Sites of Memory, Acts of Erasure: On the Powers, Meanings and Limitations of the Historical Archive

Heidi Aronson Kolk, PhD
Sam Fox School of Design + Visual Arts
Washington University in St. Louis
hkolk@wustl.edu

SAMVERA CONNECT 2019

Campbell family residence and Locust Avenue streetscape, circa 1931.

Source: Campbell House Museum Collection
August 2012 photos of Campbell House front doors. **Source**: Campbell House Museum blog.
Circa-1935 photograph of Campbell House facade. 

Source: Campbell House Museum Collection.
August 2012 photographs of window and shard of glass. **Source:** Campbell House Museum blog.
Aerial views of St. Louis riverfront before (c. 1930) and after (c. 1955) clearance. **Source:** the Missouri History Museum Collection.
Left: The Big Mound in 1852—the largest of 24 mounds in the area (measuring 319 X 158 feet).
Right: The end of the Big Mound (located at North Broadway and Mound Street) in 1869.
Source: Missouri History Museum.
Left: City officials survey Mill Creek Valley before clearance (1956). Former Mill Creek Valley site in 2001. **Sources:** *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*; Missouri Historical Society.

Above: DeSoto-Carr neighborhood during clearance in 1952. **Source:** State Historical Society of Missouri.
**Left to right:** c.1930 photo of cleared riverfront; 1931 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* article about “Campbell Mansion on Locust Street”; 1941 *St. Louis Star-Times* article announcing “Save the Campbell House” campaign.

**Sources:** Missouri Historical Society; Campbell House Museum collection.
Left: Circa-1935 photograph of the Campbell home. Right: 1942 St. Louis Globe-Democrat advertisement celebrating the “gift” of house to the city by owners of the Stix, Baer & Fuller department store. 
Source: Campbell House Museum collection.
Left: View of St. Louis, From Lucas Place. 1865, lithograph. E. Sachse & Co, Baltimore, Maryland.
Right: Unknown, VIEW ON LUCAS PLACE. 1865, engraving. Source: Campbell House Museum Collection.
**Left:** Early photos of the “Robert Campbell House” right after museum opened in 1943, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch.*  **Right:** Campbell House parlor in 1938.  **Source:** Campbell House Museum Collection.
The City of St. Louis, Sketched and drawn on stone by Parsons & Atwater (Currier & Ives), 1869.

Source: Library of Congress
Newspaper coverage of “Locust Street Campbells” (court case, 1939) and “opening” of the house (1941) from St. Louis Globe-Democrat, Post-Dispatch and Star-Times. Source: Campbell House Collection.
Cover and frontispiece from *Dispersal Resume* (catalog) and invoice for auction purchases made by the William Clark Society in February, 1941. **Source:** Campbell House Museum Collection.

Source: Campbell House Museum Collection.
Circa-1885 photographs of interiors of the Campbell residence. **Source:** Campbell House Museum collection.
Artifacts from the Campbell House collection. **Source:** Campbell House Museum collection.
Left: Circa-1935 photograph of Campbell House facade.
Right: 1920s photo of Locust Ave. looking east from 15th Street.
Source: Campbell House Museum collection.
Modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image...

The less memory is experienced from the inside the more it exists only through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs—hence the obsession with the archive that marks our age, attempting at once the complete conservation of the present as well as the total preservation of the past. Fear of a rapid and final disappearance combines with anxiety about the meaning of the present and uncertainty about the future to give even the most humble testimony, the most modest vestige, the potential dignity of the memorable...

-- P. Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire (Representations, 1989)
War with its terrible destruction is wiping out the landmarks of Europe! We are powerless to stop this, but we can help preserve the historic points of interest in Saint Louis.

Symbolical of what Saint Louisans want to preserve is the home of Robert Campbell, pioneer citizen and fur trader. This is proved by the spontaneous and voluntary public contribution of over $8,000.00 to secure the Victorian furnishings which so vividly reflect the life of Saint Louis in the 'fifties.

Since our successful participation in the public

May 1941 Campbell House Foundation fundraising letter. 

Source: Campbell House Museum collection.
Left: Google Earth image, “City Eyes Pruitt-Igoe for 3,000 National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency Jobs” (nextSTL.com). Right: 2015 aerial photo of NGA tract as seen from the northwest (St. Louis Post-Dispatch).
Concept drawings for new NGA West campus, NGA website, [http://nextngawest.com/](http://nextngawest.com/).
Demolition of houses in the NGA redevelopment zone taken in May 2017. **Source:** St. Louis Business Journal
Taylor-Brown residence before relocation, 2530. N. Market St.

Source: Next NGA West History Project, City of St. Louis, stlouis-mo.gov
Media coverage of Taylor-Brown house relocation, Feb. 2017

Sources: Next NGA West History Project, City of St. Louis, stlouis-mo.gov (left) David Carson, St. Louis Dispatch (right)
“St. Louis Wins!” mailer circulated to 1st District voters by William Lacy Clay (D-MO) celebrating the selection of North St. Louis site for NGA West. **Source:** Author’s collection
Grace Baptist Church and soon-to-be-demolished homes in the NGA re-development site in March 2017. **Source:** author’s collection.
Campbell family residence and Locust Avenue streetscape, circa 1931.

**Source:** Campbell House Museum Collection
The Campbell House
A Romantic Survival of
Early St. Louis

A description of the museum and its contents

Photo and cover of The Campbell House: A Romantic Survival of Early St. Louis (early museum pamphlet, 1949). Source: Campbell House Museum Collection
Welcome to our Online Collections Database!

