CREATING A LIVING MUSEUM TO PROMOTE AWARENESS AND SUPPORT FOR CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC DIVERSITY IN CLARENDON (ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA)

WWW.LITTLESAINONCLARENDON.COM

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Photo Credit: Carlin Tacey
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Introduction

The impetus for this practicum was to use technology and social media as a means for cultural preservation; the result is a low-cost and extremely adaptable method of promoting and preserving economic and social diversity in areas of rapid redevelopment.¹ The project consisted of two primary deliverables: the production of five, short documentary films about a little-known chapter of a recently redeveloped commercial district in Arlington County, Virginia, and the incorporation of those films into a ‘living museum’—a self-guided, multi-media walking tour of the neighborhood—through a series of storefront stickers² (Figures 1 & 2).

Figure 1: Storefront Sticker #1

Source: Author

Figure 2: Documentary Introduction (Click image to watch Chapter 1)

Source: Author; Available for view at www.littlesaigonclarendon.com

¹ For a full account of work completed for this project, see page 16.
² For detailed description of sticker design, see page 17.
Figure 3: Clarendon, 1974

Source: Arlington County

Figure 4: Vietnam Fashions, 1987

Source: Michael Horsley

Figure 5: Clarendon, 2014

Source: Arlington County
Background
The practicum expanded on a previous studio class in which I participated, which was part of a cultural preservation program initiated by Arlington County to collect and preserve the cultural histories of some of its diverse racial and ethnic groups. My studio group specifically collected a number of recorded oral histories and artifacts from members of the Vietnamese community who immigrated to, resided or shopped in the Clarendon neighborhood of Arlington during the late 1970s and early 1980s following the fall of Saigon. During this time, Arlington experienced an unprecedented level of immigration, which was concentrated primarily within the Clarendon neighborhood due to the cheap and flexible residential and commercial rents afforded by the construction of the Metro station; the fact that Clarendon had fallen out of favor as a retail destination made it all the more affordable. The neighborhood subsequently became known for a time as "Little Saigon" due to the many Vietnamese shops and restaurants that proliferated along Wilson Boulevard, primarily between N. Irving and N. Highland Streets. Once the Metro was completed, rents quickly began to rise and forced many residents and business owners to relocate further west to Falls Church and the newly opened Eden Center (O’Connell 2003).

By the time the Vietnamese began moving into the neighborhood during the 1970s, Clarendon had lost its status as the commercial “downtown” of Arlington; retail had migrated to nearby auto-oriented shopping malls (O’Connell 2003). Clarendon provided a home and opportunity to a people recently deprived of both by war, and the Vietnamese in turn helped revive and maintain Clarendon as a retail and restaurant destination during its most distressed years. However, the landscape and demographics of Clarendon have changed radically in the last decade alone, and not many of its current residents know about its rich cultural history and significance. Simultaneously, Clarendon struggles to retain its own unique and authentic identity as continuously rising rents squeeze local, independent businesses out of the neighborhood, and only large, national retail chains can afford to stay.

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3 For a full account of deliverables and work completed for this studio, see page 15.
Objective
The objective of this capstone practicum was to create a “living museum” self-guided walking tour commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Fall of Saigon, the refugee immigration to Arlington, and the Clarendon community once referred to as "Little Saigon" during the 1970s and 1980s. The walking tour is marked and narrated through a series of unique storefront stickers reminiscent of museum placards that are placed on the exterior windows of businesses that were once part of the Little Saigon community (primarily along Wilson Boulevard and North Highland Street) (see Figure 6). These stickers will include Quick Response (QR) codes—square, checkered bar codes that can be scanned by a smartphone—that link to the project website (www.littlesaigonclarendon.com), which contain a mini-documentary on some element of the Little Saigon neighborhood, including the history of that particular building, and the individual businesses that occupied the space or spaces nearby. These documentaries contain excerpts from oral histories recently recorded in conjunction with this project, as well as pictures and articles from the time period, sourced from institutions or former and current community members. Themes explored include immigration, cultural preservation, urban renewal and economic development.

