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# In the Shadow of Steel

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In the Shadow of Steel

by

Alison O'Connell

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

History

Lehigh University

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Thesis is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in History.

In the Shadow of Steel  
Alison O'Connell

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## ABSTRACT

The documentary “In the Shadow of Steel” is a case study of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and how it is preserving and re-using its post-industrial resources. The film argues that adaptive reuse is the most valuable preservation tool for this post-industrial site, because that is the strongest way to retain its sense of place and history. ‘Sense of place’ and ‘sense of history’ are important both because they reflect and restore community pride and because the Bethlehem Steel site is unique and conveys a sense of history that is important both locally and nationally. Having the full site re-used both gives the site a new purpose, while also conveying the history of industrial America.

The thesis consists of a film, a summary, which provides additional insight into the documentary, a piece on filmmaking decisions, which explores how and why the film was made, and an annotated bibliography to demonstrate the research done prior to and during the making of the film.

## Summary of “In the Shadow of Steel”

The documentary “In the Shadow of Steel” is a case study of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and how it is preserving and re-using its post-industrial resources. The film is beneficial to the field of public history because it represents the complexity of an in-progress economic revitalization project on a historical industrial site that consists of “the last fully integrated steel mill still standing in the United States.”<sup>1</sup> The film argues that adaptive reuse is the most valuable preservation tool for this post-industrial site, because that is the strongest way to retain its sense of place and history. ‘Sense of place’ and ‘sense of history’ are buzzwords within the public history field, and in this case they are important both because they reflect and restore community pride and because the Bethlehem Steel site is unique and conveys a sense of history that is important both locally and nationally. Having the full site re-used both gives the site a new purpose, while also conveying the history of industrial America. However, it still needs a strong, centralized, coherent plan with historic interpretation at the center. From this case study, we learn that the first obstacle to tackle is that the site is in danger of demolition by neglect; if that dilemma can be solved, the next issue is that interpretation is often set aside or left until the last moment, when it may be too late. Simply saving and re-using the buildings is not successful if the historical narrative has been forgotten.

Once the second-largest steel manufacturer in the United States, Bethlehem Steel Corporation shut its main plant in South Bethlehem in 1995. There have been plans to preserve and re-use the site ever since the plant closed, but many of those have been changed or even eliminated along the way. The film focuses on interviews with several

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<sup>1</sup> Isidore Mineo, “Rebuilding Bethlehem with Bethlehem Steel,” Historical Society of Pennsylvania, <http://www.hsp.org/node/2942> (accessed December 7, 2011).

people involved in the revitalization of the site, including a preservationist, the City of Bethlehem's Director of Planning, a staff member of ArtsQuest, a local non-profit arts organization that is located on the site, and the CEO of the in-progress National Museum of Industrial History. An interview with a professor at Lehigh University provides a narrative line throughout the film.

“In the Shadow of Steel” focuses on the major plans currently in place – the museum, an arts facility, and a casino – and what may be in store for preservation in the future. The narrative line shows what is possible for a post-industrial site as well as the struggles and painful decisions that go into any revitalization project. When there are several parties involved, it can be especially difficult to agree upon or finalize preservation plans. It is likely that even as soon as this documentary is completed, the plans for the Steel site will change. This summary acts as a supplement to the film to further explain the many projects and events shown in the documentary.

The film consists of three basic chapters: The Past, the Present, and the Future.

#### “Past”

The early history of the revitalization is not thoroughly discussed in the film, because it primarily focuses on the plans currently in place. When the Bethlehem Steel Corporation shut down its South Bethlehem plant in 1995, the company stated that it would take on the responsibility of adapting the site into something new for the community, and was given carte blanche by the City to do shape the development plan for the whole site. Zoning restrictions were set aside by the City, and the company developed plans in secret, an approach that angered many residents as well as

preservationists.<sup>2</sup> In 1999, an article in the local newspaper, the *Morning Call*, noted that while commission members had unanimously allowed developers to be loose with construction codes, they were still concerned about the lack of information from Bethlehem Steel on the project.<sup>3</sup>

The original plan, called Bethlehem Works (Bethworks for short), was wide-ranging and multifaceted, and included the creation of a National Museum of Industrial History, entertainment complexes, retail space, and even an amusement park designed by the Disney Imagineers. The project was meant to revitalize the South Side while also preserving at least some of the Steel's industrial buildings. However, the public was mainly just told that Bethlehem Steel planned to reuse what they could and would make a plan for mixed use. Preservation was not a major topic of discussion.

