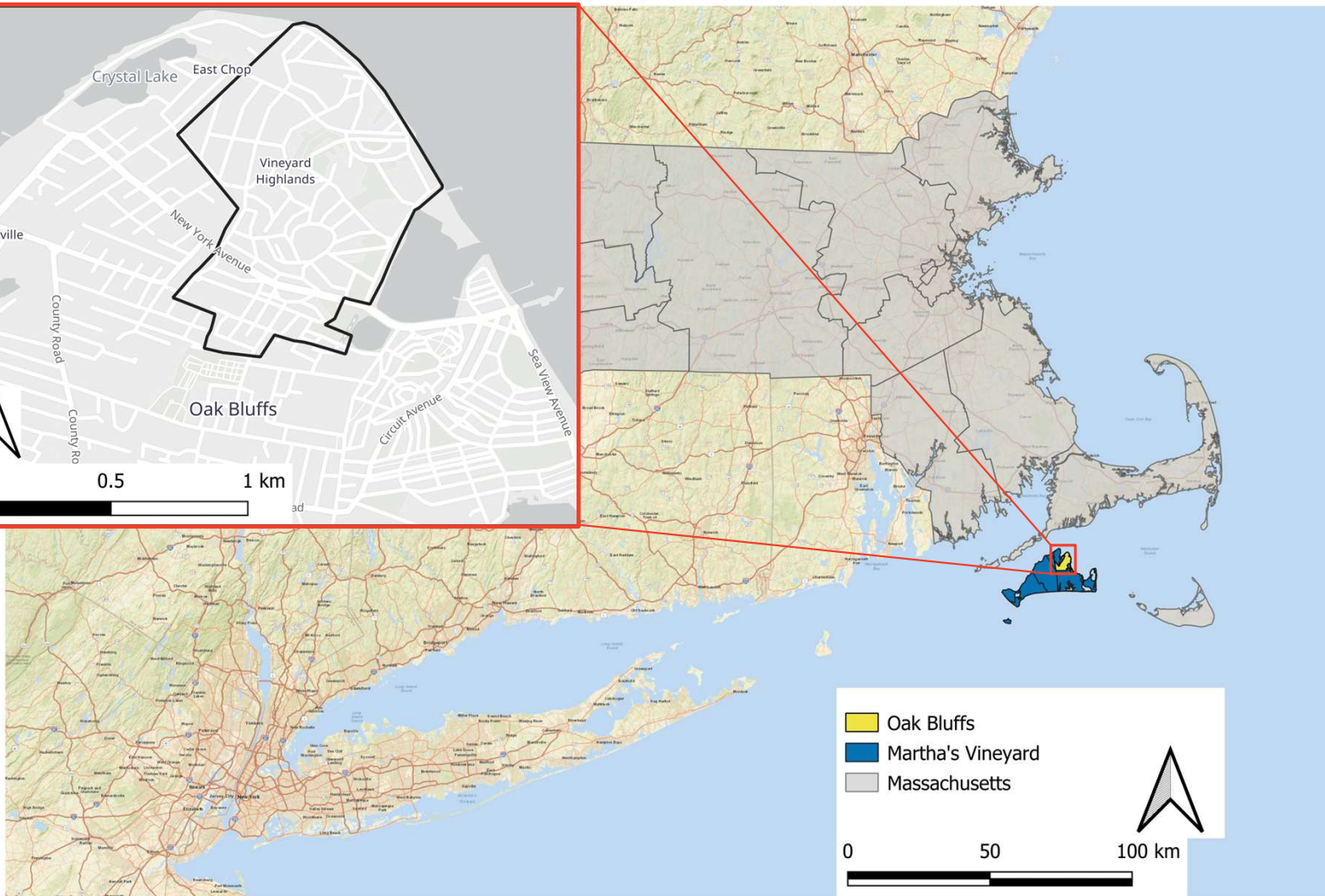
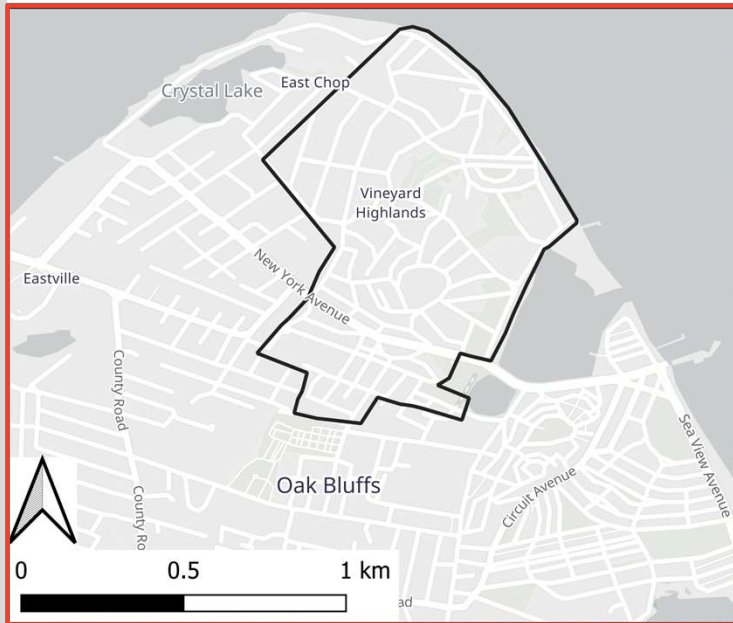