Figure 6: Former Little Saigon Clarendon Area, Today

Source: Google Maps
Literature

This practicum draws on the primary and secondary historical neighborhood research gathered as part of the studio class, as well as scholarly literature related to historic and cultural preservation. Within the United States, traditional definitions of preservation have focused primarily on preserving the physical characteristics of the built environment, such as a building or its facade; preservation programs, likewise, are typically dedicated primarily to the protection of landmarks—sites and structures with visible and tangible historical value that either played host to an historical event or possess architectural significance (Avrami et al. 2000). However, there has been a growing acknowledgment of the fact that this narrow slice of preservation represents only a small fraction of the country’s diverse cultural experience, and that preservation should not be purely a technical exercise, immune from change. Advocates insist that preservation should be more participatory and process-oriented, “a social activity constantly reshaped by forces such as globalization, technological developments, the widening influence of market ideology, cultural fusion, and myriad others” (Avrami et al. 2000: 7). As former president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation Richard Moe noted in 2010, “historic preservation has evolved into something much more than just saving historic buildings. Today it is about people and the places that they care about—where they live, work, shop, worship, and celebrate” (Moe 2010: 5). This more inclusive definition broadens the scope of preservation from simply preserving historic landmarks to conserving diversity in neighborhoods, even as they undergo economic change (Stipe 2003).

Diversity and cultural preservation are becoming increasingly important within planning efforts (Jackson et al. 2011). Local municipalities are recognizing the need to foster diversity in preservation for the same reason the planning profession is looking to foster diversity within its ranks and reverse the so-called “diversity deficit”—they are looking to better reflect the inherent and growing diversity within their community (Kaufman 2009). One way preservationists are doing this is by conducting surveys and public outreach to identify these architecturally modest but culturally important “story sites,” alongside those that fit the traditional description of historic and preservation-worthy (Kaufman 2009). Oral histories provide an initial form of cultural preservation that seeks to identify and preserve these underrepresented voices, experiences and
traditions of the past, and they can subsequently lead to greater recognition and even preservation of these often overlooked “story sites” (Jackson et al. 2011; Kaufman 2009).

The preservation of these “story sites,” and the stories associated with them, not only reflects a much more representative cross section of history, but also contributes significantly to place making. The adaptation and reuse of old buildings (even those not considered to be landmarks in the traditional sense) can reveal a lot about how a community or a particular neighborhood has changed over time. Older building stock is often viewed as undesirable, and is therefore less expensive to buy or rent. When located in equally undesirable parts of town, such buildings provide affordable space for a diverse mix of entrepreneurs and artists—the vanguard of those Richard Florida has famously labeled the Creative Class (Florida 2002). These spaces are also flexible and can be easily adapted to the needs of the current tenant. Over time, as they begin to flourish, the neighborhood becomes desirable again, so property values and rents begin to rise, and those still-vulnerable residents are often priced out. In the years since The Creative Class was first published, municipalities have recognized the value of diversity, both socially and economically, and have sought to foster it within their communities by cultivating a personality of place to attract growth and investment. In the world of community and economic development, diversity has to some extent become both the fuel and the fire of change. Therefore, documenting this neighborhood change can be essential to public consideration of the consequences of gentrification as well as the opportunities for preserving diversity in future planning efforts so that diversity is not simply paid lip service for economic gain.
Methods

Storefront stickers are a common adornment on many businesses these days, including within Clarendon, typically indicating to customers that the stores are small and independent or that they are popular with online social media or review sites like FourSquare or Yelp (see Figure 7). Most of these stickers include a QR code. While the Little Saigon Clarendon stickers capitalize on this practice, they are stylistically and functionally more akin to a museum placard, providing contextual information for an historical exhibit, which in this case is a particular chapter in the history of the actual building to which the sticker is affixed.

Today, many museums are incorporating QR codes, dial in phone number and exhibit codes, or other forms of technology into their informational placards, which allow visitors to use their own smart or cell phones to conduct self-guided tours in lieu of the headsets that were once available for rent (Rosenbloom 2011) (see Figure 8). For example, in 2011, the Museum of Modern Art in New York hosted an exhibition entitled Talk to Me, in which it included QR codes on labels for every object included—the first time it had done so (Rosenbloom 2011) (Figure 9). For this project, each QR code connects users directly to a short documentary (typically about eight minutes in length), produced as part of this practicum, that utilizes recorded oral histories, pictures and articles (from either the studio class or newly collected as part of this project) to tell the story of a particular chapter in Little Saigon’s history in a cohesive narrative. These documentaries also address the economic factors that led to the

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4 QR codes were invented in Japan in the 1990s. Although they were developed initially for component tracking in manufacturing, they have since achieved fairly widespread use as a marketing tool, connecting the physical world to the online, digital realm (Rosenbloom 2011).
dissolution of Little Saigon. Posted up and down Wilson Boulevard and North Highland Street, the stickers function as a self-guided, curated walking tour of the history of the neighborhood (see Figure 6).