After the Bethlehem Steel Corporation filed for bankruptcy in 2001, the Delaware Valley Real Estate Investment Fund became interested in the site. In 2003, the group paid "\$3 million to buy the land and pledge[d] to fulfill Steel's Bethlehem Works plan, which call[ed] for \$450 million of retail, commercial and residential development in south Bethlehem."<sup>4</sup> However, concerns grew over the Fund's previous development projects, which had focused primarily on "big-box" retail; the only structures they promised to preserve were the blast furnaces. In 2004, the Delaware Valley Real Estate Investment Fund dropped their bid to purchase the land, and the site went back into limbo. But the threat of losing the historical character of the site, and many of the existing steel plant buildings was enough to galvanize a number of citizen groups and historical

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<sup>2</sup> Editorial, "Cancel Secrecy on Steel's Plan," *The Morning Call*, March 19, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Joe McDermott, "Planners Approve the First Phase of Steel's Historic Transformation." *The Morning Call*, December 10, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Chuck Ayers, "Steel is offered \$10 million for Works site." *The Morning Call*, February 12, 2003.

organizations to become active in lobbying the city and the developers for the historic preservation of at least 120 acres (and the oldest portion of the plant) near the blast furnaces.<sup>5</sup>

A New York City investment group calling itself BethWorks Now became the next interested buyer, purchasing 120 acres of the Steel land in 2004. Yet again, the group said “it would follow much of Bethlehem Steel’s original plan for a shopping and recreation complex that includes a museum of industrial history,”<sup>6</sup> as well as secure the preservation of just the blast furnaces. The new owners also hinted, though did not promise, that they were interested in preservation of at least some of the plant site, since it is “the historical context makes it so spectacular.”<sup>7</sup> It was this investment group that built a partnership with the Las Vegas Sands Corporation. The Sands Corporation paid BethWorks Now to become a partner on the site, and expressed interest in opening a casino. In December of 2006, the city officially won the gambling license, transforming the group overseeing the development of the Steel site into the Sands BethWorks Gaming group.<sup>8</sup> The land is currently owned by the Sands BethWorks and the Bethlehem Redevelopment Authority.<sup>9</sup> It is from this context of multiple owners, city government involvement (or lack thereof), citizen activism over historic preservation, and changing ideas about adaptive reuse or demolition on the site that the film begins.

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<sup>5</sup> Mineo.

<sup>6</sup> Chuck Ayers, “Incredible Step for Bethlehem Works,” *The Morning Call*, September 15, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Tim Darragh, “New Owners of Steel Land Bring Savvy, Success,” *The Morning Call*, October 17, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Christina Gostomski, Matt Assad and Matt Birkbeck, “Bethlehem Wins Casino; Louis DeNaples' Mount Airy is other area winner,” *The Morning Call*, December 21, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed timeline of the Bethlehem Steel property, please see: SouthSide Initiative, “Extensive Development Timeline,” <http://cas.lehigh.edu/CASWeb/default.aspx?id=725> (accessed December 7, 2011).

The film opens with Dr. John Smith, Associate Professor of History at Lehigh University, discussing why the community wants the steel plant to be preserved; namely, because they have significant personal connections to it, and thus many people have strong emotional ties to the site. Preserving the remnants of Bethlehem Steel is significant not just to community members who remember the steel mill in action, but to everyone who walks among its structures. Dr. Smith notes, however, that preserving such a large industrial site is a difficult problem. Following the title sequence we see Amey Senape, the founder of the grassroots preservation organization Save Our Steel, who argues that the site is worth preserving because of all the different types of history that can be told through the steel plant. She also notes that these structures have lasted nearly a century, and thus tell thousands of human stories. A sense of history could be preserved through the preservation and adaptive re-use of the steel plant.