LAYERS OF ABUNDANT MEANING

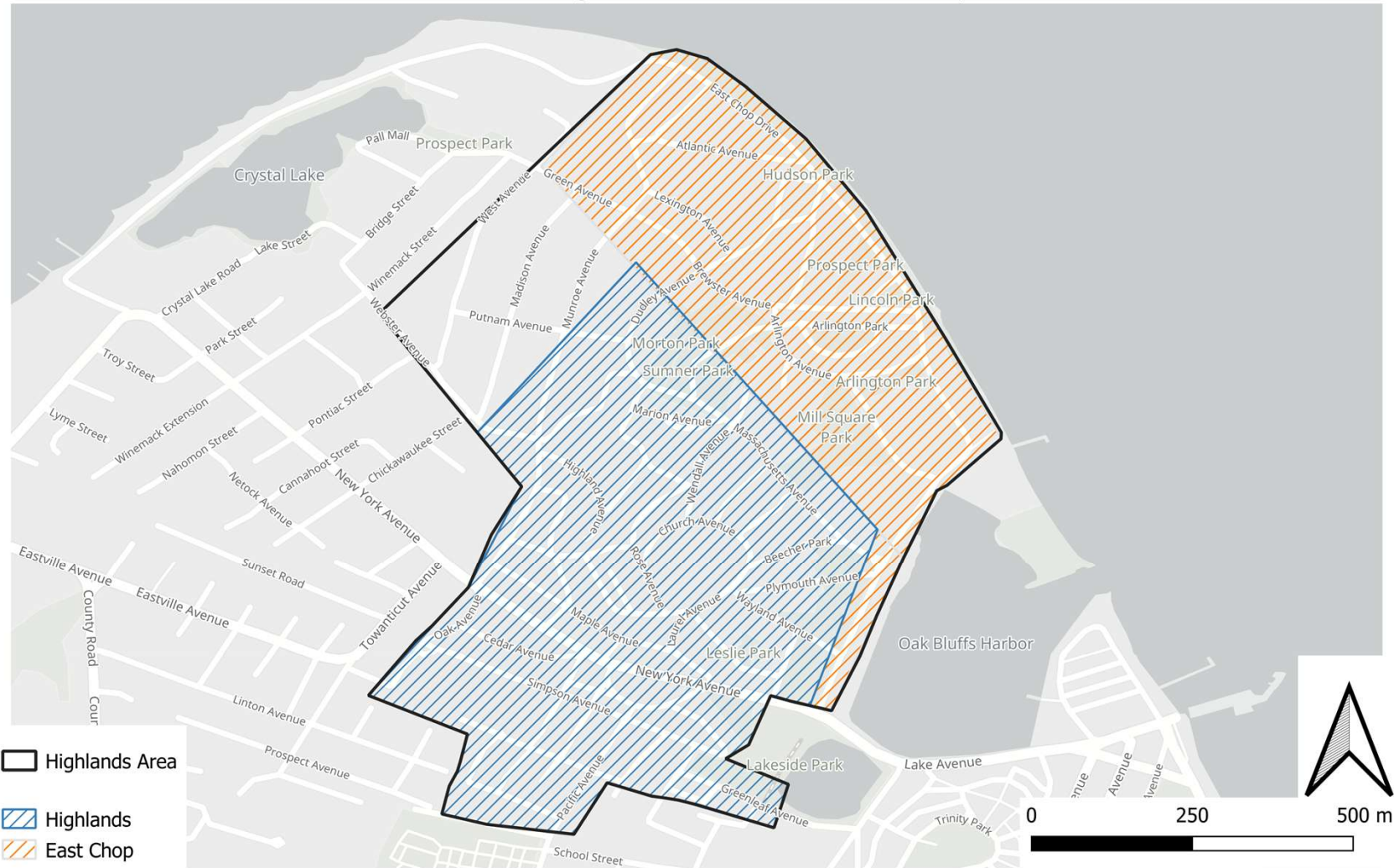
A MULTI-METHOD INVESTIGATION OF
COMMUNITY FORMATION AND MEMORY IN THE
VINEYARD HIGHLANDS, OAK BLUFFS, MA (1870-
1960)



Jeffrey Burnett
SHA 2026
January 1, 2026



Map of the Highlands Area showing the general location of the areas referred to as the Highlands and East Chop



