



Teacher's Companion to the 2022 Michigan Archaeology Poster

Echoes of Community: Remembering Paradise Valley through Archaeology

[Archaeology](#) is the study of human history by investigating the material remains, objects, and buildings we create and use. Archaeology can make the history of a place and community tangible and connect us to the past. Traces of the past are often quite literally buried beneath our feet, especially in cities like [Detroit](#) that have many generations of history. While the urban landscape may rapidly transform and change, there can still be archaeological deposits intact, revealing the stories of those who lived there before us.

This poster features the stories of Paradise Valley, a vibrant neighborhood in Detroit in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that was home to Jewish American and African American communities. Just as the Great Migration brought many African Americans to the neighborhood, urban renewal later decimated and displaced residents. Today, redevelopment of the former Douglass Homes public housing site provides opportunities to learn from failed urban development policies of the twentieth century. Daily life in Paradise Valley can now be better honored through the discovery of artifacts through Section 106 archaeology.

In the United States, the [National Historic Preservation Act \(NHPA\) of 1966](#) created a framework for preserving our shared national history. A significant principle of the NHPA is that historic places can be important to communities at the local, state, and national levels. In this way, the law helps to document and protect histories of everyday people in addition to notable leaders.

What is Section 106?

[Section 106 of the NHPA](#) requires federal agencies to consider the impact of their projects on historic resources, both above and below ground. Before a project can begin, the agency must conduct research to identify potential historic sites. The results of this research may uncover new knowledge about human activities and documents it for the future.

The Project

Under Section 106, archaeological investigations were conducted when the Detroit Housing Commission sought to demolish the Douglass Homes towers and redevelop the land. Archaeological investigation of the Douglass Homes property began in 2012 when The Mannik & Smith Group, Inc. (MSG) was hired to ensure compliance with federal and state environmental regulations during the condemnation and demolition process. Section 106 applied to the project because the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had to approve the project.



MSG's initial study of the Douglass Homes project area included an architectural assessment of the remaining Douglass Homes public housing units as well as an archaeological sensitivity assessment for what may be underground. However, the archaeological assessment, which involved researching the history of the neighborhood and scouring historic fire insurance and real estate maps of Detroit, resulted in a finding that showed archaeological remnants of Paradise Valley were likely still present within the project area. The Michigan State Historic Preservation Office agreed with this finding, and MSG subsequently conducted archaeological monitoring of select building demolitions in 2013-2014 to document any such remnants. As a result of the monitoring, MSG recorded 30 individual archaeological features across 11 separate archaeological sites.

The Douglass Homes project area sat vacant for several years after the demolition, but in 2018 Bedrock Detroit began the process of redeveloping the property. Bedrock retained MSG as the archaeological consultant for the project, and in 2019 MSG conducted archaeological excavations at six of the archaeological sites that had been documented in 2013-2014. New knowledge based on these archaeological discoveries now sheds light on everyday life in the neighborhood.

What is an archaeological feature?

A feature is the term archaeologists use to describe the remnants of something that people built into their environment, such as building foundations, roadways, earthen mounds, and even fire rings or pits. The photograph below is a basement wall feature from a demolished house in Paradise Valley that was uncovered by MSG archaeologists.