The film then returns to Dr. Smith. He discusses the history of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation and its ultimate downturn into bankruptcy. He also talks about the importance of the Steel both nationally and locally, and the early plans for the preservation of the site that began in the 1990s. This first piece of the film both gives the viewer a solid background of the Steel site and sets up the narrative framework for the rest of the film.

The next two interviews are intertwined to discuss the early stages of the site's preservation. The CEO of the National Museum of Industrial History, Steve Donches, also discusses the early stages of the adaption of the site, focusing primarily on both the Corporation's involvement as well as the beginning of the museum. Donches, a former vice president of public affairs at Bethlehem Steel, talks about how the Smithsonian

became involved, with the institution providing a much-needed boost to the National Museum of Industrial History's development, while legitimizing its claim to the "National" status in its title. The NMIH, unfortunately, is still languishing in the fundraising and planning stage. The museum does plan to reuse the Electrical Shop building on the site, which is one of the few examples of adaptive reuse being pursued. It is also indicative of the various struggles that any adaptive re-use will have – money is always an obstacle.

The City's Director of Planning, Darlene Heller, discusses the zoning of the former Steel site, noting that the city welcomed the Bethworks plan for a variety of uses, including retail, entertainment, and industrial after the plant shut down. Heller seems to suggest that this provides a strong foundation for the development of such a vast site. As Heller notes, the city's actions helped preserve the site while also leaving it open for adaptive re-use.

The next interview to appear in the film is with Amey Senape, founder of the organization Save Our Steel. Senape is a preservationist, and her presence in the film serves to represent the passion and strong opinions that many in this community have about the Bethlehem Steel site. She also represents the activism of ordinary citizens in preservation efforts that can be found all across the United States. Save Our Steel is a grassroots operation, and works by galvanizing the community into action through letters, e-mails, and phone calls. Senape's interview also serves to show the tension and difficulties of preservation, and sets up the rest of the film. She discusses why she became involved in the fight to save the Steel plant structures, as well as how she found

support in the community among those who also did not want to see the Steel structures torn down.

“Present”

There are two primary projects that have already made use of the Bethlehem Steel plant: the Sands Casino and the ArtsQuest SteelStacks complex. Dr. Smith notes that these two organizations are currently the primary players in the preservation of the site; as he puts it, the Steel site has been a “political football” for a long time, and it still remains a debated issue even with these high level organizations involved. The casino was completed in 2009, and although the long and heated controversy leading up to its opening is not openly discussed in the film, it is alluded to through Darlene Heller’s interview and newspaper headlines. Heller states that the city worked to ensure that the Sands would consider preservation. The organization in charge of the redevelopment is now called Sands Bethworks, and basic plans still include the museum, arts facilities, and retail space. The Sands Casino and Hotel have already been completed, and an outlet mall is slated to open in 2012. Amey Senape notes that although the casino does fit in with the industrial architecture, she is still only “cautiously optimistic” about the future of preservation on the site.

Dr. Smith sets up a discussion of the arts complex SteelStacks by discussing the controversy over the demolition of Hammer Shop No. 8, which was torn down to make way for the ArtsQuest Center. Despite protests from people like Amey Senape, ArtsQuest and other entities claimed the building was too expensive to restore, and not an essential structure in the story of steelmaking on the Bethlehem Steel site. While this may be true, it is still alarming to see how easy it was to demolish one of the historical structures that

had been kept in the Sands original plans. Dr. Smith brings up an interesting question, however; when trying to preserve an industrial site, what exactly are we trying to preserve? That question is answered by the argument of the film: preservation of extant Bethlehem Steel structures ensures the preservation of the heritage and sense of history of the Bethlehem community. However, the specifics of how to interpret an entire sprawling steel mill while adapting it to new uses continues to remain the crux of the problem.