Map of lots and parks plotted in the Vineyard Highlands, ca. 1890

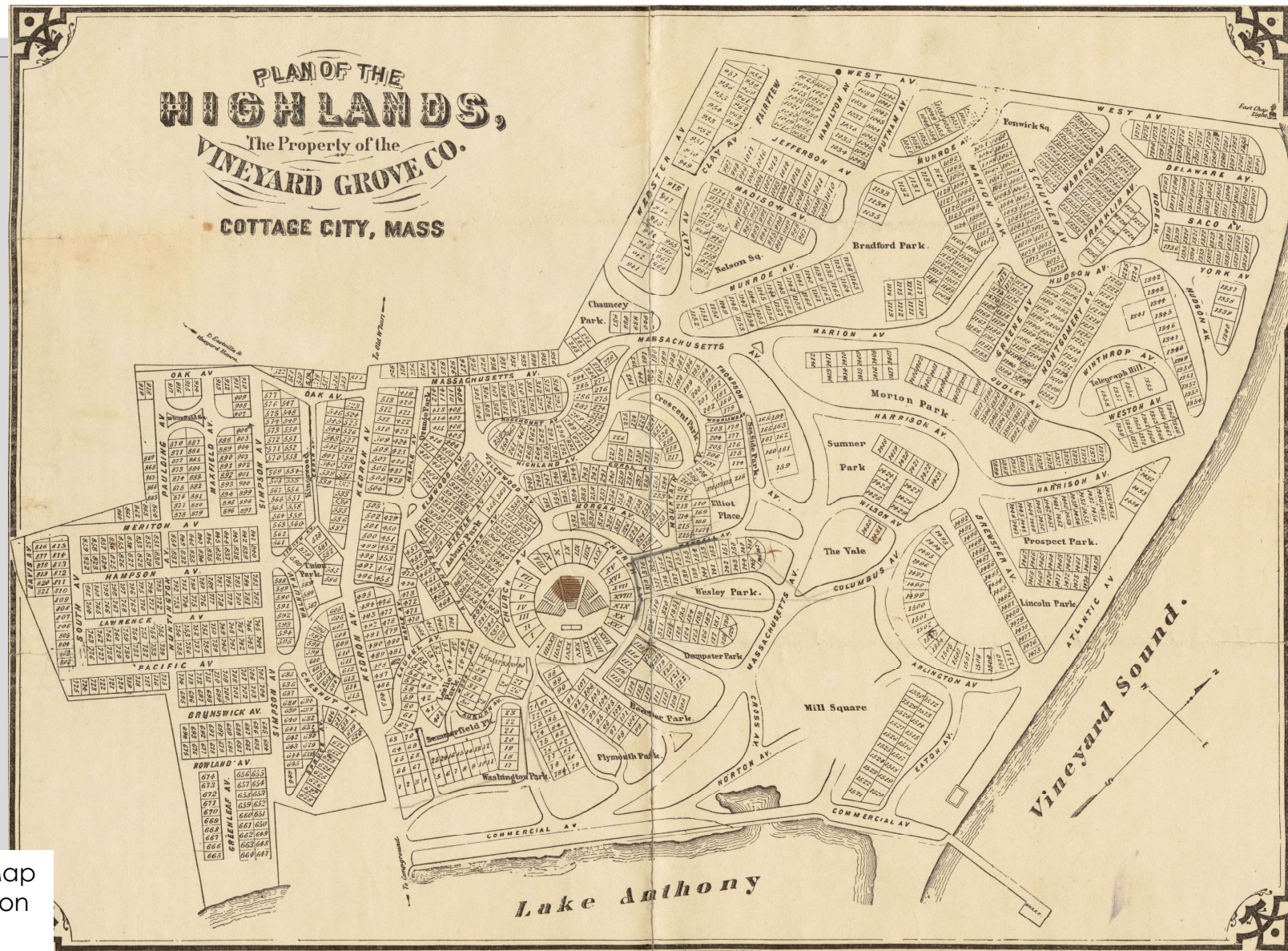


Image Courtesy of Leventhal Map & Education Center at the Boston Public Library

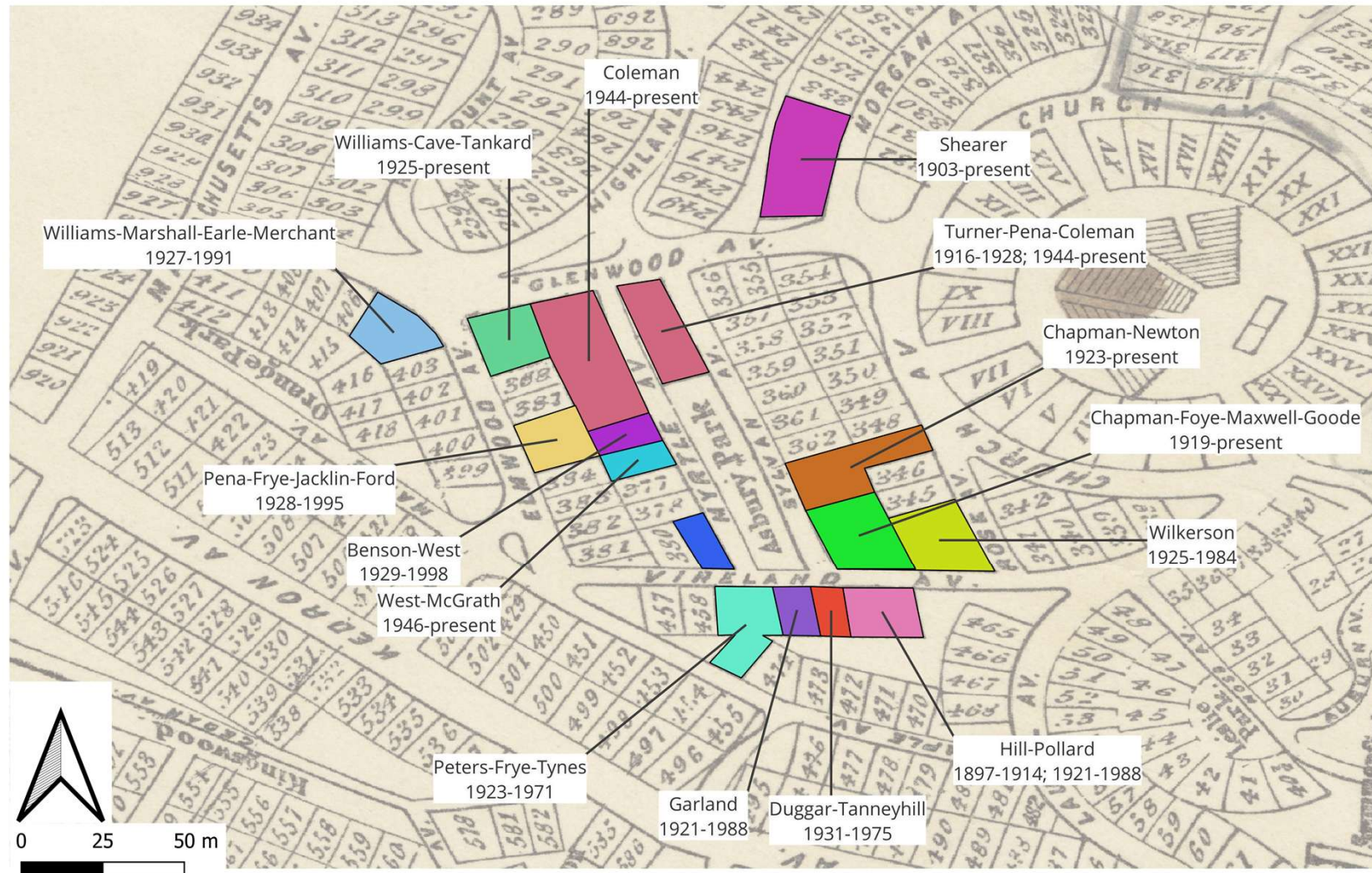