The new/social media element of this project is in keeping with the current youthful and tech-savvy demographic of Clarendon, to whom this information campaign is directed. According to research conducted in 2011 by comScore, a digital media analytics firm, more than half of all QR code scanners were between the ages of 18 and 34 (53.4 percent), and had annual incomes of $75,000 or more (54.7 percent) (comScore). As of 2013, more than half (53.3 percent) of those living in Clarendon were within this same age bracket, and nearly two-thirds (65.9 percent) had annual incomes of $75,000 or more (U.S. Census Bureau) (see Figure 10). Furthermore, because Arlington has experienced so much redevelopment in the last decade and these young Clarendon residents generally have moved to Arlington and the Washington, D.C. area from elsewhere for work, they would most likely be unaware of this or any chapter in Arlington’s history.
Figure 10: Residential Census Tracts Surrounding Clarendon Metro

Source: American Community Survey
There have been other precedents for using storefront stickers as indicators of a cultural or historic district, but they are primarily a branding and marketing campaign by a city agency or business alliance interested in place making. In San Francisco, San Francisco Heritage (sfheritage.org), a 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to protect the city’s unique architectural and cultural identity, launched the Legacy project, which is an “educational initiative that invites users to experience the history of some of San Francisco’s most legendary eateries, watering holes, dives, and haunts,” particularly those that do not necessarily qualify for formal historic designation (About Legacy). To qualify, a business must have achieved “longevity of 40 or more years, possess distinctive architecture or interior design, and/or contribute to a sense of history in the surrounding neighborhood” (About Legacy: 1). Qualifying businesses are able to post a SF Heritage certified Legacy sticker (see Figure 11) in their storefront to advertise to the public, and will be included in both an online and printed guide of other Legacy members, and promoted on the organizations social media. This publicity can help drive additional traffic and tourism dollars to the included establishments. However, there is no detail provided about an individual establishment’s historical or cultural significance through the program. Many historic neighborhoods in cities across the country, such as Old City in Philadelphia (Old City District 2012), have similar types of storefront sticker programs, but none appear to provide direct access to the historical information that makes the property or district unique.
Conclusion

If there is sufficient interest, this capstone practicum could serve as a pilot project for a new kind of cultural heritage program, one that distills the specific significance attributed to a building, business or neighborhood into a multi-media experience and embeds it directly within the built environment. Buildings of historic or cultural significance could become the virtual repositories of their own past. While the method by which a user accesses this information may become antiquated and change over time (for example, the QR code may be phased out in favor of another type of code technology), the variety of applications for which the platform could be used will only continue to grow. Already, Clarendon Alliance, the local business alliance (similar to a business improvement district, or BID) that sponsored the project, has indicated that it is considering this project a pilot for what could be a larger district designation program within that neighborhood, similar to what was discussed previously in other cities.

The premise of the project—combining cultural preservation interests and practices with multi-media to create a “living museum”—is very scale-able and adaptable to other communities. It could also be used to provide added depth to the types of place-making branding described earlier, such as in Old City District in Philadelphia or the San Francisco Heritage program. That type of program need not be limited only to historic landmarks or neighborhoods. It can be very useful for documenting hyper-local stories of both the recent or distant past with equal weight, connecting them to place, and making preservation/conservation initiatives relevant for new audiences. Because of this hyper-local focus, I believe a similar model of sponsorship to this project—a local business alliance or business improvement district (BID) working with the local jurisdiction or economic development agency—would work well in the future for similar projects, and could help to generate both local and regional interest. A tool such as this could help retain existing communities by establishing sustained social and economic support for local, independent businesses or as the first step in the creation of arts or cultural heritage districts.

For capstone project data analytics, see Figures 12 and 13.
Figure 12: LittleSaigonClarendon.com Analytics (as of May 27th, 2015)

Source: WordPress
Figure 13: LittleSaigonClarendon.com Referring Websites and Sources (as of May 27th, 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referrer</th>
<th>Views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Search Engines</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arlnow.com</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>icontact-archive.com</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library.arlingtonva.us/2015/05/04/voices-of-little-saigon-in-clarendon</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preservationarlington.org</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insidenova.com</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vtnews.vt.edu</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cp.mcafee.com/d/5fHCMUji40UpdEl9FCzCVEVod7b1KVj554QsTvuv</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hosted.verticalresponse.com</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>calendar.vt.edu/main.php?view=event&amp;eventid=1428437579427</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>projects.arlingtonva.us/plans-studies/historic-preservation/</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stayarlington.com</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goucher.edu/graduate-programs/ma-in-historic-preservation/mahp</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peakoil.com/forums/collapse-or-de-growth-t70980-100.html</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: WordPress
**UAP 5124 Deliverables of the Little Saigon Studio Group:**