SteelStacks, the arts and cultural campus on the site, is currently only involved with preservation in conjunction with the blast furnaces that inspired the name of the arts complex, and perhaps only by using the structures as a backdrop for their performance venues. They do not own the blast furnaces or support their maintenance in any way. Mark Demko, the Director of Editorial Services at ArtsQuest, discusses SteelStacks the film. ArtsQuest is a local non-profit arts organization that runs the Banana Factory, an arts facility in South Bethlehem, as well as several festivals and events throughout the city. SteelStacks is a large complex at the foot of the blast furnaces that includes the ArtsQuest Center, which has movie theatres, art galleries, and a concert venue; the Levitt Pavilion, an outdoor music venue which hosts free concerts throughout the summer; as well as a “town square” and a plaza which holds events like farmers markets. SteelStacks will host several festivals throughout the year with music- and arts-based programming. Demko’s interview serves to explain all of this, as well as the hoped-for economic impact of the project. Demko expresses ArtsQuest’s desire to bring Bethlehem into the 21<sup>st</sup> century while also maintaining the city’s rich history.

What spokesman Demko does not say is that this professed interest in the history of the site has not led to preservation in the actual ArtsQuest building at the site; on the

contrary, the new structure was built at the expense of Hammer Shop No. 8, which was taken down so the new ArtsQuest Center could be constructed. Also, the sometimes contentious “SteelStacks” name continues to agitate some preservationists like Amey Senape, who has noted that the blast furnaces were neither smokestacks, nor did they make steel. This type of “adaptive reuse” may be in the eye of the beholder, or perhaps just in the interests of the user; ArtsQuest’s interest is in the unique industrial ambience of the site, which may attract and retain curious visitors, but since they do not see themselves as preservationists, the organization has not taken direct responsibility for any historical structures on the site. The arts organization views actual direct preservation of the historical industrial setting as someone else’s responsibility. As Demko explains, ArtsQuest’s role is to bring people and economic development to the site and the city, and to provide a rich mix of musical programming on the site. Any preservation-related effects will be incidental. Preservationists are left with the hope that ArtsQuest visitors will develop a sense of curiosity about the site that may lead to increased support for the site’s preservation.

#### “Future”

Although it is impossible to know for sure what will happen in the future, the last piece of the film explains what is currently in progress. Dr. Smith first discusses the lack of a centralized plan or vision for the preservation of the Steel site. He mentions a model that was on display in City Hall, a few images of which appear in the film, was put together to demonstrate the possibilities. But as Smith notes, much of this model is not being implemented, or even really seriously discussed. While the arts center has come to

fruition, the model showed nearly all the buildings being adaptively re-used in some way. As Dr. Smith notes, this model seems to have been discarded for a more piecemeal approach to development, which is not very reassuring for preservationists.

Darlene Heller then discusses how successful preservation has been in Bethlehem (primarily in North Bethlehem), which preserves the city's character and sense of place. Thus, she says, preserving the Steel site would also help preserve the character and sense of place of South Bethlehem. Dr. Smith then notes that the Steel site was not included in the first historic conservation district created in South Bethlehem. Again this juxtaposition of voices indicates the challenges posed to serious preservation of the Steel site; the plant was either never really seen as valuable enough to preserve, or perhaps it was simply too unconventional or difficult a site to include in an otherwise straightforward historic district.

Ms. Heller next describes the city's new historic preservation plan, which has been passed by city council since the interview was filmed. The plan is far more wide-ranging than what was previously in place, and includes the Bethlehem Steel site.<sup>10</sup> This bodes well for the future, because it means that city officials have begun to understand the meaning of the site, both to the city's sense of place, as well as its economic future. While the Bethlehem Steel site may have once been seen as rusting reminder of industrialism's failure in the community, the physical and interpretive preservation of the site now seems more accepted as a rational and feasible idea.