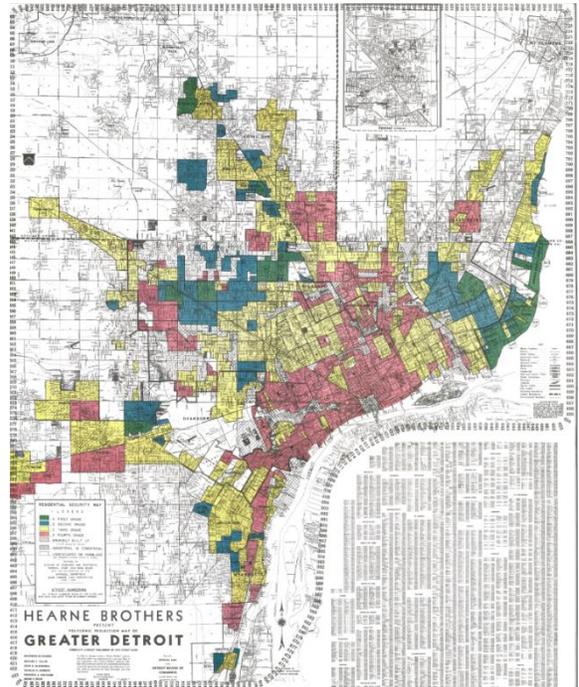


Discussion Topics

- What are some of the United States Laws that deal with archaeology? Explore this website to learn more: [Laws, Regulations, & Guidelines - Archeology \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/learn/education/teaching-materials/laws-regulations-guidelines-archeology)
 - Which act created National Historic Landmarks, and the National Register of Historic Places?
- Read about the Michigan [National Register of Historic Places](https://www.nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com/michigan/) program.
- Use this website to explore National Register sites in Michigan: [National Register of Historical Places - MICHIGAN \(MI\) \(nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com\)](https://www.nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com/michigan/)
 - Search by county to find a site near you. Can you find more information about this site online? What makes this site significant or important?
 - If you could nominate a site to the National Register, what would it be? What makes it significant to you, your community, or the state?
- Because of the National Historic Preservation Act and other laws, archaeologists work in a variety of careers at federal agencies, state and tribal governments, environmental firms, universities, and museums.
 - Explore current job listings here: [Archaeology Jobs, Employment | Indeed.com](https://www.indeed.com/jobs?q=archaeology)

Structural Racism & Urban Landscapes

Programs and policies, such as redlining and urban renewal, profoundly impacted Detroit communities, and their ripple effects still linger today. [Redlining](#) evolved from a 1930s-era Federal housing program that created color-coded “residential security” maps [ranking neighborhoods A through D](#), based on perceived loan risk. These rankings were founded on racial and ethnic biases and resulted in long-term divestment of minority communities and increased segregation of urban neighborhoods.



Detroit, like many northern cities, saw a massive influx of African Americans during a period known as the Great Migration, from about 1920-1940. African Americans moved to Detroit to seek economic opportunities in the automotive industry. However, once here, they found their opportunities constrained by redlining and legal housing covenants that excluded them from certain neighborhoods. Many were able to find housing in traditionally Jewish neighborhoods, like Paradise Valley, which did not have covenants blocking African Americans from home ownership.

Under these circumstances, communities like [Paradise Valley](#) became the epicenter for Black culture,



community, and businesses in Detroit during the first half of the twentieth century. Notable for its jazz scene, [Paradise Valley nightclubs](#) welcomed legends such as Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, and Louis Armstrong as frequent entertainers.

With limited housing options, the effects of redlining led to overcrowded and run-down conditions in the urban core of many cities, contributing to urban renewal practices that further decimated minority communities.

Image Source: <http://www.blackbottomarchives.com/blackhistory/2016/2/16/remembering-paradise-valley>

Explore More

Read about Detroit history at the [Detroit Historical Society](#) website. Search for people, places, and key words to learn more

In 1935, the [Brewster Housing Project](#) was constructed as the nation's first federally funded housing project for African Americans. The Brewster project demolished a large swath of the Paradise Valley and nearby Black Bottom neighborhoods, displacing hundreds from their homes and community without their consent. Later, the Douglass Towers projects and Interstate-375



Image Source: <https://historicdetroit.org/galleries/brewster-douglass-projects-old-photos>

construction further decimated these neighborhoods and Black-owned businesses. The image to the right shows the devastating impact on the neighborhoods.

Two Stories from Paradise Valley

Schlusel's Bath House and Mikveh

In 1907, Louis Schlusel opened a Russian and Turkish bath house at the corner of Alfred Street and St. Antoine. Schlusel was born in either Austria or Poland in 1877, immigrated to the United States in 1890, and married his wife, Anna, in 1897. The Schlusels moved to 501 St. Antoine in 1905, and in 1907 the bath house was opened around the corner at 186 Alfred Street. The bath house included Detroit's first mikveh* or Jewish ritual bath.

The baths were located in the basement of the building; tile-lined walls were recorded during MSG's excavations in 2019. Although mikvehs must traditionally be filled with "living water" as opposed to tap water, no evidence for collection of natural water collection (such as rain barrels) was encountered during the excavations or archival research. This brings into question the method of water collection for the mikveh. Does the missing evidence point towards water being piped in? Or is the natural rain collection evidence yet to be uncovered?

Between 1916 and 1919, Schlusel sold the bath house to fellow Jewish immigrant Julius Rosenfeld. Rosenfeld, who had immigrated to the U.S. from Russia in 1900, owned the bath house until its demolition in the late 1940s. Upon purchasing the bath house Rosenfeld moved into the neighboring house at 497 St. Antoine. Many of the artifacts collected from the bath house site by MSG date to the period of Rosenfeld's ownership. Test units located along the side of the bath house where it adjoined



the house at 501 St. Antoine yielded numerous glass bottles from local companies such as the East Side Bottling Works, the West Side, the Stroh, the Trivoli, and P.H. Kling Brewing Companies, and Feigenson Brothers (later rebranded as Faygo). Numerous medicine bottles came both from local pharmacies (Kruger Bros., Davy Jones Drug Co.) and national brands (Lyric, Richter). It is likely that these products were consumed at the bath house.