- Approximately 12 hours of audio and video recorded oral history interviews with community members, which will be archived at the Arlington Center for Local History
- Collection of personal photographs and other related memorabilia from project participants
- Background research (primary and secondary, as listed in attached annotated bibliography)
- A website (www.littlesaigonclarendon.com) that was used for outreach and repository of collected information
- Little Saigon content contribution to a pre-existing mapping project for Asian Pacific Islander “East at Main Street” mapping project (https://www.historypin.org/project/51-east-at-main-street/#!map/index/#!/geo:38.210513,-146.926995/zoom:3/)
- A collection of aerial photograph “maps” of Clarendon demonstrating development trends over the course of several decades
- A synopsis to Arlington TV for possible future documentary on this subject
- Proposed contribution to Arlington Historic Preservation Plan on the subject of Vietnamese heritage in Arlington and significance of Little Saigon
- Recommendations to Arlington County about possible thematic and visual inspirations for the permanent historical marker in Clarendon
Full List of Capstone Process and Deliverables

• Met with and discussed the project with Cynthia Liccese-Torres of Arlington County Historical Preservation about how this project could be coordinated with official County involvement and with the overall historic marker or district process, including any other temporary exhibit or public event related to 40th anniversary of fall of Saigon
• Met with and discussed the project and possible County tie ins and resources with Courtney Cacatian and Karen Vasquez of Arlington Economic Development
• Presented a recap of Studio 5124 project and provided a preview of capstone project to HALRB board (March 18th, 2015)
• Participated in several meetings to coordinate with the County and other stakeholders for anniversary event, and conducted frequent outreach to participants
• Researched the QR code creation process (and other viable alternatives) to determine the best smart phone access method; secured and programmed QR codes for use
• Created three separate iterations of the sticker concept myself based on market research I conducted; coordinated directly with professional graphic designer on final design
• Approached and secured Clarendon Alliance in becoming an official sponsor of the project, allowing me to put their logo on the stickers to lend project legitimacy and utilize their relationship with store owners to get specific store owners to commit to participation in project. Clarendon Alliance covered the cost of sticker images, graphic design and printing
• Contacted individual business owners of some relevant Wilson Boulevard shops directly to request participation, including Spider Kelly’s, Julia’s Fashions and Public Shoe
• Wrote scripts for sticker documentary introductions/conclusions as well as the continuous audio-only walking tour that provides spoken directions and narrative
• Asked Kim O’Connell, a freelance writer and historian who was been closely involved in County anniversary event planning, UAP Studio 5124 outreach and who has long been involved in documenting the history of Little Saigon, to be the “voice” of the project
• Arranged to record narration by Kim O’Connell at Arlington TV in a professional sound stage
• Arranged and conducted four hours of additional oral history interviews with former or current County officials and other community members, including Lieu Nguyen (daughter of Mekong Center owners) and Chris Zimmerman (former Arlington County Board Chair)
• Conducted online research for additional historical image; cleared use permissions with sources
• Edited 16 hours of audio tape down to approximately 40 total minutes of individual, relevant excerpts that could be joined together into five cohesive themed narratives, using iMovie software
• Used video editing software to align images (sourced from oral histories, articles and online sources) to audio narratives and recorded narration to form complete documentaries
• Uploaded content to Echoes of Little Saigon Clarendon YouTube channel; conducted beta testing
• Emailed oral history participants who appear in documentaries with first look opportunity
• Designed a hand out flyer to be printed and distributed by the County to accompany the stickers, with more detail about the project
• Organized and conducted ‘live’ tour for May 9th, 2015 40th anniversary event; for press coverage, visit ArlingtonTV and Vietnamese Public Television
Each Little Saigon Clarendon Sticker Incorporates:

- The project series title
- An individualized chapter title referencing a different era and theme in the history of the Little Saigon neighborhood
- An historic image of the building to which its mounted, specific to the era when it was occupied by a Vietnamese business (including credit, date)
- A schematic map of the immediate Clarendon metro area, indicating where the other sticker chapters in the series are located
- A customized QR code that, when scanned, connects users directly to a short documentary (typically about 8 minutes in length) that utilizes contributed recorded oral histories, pictures and articles to tell the story of that particular chapter in Little Saigon’s history in a cohesive narrative
- Project URL (littlesaigonclarendon.com)
- Twitter hashtag #LittleSaigonClarendon for cross promotion with County’s May 9th event
- The Clarendon Alliance logo and website
Sources