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<sup>10</sup> For a detailed explanation of the preservation plan and how the Steel site is included, please see "Draft Preservation Plan for the City of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania," [http://www.bethlehem-pa.gov/dept/planning\\_Zoning\\_Permits/pdf/Draft\\_Preservation\\_Plan\\_11\\_24\\_2010.pdf](http://www.bethlehem-pa.gov/dept/planning_Zoning_Permits/pdf/Draft_Preservation_Plan_11_24_2010.pdf) (accessed December 7, 2011).

Amey Senape appears next to express her belief that the entire community should be part of the decision process of how the site is preserved and re-used. The site clearly inspires strong feelings among residents of Bethlehem because memories of “The Steel” are still fresh. As Dr. Smith notes, many want to preserve the site to serve as a reminder of the hard work and industrial might that flourished there. Although the story of steelmaking is certainly not all rosy and inspiring, the people who worked here and other sites like it are still proud of their work, and the Bethlehem Steel structures are now all that remain to carry those memories on once the workers themselves are gone.

Ms. Senape discusses the benefits of mixed use preservation, saying it will both conserve and allow future generations to grasp the enormity and scope of Bethlehem Steel site. She also talks about possibilities for interpretation on the site, saying that education can take place as long as the structures are kept standing, noting that interpretive signage alone cannot convey the sheer size and impressive scale of Bethlehem Steel. This speaks to the film’s argument because it shows that the structures are integral to maintain the site’s sense of history and place. Adaptive reuse is not only economically viable, it also “makes sense” of history because it keeps the steel mill buildings integrated into a cohesive whole.

Dr. Smith then asks the central question in the film when he says that the re-use of a steel mill brings up the question of what preservation actually means. For someone like Amey Senape, clearly it means preserving the entire site, keeping every structure intact. However, does adaptively re-using the site cause it to lose its original meaning as an industrial center? A thorough discussion of this point could be the start of a whole new project. In this documentary, however, it serves as the springboard for the argument. As

Dr. Smith states, making the entire site into a museum by preserving every structure could not do justice to the site, and would likely not be economically feasible. The only practical and economically viable option is to adaptively re-use as many buildings as possible. Adaptive re-use saves the structures while also preserving the story of Bethlehem Steel and its community, because, as Dr. Smith notes, the overwhelming size and structural integrity of the plant will also remain intact. That is what would allow historians to tell the story of this remarkable site, and would provide a sense of place. All that would be needed, as Senape mentioned earlier, would be intentional interpretation to explain the site to visitors.

Dr. Smith again brings up an essential detail when he notes that no actual adaptive re-use or preservation has taken place on the site, as of December 2011. The Sands Casino's buildings are brand new, as is the SteelStacks campus and the PBS 39 Broadcast Center building. So while activity is happening on the site, preservation is still not a clear priority. This not only supports his own statement that there is no clear vision for the Steel plant, it also demonstrates the importance of adaptive re-use, because new construction does not contribute anything to the plant's sense of history. The visuals in this piece underscore his point. Seeing a brand new hotel set among rusting Steel buildings is not only jarring, but disrupts the historical nature of the site. So while it is beneficial to have that economic activity occurring on the Steel site, it will not continue to be beneficial unless more buildings are re-used.

All of this focus and attention on the Bethlehem Steel plant bodes well for the South Side as a whole. As mentioned by Mr. Donches, south Bethlehem has rarely been given the same historical consideration as north Bethlehem, across the Lehigh River,

which has beautiful and very well-preserved colonial architecture, and feels more like a quaint small town. The South Side, which feels more urban with its hodge-podge of late 1800s to early 1900s architectural styles, is now showing signs of economic growth not seen since Bethlehem Steel shut down. As Ms. Heller notes, both sides of the river are unique and interesting, and they can both be successful for tourism. This piece of the film demonstrates the impact adaptive reuse of the site would have on the community of south Bethlehem in particular.