Tips for Searching

Keyword Search

The **Keyword Search** button allows you to perform a general search across multiple fields for a connector between words (e.g., a search for *Harley Ranch* will return records associated with *Harley* found, type in AND between the two words. To search for a specific phrase, be sure to put the asterisk (*) as a wildcard (e.g., a search for *history* would come up with records containing history.*

Advanced Search

The **Advanced Search** button can help you be more specific with your search. You can search categories to further narrow down your search results. For example, searching *White in the Pecos family*, without having to sift through black & white photographs. You can also search *People* and use of wildcards (*) are available in Advanced Search.

Random Images

The **Random Images** button is a great way to just browse the collection. Each Random Images page displays a random assortment of images from the records online. If something piques your interest, click the thumbnail to view a larger version of the image.

Catalog Searches (Archives / Photos / Libraries / Objects)

The catalog buttons can also help narrow down your search, by only searching with a selected catalog. If you only want to search for Photos, click the **Photos** button and type in your keywords(s) or phrase. You can also browse records within that catalog without performing a search. Phrase searching, wildcards (*) as well as AND/OR statements are available when performing catalog searches.
Some limitations and biases:

1. The **romance** of the site’s **exceptionalism**
2. The **privileging** of narratives of single-family ownership and private property;
3. The concern with the Campbells’ **accumulation of wealth and power**;
4. The **fetishizing of certain artifacts**, and a **preoccupation** with objects as personal possessions;
5. Strong investment in institutional **claims of ownership and control**;
6. Obsessive concern with **intactness**.
School groups involved in site- and object-based educational programs at the Campbell House Museum. **Source:** Campbell House Museum Collection
**Campbell House Museum object records from Urban Museum Collaborative website** [http://www.urbanmuseumcollaborative.org/index.html](http://www.urbanmuseumcollaborative.org/index.html)

### Gas Chandelier
*(Gaskeller, one of pair)*

Circa 1895  
**America**

Bronze, spelter, glass globes: 63 inches tall  
Campbell House Museum

**Descriptive Detail**

Embellished with swirling designs and allegorical figures, this elaborate six-arm bronze chandelier is one of a pair that hangs from the parlor ceiling in the Campbell House. Delicate fluted and acid-etched glass shades sit on each arm of the fixture. A leaf pattern in the Aesthetic Style surrounds the upper portion of each globe—the lower section is frosted glass. These fragile globes may have originally graced the fixture.

The fixture, now electric, was powered with gas when installed. Made of gilded bronze and iron, mermaids, lizards, mice, eagles, winged griffins, and grotesque faces almost play hide-and-seek within the elaborate embellishments. The Victorian style, named after Queen Victoria who ruled in England from 1837-1901, incorporated a variety of artistic movements including the Neo-Gothic and the Aesthetic Movement: and also borrowed from a rich array of visual periods and sources. Nature was a popular motif that focused on an appreciation of natural forms and the senses—it is evident in the fixture's entwining vines and acanthus leaves. Most notable are the three figures dressed in Greek-inspired costumes that surround and rise above the central shaft of the fixture. They are cast in a metal alloy, spelter, and have a dark patina.

**Local Historical Connections**

---

### Coat

Circa 1840  
**America**

*Hide, cotton, glass beads, sinew, quill: 45 inches long*

Campbell House Museum

**Descriptive Detail**

Small by today’s standards and cut like a gentleman’s frock coat from the 1830s or 1840s, this beautiful garment is hand-made of brain-cured elk hide and sewn with sinew. The upper body of the coat is constructed of five pieces, three of which form the back with two curved seams running from shoulder to near the back center of the waist. Each sleeve is cut from two curving pieces. Piecing the parts of the coat uses the hides more efficiently and makes the coat more flexible. The seams along the sleeves, shoulder, and across the back of the coat are fringed with long strips of hide. Fringe also decorates the hem. The embellishment is made primarily of
Campbell family residence and Locust Avenue streetscape, circa 1931.

Source: Campbell House Museum Collection
THE URBAN MUSEUM COLLABORATIVE

...More than bricks and mortar, containers of memory, the keepers of our stories, touchstones of our common humanity—places rooted in time but alive within the complex vibrant landscape of today—a museum without walls in our midst...

Established in 2009, the Urban Museum Collaborative brings together three small, innovative museums in downtown St. Louis—the Campbell House Museum, The Eugene Field House Museum, and The Griot Museum of Black History. The evocative collections and the stories contained within illuminate the complex narrative of urban life in 19th-century St. Louis—a history that resonates in our lives today. These fascinating and sometimes heart-wrenching narratives come alive through interconnected site-based programs, educational resources, tours, and community events. Teachers, students, and visitors of all ages become engaged in “museum without walls” discovering a new landscape in a changed and changing city.

INSTEAD, ATTEND TO:

- Efforts at protection and patterns of destruction
- Multiple / evolving paradigms of ownership
- Multiple contexts: the street, the neighborhood, the evolving downtown, the broader landscape of the city
- Object ecologies within the house (including links to objects outside the house)
- The house’s relationships to “dark twin” sites, and to the unseen
WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE TO...

- Have a more open conception of ownership
- Break down barriers between Campbell-related archives, and between parts of the museum collection
- Make the invisible more visible in museum education and website
- Develop object records that capture multiple / complex relationships and contexts
- Document erasures and losses

Campbell family residence and Locust Avenue streetscape, circa 1931.

Source: Campbell House Museum Collection
Thank you for listening!

hkolk@wustl.edu