Participants Henny Skeen and Ifeoma Ezeoke map a cement footing in Baptist Temple Park using GPS equipment. Ed Zephyr and Sis Carroll look on.

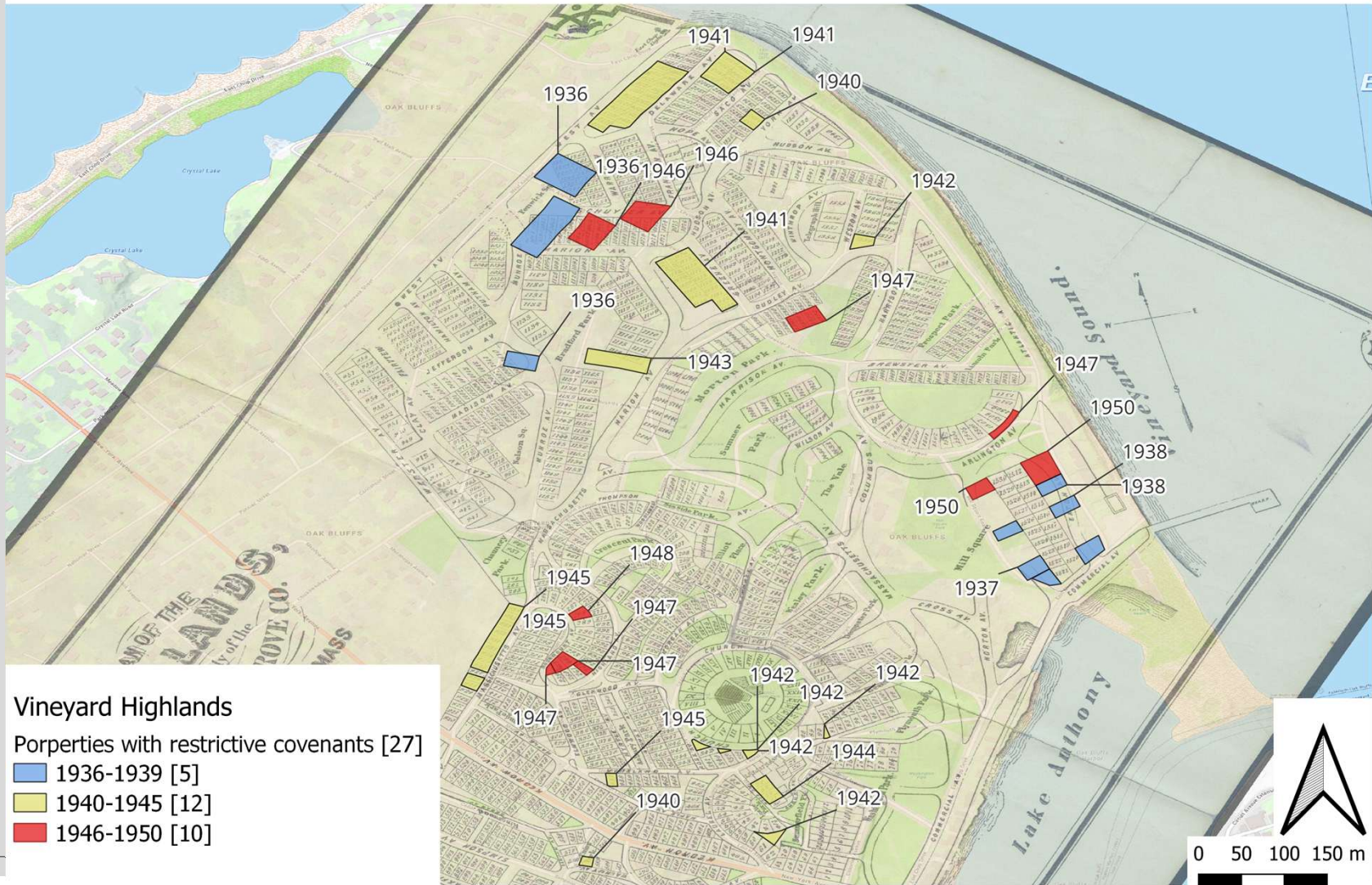


Baptist Tabernacle, Vineyard Highlands, Oak Bluffs, MA Image courtesy of the MV Museum