Dr. Smith's last interview quote addresses the legacy of Bethlehem Steel, which reinforces the importance and significance of not only this documentary, but of the preservation of the site overall. The preservation and adaptive re-use of the Steel plant would serve a dual purpose – to commemorate and explain the history of Bethlehem, but also to provide jobs and a bright economic future to the South Side. Retaining the steel plant's sense of history will be important to not only residents of Bethlehem, but also to the national historical narrative. The city of Bethlehem was heavily impacted by the Bethlehem Steel Corporation, as were the lives of thousands of Americans. The structures are absolutely integral to telling the history of both Bethlehem and the history of large-scale industrial production; there are no other intact, fully-integrated steel mills left in America that can tell the story of industrialism with such visual power.

The film comes to a close with Amey Senape describing why it is important for the Bethlehem Steel plant to be preserved. The visual of the old plant fading into the static current one underpins her statement that losing the buildings would mean losing the story; Bethlehem has a long and fascinating history, and the Steel is an essential part of it. Saving the buildings and giving them new life will not only boost tourism, but will also

give the Bethlehem community a new source of pride. Instead of rusting, crumbling reminders of the fall of industrialism, a redeveloped steel site will both honor Bethlehem's past while giving it a new future.

## Filmmaking Discussion

Creating a documentary requires finding a delicate balance between academic integrity and compelling aesthetics. The central thesis of “In the Shadow of Steel” is that a thoughtful, planned method to adaptive reuse is the best preservation approach for the revitalization of the Bethlehem Steel site, because it will ensure that its sense of place is retained. A sense of place is important both because it reflects and restores local community pride and because the site is unique and tells an important story for the entire nation. There is a complexity to the Bethlehem Steel site that is irreplaceable because it has the potential to tell so many different stories: labor history, the place of an industrial site in a small city, and the impact of the Steel on the whole community. Having the full site re-used gives the structures a new purpose, but also conveys the site’s sense of history, telling the story of industrial America in a way no single museum or an interpretive sign ever could.

The film demonstrates the difficulty of achieving this goal, because the revitalization project still requires a strong centralized plan which includes historic interpretation to make it successful. If the Bethlehem Steel site is to be redeveloped, the structures must not only remain and be restored, but also be given a historical narrative and purpose. David Glassberg wrote that a “sense of history reflects the intersection of the intimate and the historical – the way that past events of a personal and public nature are intertwined, so that public histories often forcefully, and surprisingly, hit home.”<sup>11</sup> This quote was the springboard for my own thesis. What we learn from the case study of

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<sup>11</sup> David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 6.

Bethlehem is that preserving and re-using this site is so important and yet so complex precisely because it intertwines the personal and public – the legacy of Bethlehem Steel is important both for the community as well as the nation as a whole.

One of the first and most difficult choices I had to make concerned narration. I chose not to employ a spoken narrator because it overcrowded the film – I found having another voice lessened the impact of the interviews. Letting the interview subjects speak for themselves allows the viewer to take in the information and form their own opinion, without a narrator telling them what to think. Similarly, having a narrator say all of the background information did not afford the film’s visual imagery any chance to make an emotional or interpretive impact, and would have felt overwhelming for the viewer. Instead, I used my interview with Dr. John Smith, Associate Professor of History at Lehigh University, to offer the background information that the interviews do not provide. Smith is very knowledgeable in Bethlehem history as well as current events, and was able to provide an explanation of the history and importance of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation, as well as a historians’ expertise on the timeline and meaning of the struggle for preservation. His interview is not entirely objective, but overall his statements were very useful for providing a narrative framework for the whole film.

Professor Smith opens the film, thus creating the narrative framework. I re-worked the beginning of the film several times, because I wanted it to have a hook to draw viewers in, while also setting up the narrative. I chose to intersperse Professor Smith’s statements on the romanticism of steelmaking with his comments on Bethlehem Steel’s impact on the city because his remarks demonstrate why this site is important, both to Bethlehem and to a broader audience. In following up his first remarks with

Amey Senape, co-founder of the preservation group Save Our Steel, I was able to interject the emotional side of the story right from the beginning. Senape first notes the many stories that can be told through the Steel site, but then also makes an appeal to the importance of preserving the structures; this sets up the thesis of the film.