“About Legacy Bars and Restaurants,” San Francisco Heritage.  
http://www.sfheritage.org/legacy/#


Appendix I:
Project Materials and Handouts
LITTLE SAIGON SELF-GUIDED TOUR

Look for this series of stickers in the windows of the five participating businesses (addresses below) and scan the QR codes with your smartphone to see and hear what Clarendon was like when it was known as Little Saigon. You will see videos and hear stories taken from oral history interviews with current and former residents and community members.

You can also download the complete walking tour online at: www.littlesaigonclarendon.com.

Discover each of the Neighborhood’s Chapters:

1. Escape from Vietnam, and Immigration to the U.S. (1135 N. Highland St.)
2. Making Home in Clarendon (3101 Wilson Blvd.)
3. Scenes from Little Saigon (3125 Wilson Blvd.)
4. Introduction of the Metro, and Rise of Eden Center (3165 Wilson Blvd.)
5. Reflections on Little Saigon (3181 Wilson Blvd.)
1940s - 1960 — Clarendon is a thriving retail center and home to well-established residential neighborhoods.

1960 - 1970 — Commercial activity declines

1975 - 1985 — Height of the “Little Saigon” Vietnamese business district

1979 — Clarendon Metro Station opens

1980s — Numerous small businesses established in Clarendon

1985 - 2000s — Higher-density redevelopment around the Clarendon Metro Park transforms character of area

Little Saigon Establishments:
1. Queen Bee
2. Dan Kain Trophies
3. Kim Ngoc Jewelry
4. Ngoc Long Jewelry
5. Nam Viet
6. Vietnam Fashions
7. Kim Photo
8. Saigon Market
10. Kim Son Jewelry
11. Dat Hung Jewelry
12. Dai Nam Restaurant
13. Mekong Center
14. Pacific Oriental
15. My-An Fabrics
16. Nam Viet (later)
17. Cafe Saigon

Look for this series of stickers in the windows of the five participating businesses (addresses below) and scan the QR codes with your smartphone to see and hear what Clarendon was like when it was known as Little Saigon. You will see videos and hear stories taken from oral history interviews with current and former residents and community members.

Discover Each of the Neighborhood’s Chapters:
1. Escape from Vietnam, and Immigration to the U.S. 1135 N. Highland St
2. Making a Home in Clarendon 3101 Wilson Blvd
3. Scenes from Little Saigon 3125 Wilson Blvd
4. Introduction of the Metro, and Rise of Eden Center 3165 Wilson Blvd
5. Reflections on Little Saigon 3181 Wilson Blvd

Or download the complete walking tour online at www.littlesaigonclarendon.com.
1 PM: County Board Proclamation and Special Guest Speakers
1-3PM: Lemongrass Food Truck will sell Vietnamese cuisine (www.lemongrasstruck.com)
1:30 PM: Walking Tour Narrated by Former Little Saigon Community Members
1:30-3 PM: Public Art and Art Activities by Artist Khánh H. Lê and Self-Guided Smartphone Tours

Event info: publicart.arlingtonva.us
Arlington County will provide upon request reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities. Two weeks advance notice is preferred. Call 703-228-3329. TTY 711.

Since 1983 when we first opened our doors as My-An Restaurant, Arlington to our family has always been more than just a city where our restaurant operates, it’s been a vital part of our lives from being brought up through its wonderful school system to being a place we are proud to call home, both as business owners and residents of this wonderful county.

To be one of the oldest remaining businesses when the Wilson Boulevard corridor was known as Little Saigon where prominent shops and storefronts once showcased a robust community of Vietnamese merchants is a proud accomplishment and a testament to our love for Arlington; And our desire to continue to be a long standing establishment that serves traditional Vietnamese food to the entire metropolitan area.

We take great pride in being one of the last remaining establishments in an ever changing area of Clarendon where more and more modernization is happening all around us each and everyday. To commemorate Little Saigon, Nam-Viet Restaurant is proud to offer a 15% discount off your dine in meal with this flyer for both Saturday May 9th, and Sunday May 10, 2015.

Please present this to your server and enjoy 4 generations of traditional cooking from Nam-Viet Restaurant and the Nguyen Van Thoi family.