Vineyard Highlands - Black owned properties in the Dorothy West Ave Neighborhood 1897-present



Vineyard Highlands - Properties with Discriminatory Restrictive Covenants, 1936-1950



Collaborative Memory-Mapping

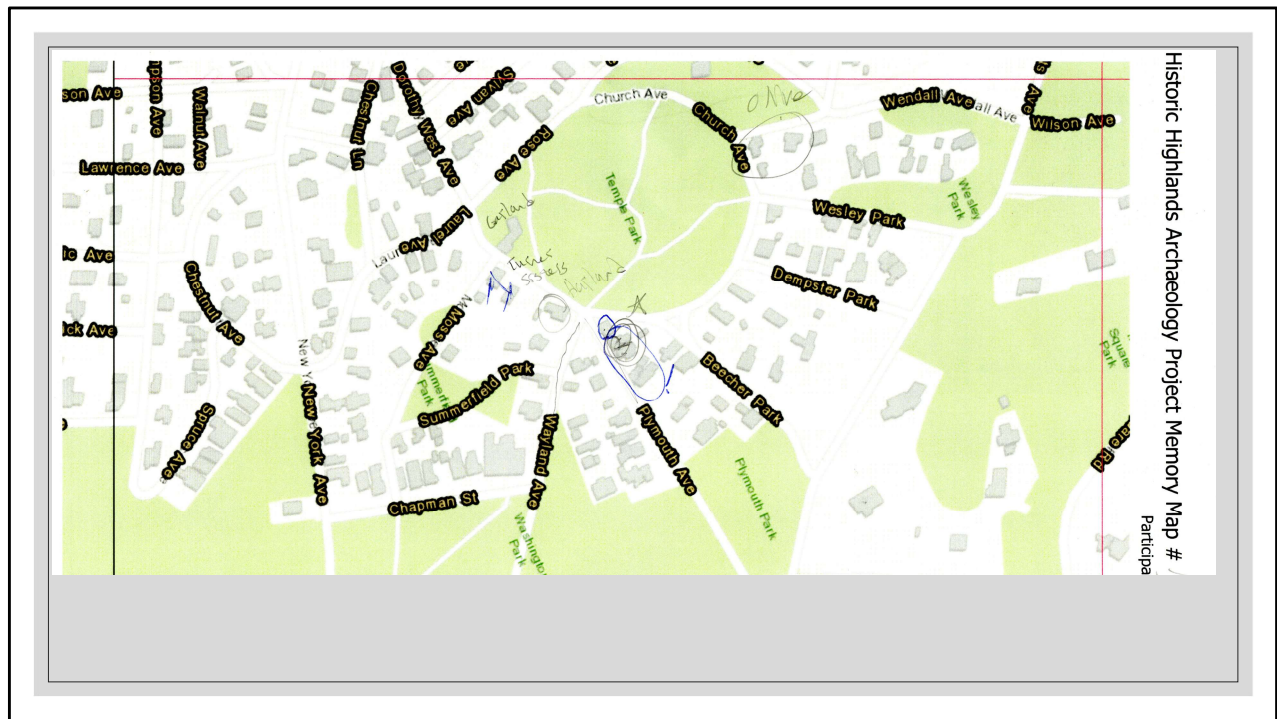
- Participants annotated maps of the Highlands area - showing their communities, important spaces and places, historic sites, and pathways.

- Sample Question Prompts:
 - How long have you been coming you Martha's Vineyard and the Highlands, who was the first in your family to find this place?
 - What makes the Highlands meaningful to you and your family?
 - What do you or your family value about the Highlands?
 - What places are important to you or your family?
 - What roads, paths, or streets are important to you or your family?
 - What stories and memories come to mind about these places?
 - Have experiences of racism, in the highlands or elsewhere, shaped these meanings, values, places, and pathways?

As part of the OBHHAP, I conducted oral history interviews with seven individuals who were current or former residents of the Highlands area. Participants in oral history interviews also had the option to participate in the creation of memory maps of the Highlands. This memory mapping involved annotating physical maps with the meaningful places and/or events brought up in these conversations (Hart and Homsy 2020).

