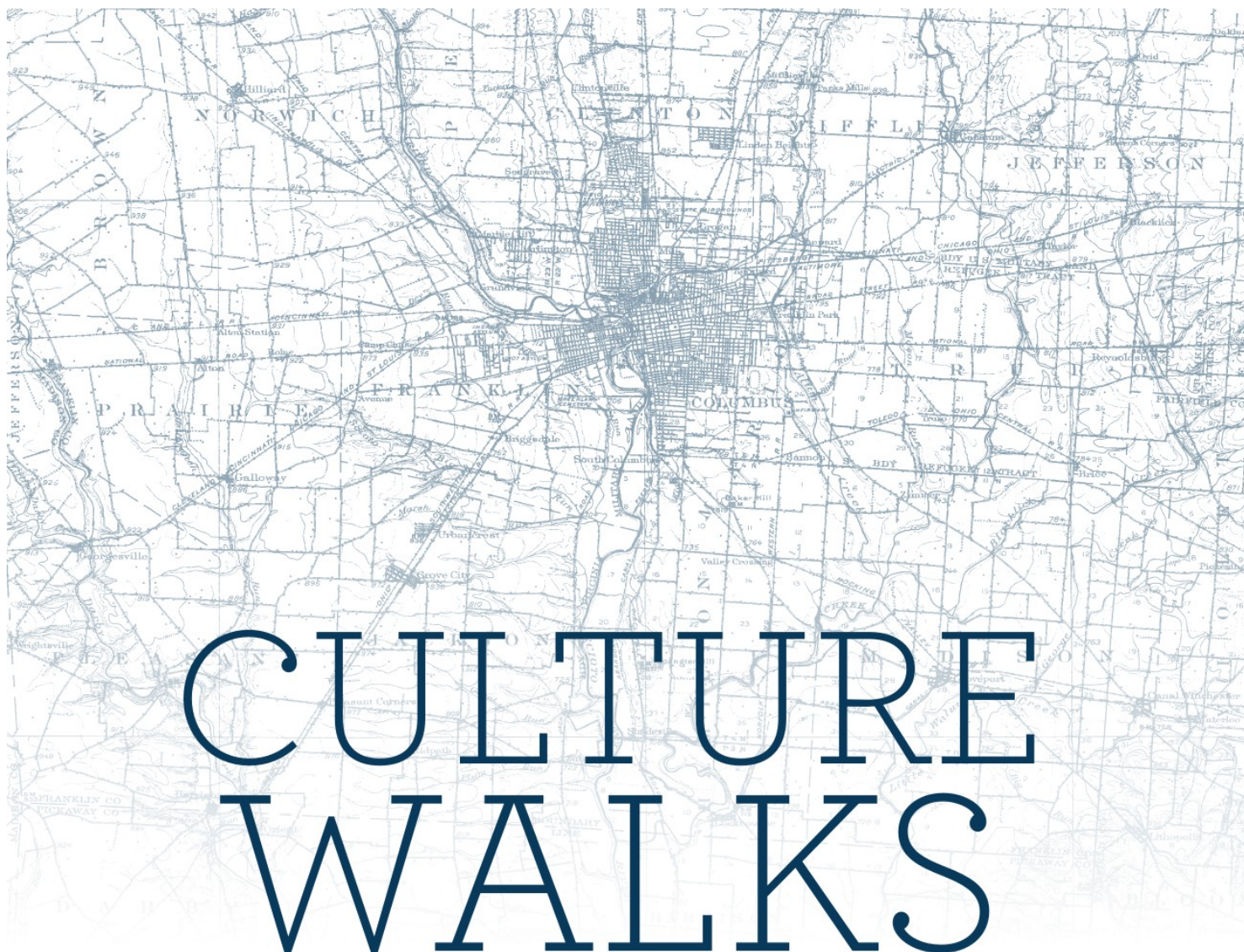




CULTURE WALKS

THE SPIRIT OF NEIGHBORHOODS

Walking tours in Columbus neighborhoods connect history and health. | By Doreen Uhas Sauer. Photos by Phil Hanson.

Thanks to a grant from Ohio Humanities, the Columbus Public Health Walking Program and the Columbus Landmarks Foundation recently piloted Culture Walks in four Columbus neighborhoods. This new program built on a five-year partnership of the Columbus Art Walks and Landmarks Talks, guided walks through 14 Columbus neighborhoods. The unique collaboration was built on combining the importance of walking toward better health

with appreciating architecture and public art. An infusion of new ideas and fresh energy inspired the program's redirection to explore the stories and spirit of place in neighborhoods underappreciated by the wider public.