Warmest Regards,
The Nguyen Van Thoi Family
Appendix II: 
Press Coverage
Echoes of Little Saigon

Since 1988

Thuật ngữ "Little Saigon" (vùng đô thị nhỏ do người Việt tạo thành ở thành phố trên khắp Mỹ) đã trở thành một thuật ngữ được sử dụng phổ biến trên toàn thế giới.
Ngoài giao Việt Nam đã liên hệ, trước leân caám của họ không có hiệu lực. Vì vậy, ngoại giao Việt Nam vẫn cho biết vào ngày đầu tiên của tháng sau, rằng các tình trạng thiếc của Trung Quốc do họ biết, họ không có ý thức hay cả những biểu hiện của việc chạy trốn, nhưng vẫn nói rằng Trung Quốc trực tiếp không có quyền điều chỉnh thông tin của Trung Quốc.

"Gia Minh"

Ngoài giao Việt Nam còn lưu ý rằng, Trung Quốc cần tập trung vào việc bao gồm quốc gia và các quốc gia khác trong việc điều chỉnh thông tin của Trung Quốc.

"Gia Minh"

Ngoài giao Việt Nam còn lưu ý rằng, Trung Quốc cần tập trung vào việc bao gồm quốc gia và các quốc gia khác trong việc điều chỉnh thông tin của Trung Quốc.
Graduate students' studio project on Arlington's Vietnamese community spurs May 9 celebration

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  - 571-858-3008
  - blmicale@vt.edu

NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION, May 4, 2015 – That "Little Saigon" was once a vibrant ethnic community in Clarendon is a little-known fact to most Arlington, Virginia, residents.

But because five Virginia Tech graduate students in the National Capital Region collaborated with the Arlington County Historic Preservation program and Arlington Public Library Center for Local History in an Echoes of Little Saigon studio project last fall, more people will have access to the neighborhood’s rich Vietnamese history.

In the mid-1970s, depressed rents because of the Metro's construction made Clarendon an attractive place to establish grocery stores, restaurants, department stores, and entertainment venues catering to the large number of Vietnamese who immigrated to the Washington, D.C., area at the end of the Vietnam War. The Metro's completion in 1979 made Arlington more expensive, and the business center gradually shifted to Eden Center in Falls Church. Only one of the original Little Saigon businesses remains in operation -- the Nam Viet Restaurant.

Jacqueline Canales of Washington, D.C; Andrea Dono of Falls Church, Virginia; Aaron Frank of Annandale, Virginia; Carlin Tacey of Woodbridge, Virginia; and Judd Ullom of Alexandria, Virginia, all master's students in the urban affairs and planning program in the College of Architecture and Urban Studies School of Public and International Affairs, formed the Echoes of Little Saigon studio.

The research and advocacy of local writer Kim O'Connell, who is of Vietnamese descent, inspired them to undertake the project. O'Connell grew up frequenting Little Saigon and has worked to bring attention to this aspect of Arlington heritage.

Conducting oral histories with former residents was an integral component of the studio. One Clarendon resident recounted a vivid childhood memory of packing weeks in advance to prepare for a spur-of-the-moment departure from Vietnam. Another reminisced about the buzz of activity in all the Vietnamese shops and restaurants in the area. For another, Little Saigon was "where we learned to be American."

The team collected photos and other memorabilia chronicling four decades of the area’s business and community life, highlighting those of local visual and performing artist Michael Horsley, who documented Little Saigon in its heyday.

The students also created a website and a Wikipedia page and contributed to a national online mapping project, East at Main Street, which crowdsources information for sites important to the Asian-Pacific community.

O'Connell offered support throughout the project and attended the students' presentation to a group of
Arlington County representatives at the end of the fall semester.

Congratulating them on a "superb job," O'Connell said, "This project means so much to me and I can't thank you enough for all you've done. I have so many fond childhood memories of day-long excursions to the Clarendon community with my mother that it's hard to keep my emotions in check."

"We have wanted to document this history for some time, and the students' work is a wonderful addition to our collection," said Judith Knudsen, manager of the Arlington Public Library Center for Local History. "It is really amazing how much they were able to accomplish in such a short period of time."

While the studio may have ended months ago, the students' enthusiasm has not waned. They have continued to advocate for public awareness of Clarendon's Vietnamese history, attending many meetings with local Arlington officials.

As a result, Arlington County will honor Clarendon's Vietnamese heritage[9] from 1 to 3 p.m. Saturday, May 9, at the Clarendon Central Park (at Clarendon Metro) as part of Neighborhood Day 2015.