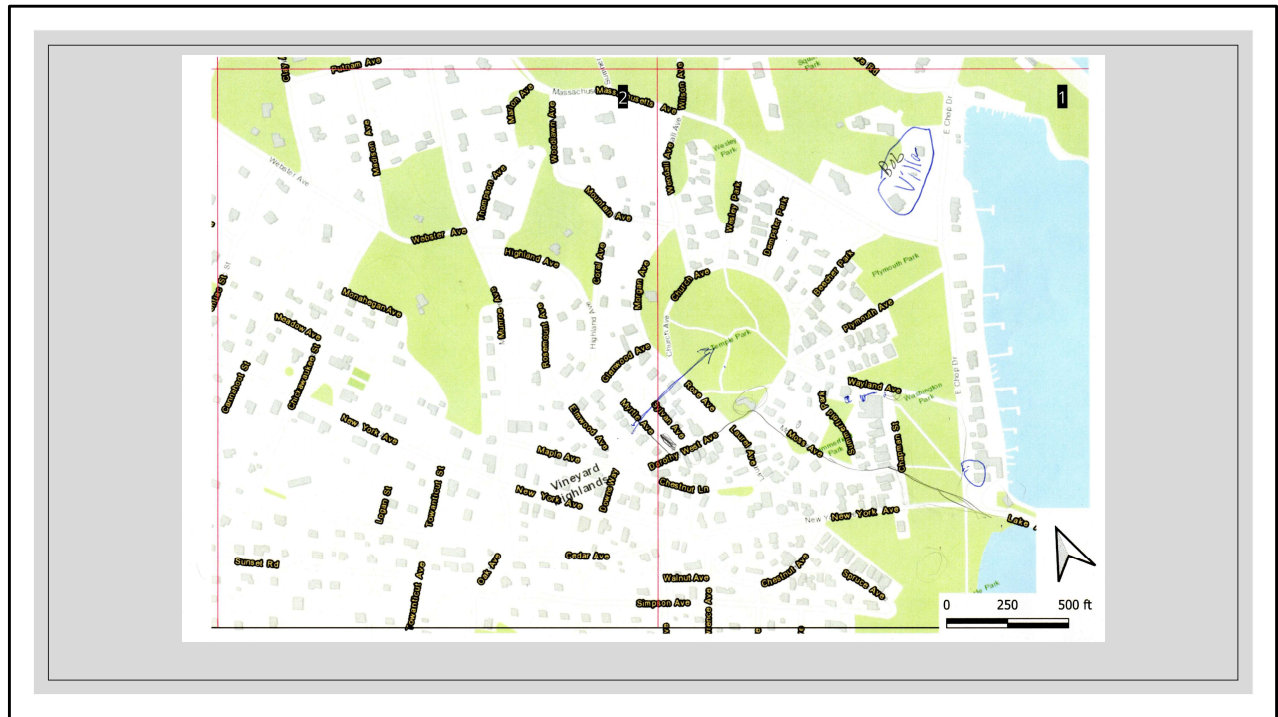
These memory-map interviews were designed to examine place-making and attachment to place in the Highlands area (Byrne 2004; Hart and Homsey 2020; Kiddey and Schofield 2011), addressing central questions of this study: how the Highlands community came to be, why the area is remembered as a core site of Black history and life in Oak Bluffs, and what the Highlands means to local and descendant communities. The interviews were conducted from July 19 to September 19, 2023, alongside the archaeological mapping work in Baptist Temple Park.

As the research focuses on the first half of the 1950s, interviewees were asked to speak to their youths in the Highlands and Oak Bluffs, including the people and places significant to them and their families, the ways they navigated space, and the experiences and feelings attached to those. Participants also shared the ways these meanings and experiences were shaped by race, racism, gender, sexuality, class, religion, length of stay, longevity in the community, and/or where one lived.



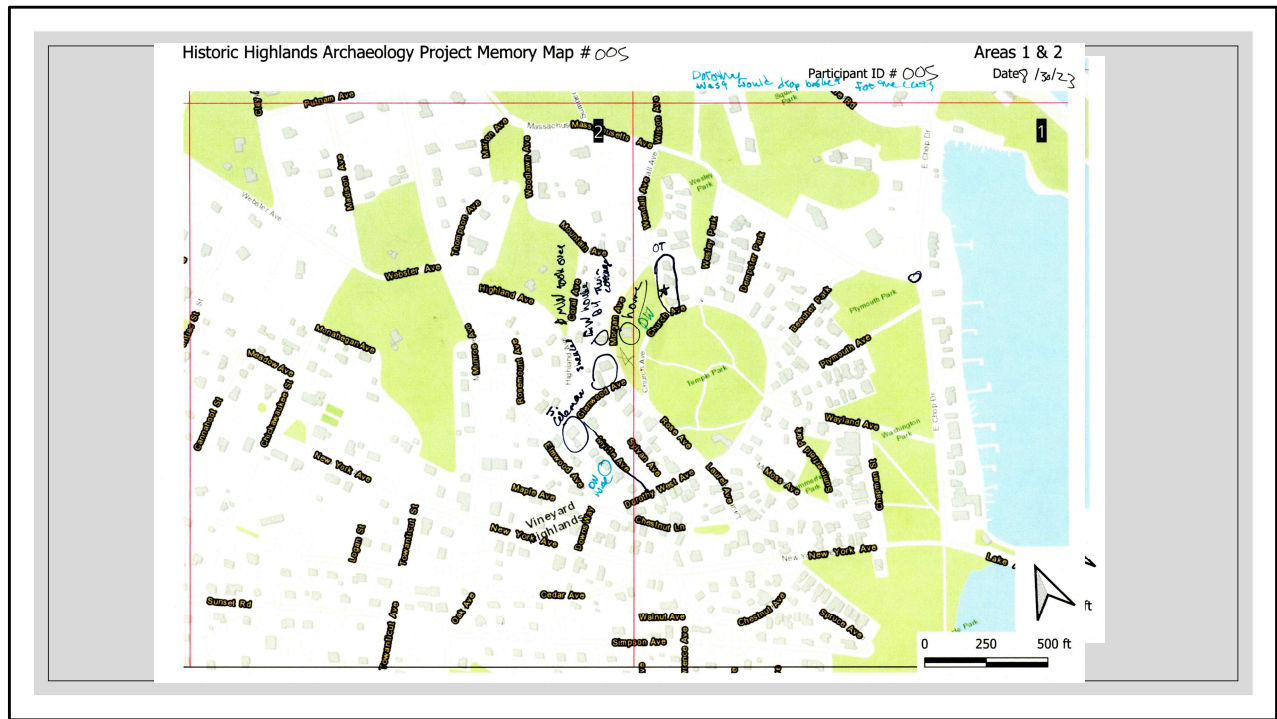
During the interviews participants were provided with printed maps of the Highlands area, both topographic and satellite at several scales, which could be used as memory aids and geographic references, to mark the locations and routes being discussed record, or to record any other information. Participants also had the option of ignoring the maps completely. At the conclusion of the interview, the interviewee and interviewer collaboratively went over the annotations, making changes or adding information until the speaker was satisfied and approved the annotated map.