King/Lincoln/Bronzeville, Westgate, Hanford Village, and South Parsons Avenue were invited to participate. Each neighborhood has a compelling story to tell and represents a unique part in the history of Columbus. The guiding questions of the Culture Walks were: *What story did the neighborhood want to tell about itself? How did each neighborhood define its "spirit?"*



KING/LINCOLN/BRONZEVILLE

King/Lincoln/Bronzeville stakeholders saw its history being lost under the pressure of rapid redevelopment. While significant local icons like Shiloh Baptist Church and the King Arts Complex are well maintained, and the restored Lincoln Theater is justly celebrated, stories of this vibrant African American community were in danger of being lost. Community stakeholders created a tour that was also a history lesson, tracing the story of the area from its early days as the “Blackberry Patch” to flourishing “Bronzeville,” a city within a city; a history that includes one of the nation’s first experiments in public housing, Poindexter Village. Some longtime residents of the area lined the walking route and stood in front of buildings to help tell the story first-hand.

WESTGATE

Westgate is a 1920s residential planned development of 1,200 homes built partly on the grounds of the American Civil War Camp Chase and a Confederate prison. Stakeholders in the neighborhood felt that their spirit was rooted in Westgate’s past as an early picturesque suburb with a diversity of architectural styles, while its future rested on its ability to respond to the challenges facing many inner-ring suburbs and maintain a spirit of social cohesion. When the neighborhood found it had become a food desert, residents created a vibrant local farmer’s market and food truck destination. When they wanted to encourage young families with their affordably priced revival-style homes, they created children’s

Once a rural community between Columbus and Bexley, **Hanford Village** was chosen for a 1940s planned suburb to house African American military families stationed at Lockbourne Air Force base, the third and last base for the famous Tuskegee Air Corps. The neighborhood is an example of a thriving, tight-knit African American mid-century suburb.

gardens, wall murals, and a series of fall activities including the Halloween family festival “Mums and Mummies,” which celebrates the Belgian chrysanthemums that have become a symbol of the neighborhood. When they had no local coffee shop or gathering spot, they created rotating coffee “shops” on neighbors’ front porches.

HANFORD VILLAGE

Hanford Village, little known and often unseen by many Columbus residents, was the smallest neighborhood featured in the Culture Walks. Once a rural community between Columbus and Bexley, Hanford Village was chosen for a 1940s planned suburb to house African American military families stationed at Lockbourne



(LEFT)
Al Edmondson's
barbershop, A Cut
Above the Rest,
in the King/
Lincoln/Bronzeville
neighborhood.

(FAR LEFT)
Westgate Park.

(BELOW)
Hungarian
Village in the
South Parsons
neighborhood.

Air Force base, the third and last base for the famous Tuskegee Air Corps. The neighborhood is an example of a thriving, tight-knit African American mid-century suburb. Annexed in part to Columbus in the early twentieth century, parts of the village were an independent municipality until the 1950s. In the late 1960s, Hanford Village was devastated by construction of I-70's raised highway bed, which divided the community into three parts. Some residents on the tour fondly recounted their stories of a vibrant community where a true spirit of neighborliness pervaded.

SOUTH PARSONS AVENUE

By the early twentieth century, South Parsons Avenue was home to the city's largest Hungarian population. It was also home to immigrants from Croatia, Serbia, Italy, Lithuania, and Poland, as well as African American and Jewish families. Located just outside the city limits, the area was a draw for major industry, which in turn drew a diverse immigrant population. The varied groups of residents established churches, synagogues, settlement houses, and fraternal lodges, where a distinct social life and connected community flourished. Neighborhood residents wanted others to know how vibrant the area was—and will be again—especially in its community centers and budding local food enterprises.

The free 90-minute Culture Walks took place on Saturday mornings and were each attended by 90 to 185 people. The walks served as a reminder to participants that neighborhoods experienced at a three-miles-per-hour pace reveal much more than a

drive-through at 35 miles per hour. Getting outside and walking through a neighborhood not only is beneficial to one's health, it also makes interactions with people, place, and history possible. Humanities scholars Susan Keeny, an architect who works with neighborhoods, and art historian Toni Smith helped with the planning process, which resulted in many of the neighbors learning more about their own area. We discovered that across Columbus, people take pride in their neighborhoods and are interested in confronting and embracing both the pleasant and the challenging stories, and sharing them with others. ♥

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