The Arlington County Board will make a proclamation, and the event will include a number of guest speakers, public art and art activities by Artist Khánh H. Lê, and self-guided smart phone tours of Little Saigon businesses narrated by former community members.

The walking tour is the culmination of Ullom's capstone project. Ullom created a series of storefront stickers for the windows of business that were once part of the Little Saigon community (primarily along Wilson and Clarendon boulevards). These stickers include QR codes that link to online "mini-documentaries" exploring the themes of immigration, cultural preservation, urban renewal, and economic development.

Virginia Tech's Urban Affairs and Planning program is supporting the Clarendon event with the Arlington County Historic Preservation Program, Arlington Public Art, Arlington Department of Parks and Recreation, and Clarendon Alliance.

Professor of Practice Elizabeth Morton[10], who led the Echoes of Little Saigon studio, praised the students for the quality of their work and the quality of their engagement with a broad range of community actors.

Morton said "the most exciting aspect is the many initiatives that have already spun off from the studio. We are optimistic that, with our great partners in the county, this pilot effort will serve as a model for continued documentation of the stories of Vietnamese residents and other immigrant groups and a reassessment of how we view Arlington."

Virginia Tech has fostered a growing partnership with the greater metropolitan Washington, D.C., community since 1969. Today, the university's presence in the National Capital Region[11] includes graduate programs and research centers in Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax, Falls Church, Leesburg, Manassas, and Middleburg. In addition to supporting the university's teaching and research mission, Virginia Tech's National Capital Region has established collaborations with local and federal agencies, businesses, and other institutions of higher education. Virginia Tech, the most comprehensive university in Virginia, is dedicated to quality, innovation, and results to the commonwealth, the nation, and the world.
Students in the Echoes of Little Saigon studio are, from left, Carlin Tacey, Jacqueline Canales, Aaron Frank, Judd Ullom, and Andrea Dono.

Related Links

- Citizen Scholar award winner Andrea Hamre has deep-rooted commitment to public service[12]
- Virginia Tech doctoral students boast a high profile at this year’s STGlobal conference[13]
- Graduate students in urban affairs and planning conduct study for Capital Bikeshare[14]

Links

[3]. http://library. Arlingtonva.us/center-for-local-history/
[4]. http://www.uap.vt.edu/
[5]. http://www.spia.vt.edu/
[6]. http://michaelhorsley.com/#home
[7]. http://littlesaigonclarendon.com/
[9]. https://littlesaigonclarendon.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/little-saigon-event-flyer.pdf
Many know that the DC is home to national Asian and Pacific Islander national organizations and federal/national organizations that work with APIAs but today, we are featuring a local neighborhood: Little Saigon in Clarendon, Virginia (just across the river from DC). Today’s pin features a video on the history of Vietnamese Americans in Claredon and the formation of Little Saigon:

From our pinner, Echos of Little Saigon:

Following the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, an estimated 3,000 Vietnamese refugees settled in the Washington, D.C., area. At that time in Clarendon, rents were low and leases were short-term due to construction, which attracted immigrant entrepreneurs who opened more than 30 businesses along Wilson Boulevard between N. Highland and N. Irving Streets. This cluster of Vietnamese-owned grocery stores, restaurants, gift shops, jewelry stores, fabric boutiques, and other businesses became known as “Little Saigon.” It was a destination for hard-to-find goods like fish sauce and Vietnamese cuisine like phở, a traditional noodle soup. For many refugees, this area served as a community hub for...
meeting friends and family; learning of news from Vietnam; and enjoying familiar foods, music and language. Little Saigon attracted people from several states and was a vibrant Vietnamese community until the mid-1980s. After the Clarendon Metro station opened in 1979, high rents and new development projects caused most Vietnamese businesses to close or relocate.

For more information, check a website dedicated to the preservation of this culturally significant neighborhood: http://littlesaigonclarendon.com

Posted 23 hours ago by Asian & Pacific Islander Americans in Historic Preservation

Labels: apaeverywhere, apihip, apiamapping, asian pacific american heritage month, historic preservation, Little Saigon, Vietnamese American
TargetExpress Coming to Rosslyn — A new 23,000-square-foot TargetExpress store is coming to Rosslyn. Located at 1500 Wilson Blvd, the store will have an in-house Starbucks, a pharmacy, a technology and mobile phone section and will carry clothing, groceries and prepared foods. Also coming to 1500 Wilson Blvd: a District Taco restaurant and a Wells Fargo bank branch. [Washington Post, Washington Business Journal]