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Relational coding – Categories and themes

- Community and belonging (88 associated themes)
- Home, family and friends (56 associated themes)
- Social and cultural life (48 associated themes)
- Work & Businesses (29 associated themes)
- Built Landscape (18 associated themes)

Participants' stories and map annotations were then used to identify the location of significant places on the landscape and highlight the meanings residents attached to those places. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded by me, as the lead researcher. One participant (#004) asked that our conversation not be recorded and only handwritten notes were taken. Following examples of similar projects (Hert and Homey 2020:595; Kiddey and Schofield 2014; Shea 2019:185-186), I coded the interviews thematically, using themes that emerge across the narratives to identify shared values and experiences attached to Highlands and its cultural heritage.

Relational coding – Place and Themes

Baptist Temple Park - Community

- Beginning of the community, Black children, Black men, Black women, Black middle class, People of African descent, people of European descent, Children, Community, Community: Boundaries, Community: Danger, Community: Neighborhood, Family, Home, Home ownership, Motherhood/Mothers, multigenerational homeownership, Paths, quality of homes - summer cottages, Racism and Segregation: Racism, Religion: Baptist, Religion: Methodist, significant place, Social events, summer resident, walking, white women, Working off-Island

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Relational coding – Place and Themes

Ocean View – Work and Businesses

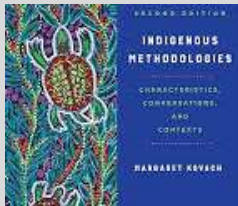
- Belonging: Belonging reinforced by home ownership, Belonging: differing impacts of racism on men and women, Black children, Black middle class, Black women, Children, Class, Community, Community: differences - summer residents & summer vacationers, Community: Neighborhood, Gender, Home ownership, importance of landownership, Inn / Hotel, Navigation, negative emotional impact: class position mitigating negative emotional impacts of racist acts, People of African descent, people of European descent, positive emotional impact: home ownership mitigating emotional impacts of racist acts, Race, Racism and Segregation: Racial segregation, Racism and Segregation: Racialization, Racism and Segregation: Racism - microaggression, Racism and Segregation: Racism, Racism and Segregation: Racism - needing to be cautious, Place - Restaurant, summer resident, summer vacationer, walking, white women, Youths

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Storywork and Deep Mapping



In storywork, seven principles—*respect, responsibility, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy*—form a theoretical framework for recognizing and caring for the meaningful lessons contained in stories. (Archibald 2008)



Story as method - a process through which knowledge is co-created through the active engagement participants in research and in telling their own stories (Kovach 2009:96)

memorymap.oakbluffsarchaeology.org - 1

memorymap.oakbluffsarchaeology.org - 34

Deep mapping seeks to bring a community's diverse knowledge and values of place and memory to the community itself, prioritizing "coherence and cohesion without simplifying, paraphrasing, or interpreting for a community" (Shea 2019:185).

The oral historical and memory-mapping components of this project draw participatory, community-based research methods, aiming to involve community members in all stages of a project (Atalay 2012). A goal of facilitating community participation in this way is that the process of conducting, analyzing, and sharing oral history stories is nonlinear, nonhierarchical, and dialogic (Shea 2019:175).

To this end, my methods are shaped by Joan Archibald's (2008) concept of "storywork," a methodology that centers the important knowledge carried in experience-based stories and their speakers (Archibald 2008). In storywork, seven principles—*respect, responsibility, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy*—form a theoretical framework for recognizing and caring for the meaningful lessons contained in stories. Storywork involves *Story as method*, a process through which knowledge is co-created through the active engagement participants in research and in telling their own stories (Kovach 2009).

