

Beyond the Archives

Examining cities through their relationship to the natural environment offers a framework to consider much of American history. These issues are on my mind a lot right now, in part because of my recent re-appointment to Boise's Planning and Zoning Commission, and in part due to my preparation for the upper division course I will be teaching this spring on Urban Environmental History at Boise State University.

In October, I attended the Western History Association Conference in St. Paul, MN, a conference where scholars gather to discuss the intersections of race, environment, labor, capital, and development related to the West. It is one of my favorite conferences because of the diversity of scholarship displayed and the opportunity to think about old subjects in new ways.

I spent one pre-conference morning running along the Mississippi River, considering and questioning its meaning to the city over time. Many of our nation's biggest cities grew and developed along rivers, like Minneapolis-St. Paul. Downtown St. Paul is separated from the river by a busy street and by the bluffs upon which the city is perched. Remnants of the river's historic industrial uses remain visible today, with mills lining its banks and rail yards spilling into its channel. This river was and remains a working river. Since its 18th century days as a rich hunting ground for fur traders and into the 19th century, when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers engineered the Mississippi to control its flow for navigational purposes, colonists and then Americans transported a vast variety of goods downstream to St. Louis and New Orleans, connecting the country's interior with its seas and then to the world beyond.

In addition, urban industrialists exploited the Mississippi as a vast drain into which anything and everything was dumped. But my run along the waterfront in October revealed the work that St. Paul residents have accomplished to restore this river since the 1960s. Tom Kelley was one actor who helped make restoration happen. As a county auditor, he convinced the state legislature to allocate \$16 million to buying land along the river. The assembled parcels were flood-prone or had an industrial history – in other words, they were properties with little commercial value but high wildlife potential. The county used the money to assemble a contiguous stretch of land along the river that became known as St. Paul's riverfront, part of which Congress later designated the Mississippi River National River and Recreation Area in 1988. As recreation has become a more solid and enduring American value, cities have recognized that natural resources offer an economic benefit, and in this case, the state's early \$16 million investment has paid great dividends. The city of St. Paul now sees its river as more than utilitarian; it is a quality-of-life benefit for Minnesotans.

Myriad American cities are like St. Paul in that their rivers convey a human, urban, *and* environmental story. SHRA has told many of these histories over the years. Working for cities, counties, corporations, irrigation districts, and Indian tribes, we have recorded the significant tales of rivers like the Mississippi, focused on navigation, fur trapping, irrigation, flood control, and sometimes, toxic cleanups. As rivers continue to play a critical role in urban and rural America, we look forward to continuing such work.



The St. Paul Waterfront

- Jennifer Stevens

New Project Manager and Researcher - Amalia Baldwin comes to us from Madison, WI, where she earned her Master of Science degree in Environmental Studies from the University of Wisconsin's Nelson Institute in 2008. Amalia's Master's thesis, *Becoming Wilderness: Nature, History and the Making of Isle Royale National Park*, was published as a book in 2011. After graduate school, she worked for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for eight years before moving to Boise. Amalia has always been fascinated by the relationship between people and place. She explored this during her undergraduate years at Yale University where she majored in Anthropology and graduated Magna Cum Laude. Between undergraduate and graduate work, Amalia worked for the National Park Service as an interpretive ranger in several parks around the country.



SHRA News - We are thrilled to announce that the University of Washington's History faculty unanimously voted to appoint Dr. Jennifer Stevens as an affiliate in their department. In that role, she will mentor doctoral students in public history and consulting, the first of whom is Cyrus Forman, a public historian from West Virginia who is writing a history of salt mining in that state.

The American Society for Environmental History meets in March 2017 in Chicago where Dr. Stevens will be on a panel related to public history jobs in environmental history.

Dr. Stevens will teach an upper division urban environmental history course this spring at Boise State University. The class will focus on American cities and their wide-ranging impact on natural resources from 1800 to the present.

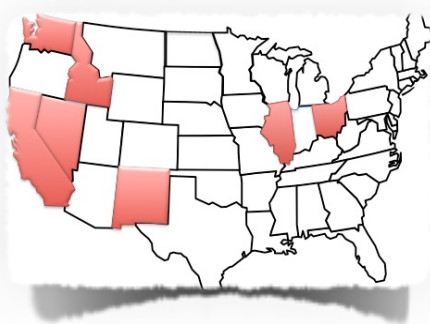
Former SHRA associate Stephanie Milne-Lane recently was named as Boise City's first City Archivist. We will miss her and wish her the best in her new career!

The SHRA team will be volunteering in the Boise community this holiday season to help the underserved.



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Map courtesy of ppt-toolkit.com

SHRA is currently working in:

California, New Mexico,
Nevada, Washington,
Illinois, Ohio and Idaho

History in the Making

*SHRA is pleased to announce a new practice area in Asbestos Litigation. Our team is currently researching industrial uses of this mineral during the 20th century. Many of our cases occur in states such as Illinois and Ohio, since the Midwest was the center of many types of industrial manufacturing. Our research took us to the New York Public Library this summer to work in historic trade journals not available in any other library!

*SHRA is currently conducting two research projects for the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD), including a history of north-south travel routes through the state's interior, as well as a research guide to historic ferry crossings on the Snake River. Both of these projects are meeting mitigation requirements for bridge replacements in the department's District 3, negotiated with the State Historic Preservation Office.

*SHRA worked in the California State Archives last month, working on a project related to water rights in the Central Valley.

*SHRA is working on its DBE (Disadvantaged Business Enterprise) and Woman-Owned-Business certification with ITD as well as becoming listed on ITD's Term Agreement list.