Figure to the left.

Top: Examples of tiles from the mikveh.

Middle: Examples of medicine bottles.



Bottom: Examples of soda and beer bottles.

452 St. Antoine House

The house located at 452 Saint Antoine Street was built sometime before 1880, when physician Amos Hoke was listed in city directories at this address. Sanborn fire insurance maps from the 1880s and 1890s show a two-story brick dwelling at 452 St. Antoine, with a two-story garage at the rear of the parcel connected to the main house by a narrow, one-story addition that created a courtyard space between the house and the garage. The house was connected to city water lines by 1897 at the latest. City directories from the twentieth century list a series of day laborers and other blue-collar workers at this address. Although race or ethnicity were not noted in these directories, these residents were likely African American.



Figure to the left.
Top: Fragments of a commemorative ceramic plate from a church.

Middle: Hair comb.

Bottom: Fragment of a child's alphabet plate.

Excavations at 452 St. Antoine revealed the solid brick foundation of the house, as well as several intact utility lines associated with the house. Inside the foundation at the rear end of the house, MSG documented evidence of the house's demolition in the form of sequential layers of architectural material, including roofing shingles, window glass, tar-paper insulation, wallpaper, and hardware. These features stand in stark contrast with the stereotype of Paradise Valley as a slum full of rickety wooden tenements that was later pushed by urban planners' intent on clearing the area for public housing.

The artifacts recovered from this site include numerous fragments of domestic items such as ceramic tableware, decorative knick-knacks, and hair combs have begun to paint a picture of the everyday lives of the laborers and their families who occupied this site. One ceramic fragment is a commemorative plate from an African American church. Glass containers and other artifacts associated with commercial consumer goods indicate that well-known national brands (including Slocum's Coltsfoot Expectorant, Four Roses Bourbon, Pond's Skin Cream, and Box Calf shoes) were preferred over local products. Several artifacts point to the presence of children, including a porcelain toy pitcher, and ceramic tableware sherds from "alphabet" dishes which were a popular way of teaching children how to read.

In Paradise Valley, the transition between Jewish and African American communities was organic and resulted in a diverse and lively neighborhood with its own unique history. Urban renewal displaced and erased the original community. However, memories and material artifacts uncovered through careful archaeology are painting a more complete picture of everyday life in a once vibrant neighborhood.

Discussion Topics

Hold a classroom discussion and/or write a reflection with the following prompts:

- What can archaeology contribute to the story of everyday people that we cannot find in historic records and documents?
- Think about your own life and family. What everyday items (or artifacts) do you use that could tell future archaeologists about who you are and the communities you are a part of?
- Now think about your home and neighborhood. Who has lived here before you? Have you ever found traces of previous residents (for example bricks, plants, or remnants of landscaping, or lost toys and small items like coins)? What do these items tell you about the past in your community?



Resources

Archaeology 101 – <https://www.archaeological.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Archaeology-101.pdf>

Black Bottom Archives – <http://www.blackbottomarchives.com/>

Citizens Guide for Section 106 – <https://www.achp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2017-01/CitizenGuide.pdf>

Detroit Historical Society – <https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit>

Historic Detroit – <https://historicroetroit.org/buildings>

Michigan Archaeology Day – <https://www.miplace.org/historic-preservation/archaeology/archaeology-day/>

Michigan State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) – <https://www.miplace.org/historic-preservation/>

Michigan SHPO, Archaeology Program – <https://www.miplace.org/historic-preservation/archaeology/>

Michigan SHPO, National Register of Historic Places Program – <https://www.miplace.org/historic-preservation/programs-and-services/national-register-of-historic-places/>

NPS, Archaeology Laws – <https://home.nps.gov/subjects/archeology/laws-regulations-guidelines.htm#:~:text=Archeological%20resources%2C%20both%20sites%20and%20collections%2C%20are%20protected,preservation%20laws%20have%20been%20moved%20to%20Title%2054.>

National Historic Preservation Act – <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/historicpreservation/national-historic-preservation-act.htm>

National Housing Conference, History of Redlining – <https://nhc.org/the-history-of-redlining/>

National Register Listings in Michigan – <https://nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com/MI/state.html>

The Other America, Redlining – <https://the-other-america.com/holc-redlining>

Unearthing Detroit – <https://unearthdetroit.wordpress.com/>



www.michigan.gov/shpo
www.michigan.gov/archaeology