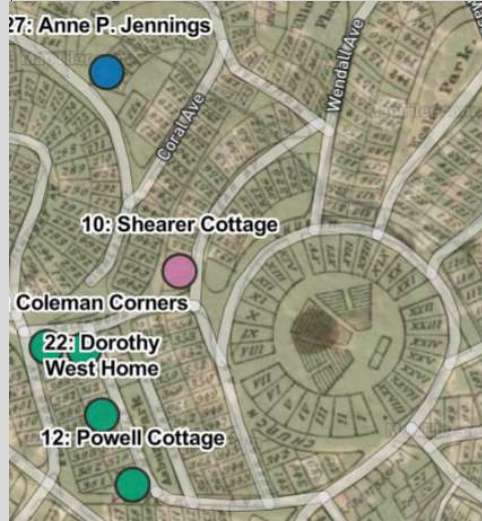
I also drew on the concept of "deep mapping," a place-based participatory research framework which recognized that memory work is deeply personal as well as inseparable from the social context of the remembering (Shea 2019:174-177). Deep mapping is "both a method and a product," providing a framework for research, analysis, and dissemination (Shea 2019:174-176). I find deep mapping useful because it facilitates the spatialization of multivocal, co-created memory narratives of hyper-local places, such as a single neighborhood, while maintaining the importance of individual experiences and memories (Shea 2019:175-176).

For both storywork and deep mapping, researchers must learn local history, the interpersonal, political, and social relations within a community, and how memory and attachment to place are connected to community and cultural identity. Co-creation requires researchers that listen deeply and earn the trust of participants who require that stories and their voices are represented respectfully (Franklin and Lee 2020; Kovach 2009:97-100; McDavid 2010:44-45; Shea 2019:179-184).

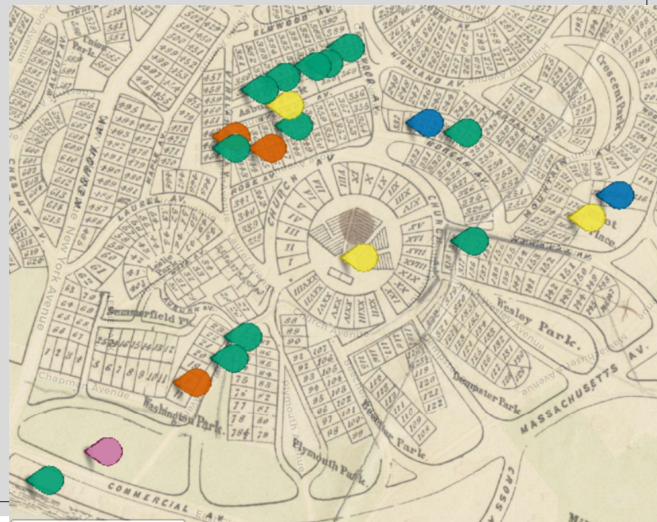
Following these methods, memory-map interviews involved multiple meetings, were led by participants; the annotated maps, recordings, and transcriptions were shared with participants; themes of the research emerged from the stories shared by participants; and the findings were recounted and interpreted based on the participant's framing. Lastly, findings will be shared broadly on digital platforms while still ensuring that participants retain control over how publicly their individual stories and experiences are shared.

Preservation for and by the People

African American Heritage Trail of MV



Oral history memory map



Efforts towards empowering community control over historically meaningful places, belongings, and narratives are rooted in anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist practices (Atalay et al. 2014; Flewellen et al. 2021; Montgomery et al. 2023). Enacting these practices in the realm of cultural heritage is an important aspect of the process of envisioning and building non-capitalist futures (Flewellen et al. 2021).

Social change requires altering our social and material practices as well (Brodkin 2000; Saito 2022), including the ways in which we produce of historical knowledge (Flewellen et al. 2021; Matthews 2020; Montgomery et al. 2023). In cultural heritage practice, the concept of abundance, in contrast to scarcity or exclusivity, is beginning to frame arguments for community-control over historical knowledge production (Matthews 2020).

This framing parallels arguments in anti-capitalist and environmental scholarship for de-growth through the communal management of resources and production (Hickel 2020; Saito 2022). These positions seek to redress inequality produced by the disproportionate distribution of power, resources, and opportunity by empowering local communities to take control of, and manage, the already abundant resources—history or wealth—they know and produce.

By redefining historical significance as the common, everyday acts of common, everyday people it becomes possible to recognize the abundance of history that surrounds us. By empowering local communities to preserve, share, and interpret these histories on their own terms, and with regard to their own sense of meaningfulness, it becomes possible to generate an abundance of historians and historic preservation activity that is also more equitable (Battle-Baptiste 2017; González-Tennant 2014; Jenkins 2022; Matthews 2020). If the communal production of historical knowledge becomes a normal part of cultural heritage practice it may significantly alter the field's current basis in capitalist relations of property.

Broader Impacts

- Building on community-based archaeologies of the African Diaspora, particularly projects that position archaeologists as working for local communities (Jenkins 2022) or archaeology as a way to disrupt white nationalist heritage tourism (Reid 2022)
- Also engages of radical abundance in historic preservation and cultural heritage work which seek to reorientate the field away from capitalist understandings of preservation as enclosure towards preservation as empowering communities to assert control over meaningful places, belongings, and historical narratives.

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Community Cultural Heritage Need / Ask

- Why do this work?
- This project brings together individuals and groups who know and love the Highlands and its history and recognize the new risks the historic community is facing. One of the goals is to identify community-supported historic preservation arguments and methods and to facilitate community participation in preservation. As such, this research project seeks to identify what a successful community-engaged, participatory mapping project of the historical Black communities in the Highlands looks like.

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Acknowledgments

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- I extend my deepest thanks to the many individuals and organizations I worked with and learned from over the past few years. I appreciated you welcoming me into your spaces and sharing your history and your summers with me.
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**Wenner-Gren
Foundation**