Little Saigon Remembered — A master’s student at Virginia Tech’s Northern Virginia campus recounts Clarendon’s former identity as “Little Saigon,” thanks to the immigration of Vietnamese refugees following the end of the Vietnam War. As a project, the student has created a self-guided walking tour of Clarendon in connection with the 40th anniversary of the fall of Saigon. [Preservation Arlington]
April 30, 2015, marked the 40th anniversary of the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War. After the war, many Vietnamese refugees settled in Arlington, Virginia, and the Clarendon neighborhood briefly became known as “Little Saigon.” On Saturday, a cultural heritage event took place in Clarendon to recognize this important history.

The event featured a County Board proclamation, a temporary public art installation by Vietnamese-American artist Khánh H. Lê (now on view at the Center for Local History), and the unveiling of a smartphone audio tour of the historic buildings of Little Saigon. This audio tour is a “living museum” featuring the stories of Vietnamese immigrants, and Preservation Arlington welcomes this guest post by the tour’s producer and creative director, Judd Ullom. Learn more at www.littlesaigonclarendon.com.

I’m a master’s student in Urban Planning at Virginia Tech’s Northern Virginia campus. Last fall, I participated in a studio class that collected a number of recorded oral histories and artifacts from members of the Vietnamese community who immigrated to, resided or shopped in the Clarendon neighborhood of Arlington during the late 1970s and early 1980s following the fall of Saigon.

During this time, Arlington experienced an unprecedented level of immigration, which was concentrated primarily within the Clarendon neighborhood due to the cheap and flexible residential and commercial rents afforded by the construction of the Metro station; the fact that Clarendon had fallen out of favor as a retail destination made it all the more affordable. The neighborhood subsequently became known for a time as “Little Saigon” due to the many Vietnamese shops and restaurants that proliferated along Wilson Boulevard, primarily between N. Irving and N. Highland Streets.

Once the Metro was completed, rents quickly began to rise and forced many residents and business owners to relocate further west to Falls Church and the newly opened Eden Center.

By the time the Vietnamese began moving into the neighborhood during the 1970s, Clarendon had lost its status as the commercial ‘downtown’ of...
Arlington; retail had migrated to nearby auto-oriented shopping malls. Clarendon provided a home and opportunity to a people recently deprived of both by war, and the Vietnamese in turn helped revive and maintain Clarendon as a retail and restaurant destination during its most distressed years.

The Vietnamese community that remains in Arlington has long been interested in a historic marker commemorating their impact on Arlington, and the current oral history project has confirmed this. However, the demographics of Clarendon have changed radically in the last decade alone, and not many of its current residents know about its rich cultural history and significance.

As of 2013, more than half of Clarendon’s residents were between the ages of 20 and 34, many of whom moved here within the last ten years after Clarendon experienced an enormous amount of redevelopment. Many parts of Arlington are almost unrecognizable from how they looked just a decade ago.

For my final project, I created a “living museum” self-guided walking tour commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Fall of Saigon, the subsequent refugee immigration to Arlington, and the Clarendon community once referred to as “Little Saigon” during the 1970s and 1980s. The walking tour is marked and narrated through the a series of unique storefront stickers reminiscent of museum placards that are placed on the exterior windows of businesses that were once part of the Little Saigon community (primarily along Wilson Boulevard and North Highland Street).

These stickers include Quick Response (QR) codes that link to a number of mini-documentaries on some element of the Little Saigon neighborhood, including the history of that particular building, and the individual businesses that occupied the space or spaces nearby. These documentaries contain excerpts from oral histories recently
recorded in relation to this project, as well as pictures and articles from the time period, sourced from institutions or former and current community members. They explore themes of immigration, cultural preservation, and urban renewal and economic development.

Click on the storefront stickers or the chapter links below to view the videos. Download the accompanying audio-only walking tour here narrated by Kim O'Connell, playable on any digital audio device.

Chapter 1: Escape from Vietnam, and Immigration to the U.S. — Delhi Club; 1135 N. Highland Street

Chapter 2: Making a Home in Clarendon — The Hartford Building; 3101 Wilson Boulevard

Chapter 3: Scenes from Little Saigon — Goody’s; 3125 Wilson Boulevard

Chapter 4: Introduction of the Metro, and Rise of Eden Center — Don Tito’s; 3165 Wilson Boulevard

Chapter 5: Reflections on Little Saigon — Spider Kelly’s; 3181 Wilson Boulevard