The other interview subjects I chose offer a range of opinions and expertise. Selecting pieces of each interview to include in the film was very difficult, because I wanted them to represent both the basic narrative thread as well as the broader theme of adaptive reuse and preservation. Each interviewee gave me a lot of material to work with, but I chose the portions that both moved the story forward and gave the viewer something to think about. For instance, I chose the first quote from Darlene Heller, Director of Planning for the City of Bethlehem, because it gave a good description of the basic zoning ordinances that were established when the Steel first shut down – this was a basic storytelling decision. On the other hand, I chose a piece of Amey Senape’s interview in which she discusses her belief in the utility of planned adaptive reuse because it represents the film’s (and therefore, my own) point of view – however, it very well may not be the point of view of the viewer, and thus gives them something to ponder and discuss.

There were several individuals that I would have liked to interview but was unable to secure permission. Specifically, I would have liked to speak with Jeff Parks, the President of ArtsQuest, Robert DeSalvio, the President of Sands Bethworks Gaming LLC, and John Callahan, Mayor of Bethlehem. These three are clearly major players in the redevelopment project. It may have been difficult to interview them, since my questions would have been carefully scrutinized and likely watered down. The fact that

they are not in the film is almost as telling, since the redevelopment is still in progress, and there is much that has not been settled; they may have been concerned about saying anything definitive about the future. And of course there have been controversies, and it there undoubtedly will be more in the future over the preservation of the individual buildings on the Steel site. The fact that there are no definitive future plans for any of the remaining buildings speaks to the failure of these parties to fully commit to the plant's preservation.

The film is ultimately driven by the interviews, because I believe all five perspectives represent my thesis even though they may have different viewpoints. The visual images in the film are meant to support their words. In places where I did not discuss background issues or information, the visuals and the interviews serve to give the viewer an idea of the challenges of preserving this sprawling industrial site. I chose images of the Steel plant and the words of historians and stakeholders on the site instead of employing a narrator to tell the story, because they illustrate the complex, multifaceted considerations of site preservation without being too obvious or heavy-handed. And while this film is a specific case study of Bethlehem, I believe the themes discussed in the film can be applied to many places; thus I did not want the film to get bogged down in too many details about the history of the site itself while exploring the larger preservation issues.

All of the interviews except for Dr. Smith were filmed within a two week frame, and I approached them by considering both the individuals' connection to the preservation debate as well as the overall theme of the film. In many ways, the narrative and thematic threads of the film were not established until after the interviews were

completed and viewed all together. The questions I asked each subject were tailored to each individual, but I also made sure to ask each subject some of the same questions. For instance, I asked each to describe their personal role in the redevelopment, but I also asked each of them to discuss their own thoughts and opinions. I wanted the facts (since I was not using a narrator), but I also wanted the film to have a heart and a mind.

Aesthetically and academically, it was not enough to just lay out the facts – there had to be an argument. Interviewing five very different people, while time-consuming and difficult to edit, created a film that I believe is both informational and thought-provoking.

Dr. Smith serves as a sort of narrator, explaining the history of Bethlehem Steel and its importance to the community. He also explains the beginnings of its preservation after the plant was shut down, who has been involved, and what the general timeline has been. I did have to significantly cut down parts of his interview that went into too much detail about the history of the site in order to get the flow of the film working. I chose to cut out a good deal of the history of Bethlehem Steel in order to pare his interview down to the basics; namely, the primary reasons why the plant was important and why and how it ultimately shut down. This approach improved the flow of the film immensely, because it kept the narrative straightforward and simple to understand. Dr. Smith does offer a few opinions, and I kept some of them in because they are backed up by the research I did for the film, and they also provide support for the thesis and give the viewers something to discuss.

The interview with Darlene Heller, Director of Planning for the City of Bethlehem, represents the City's general view that preservation of the Steel site is a way to revitalize South Bethlehem through tourism, business, and the arts. She also

demonstrates that the City is interested in telling Bethlehem's story, which includes the Steel. However, what I gathered from her interview, as both a filmmaker and an academic, was that the City never insisted strongly enough that historical interpretation or preservation should be at the center of the redevelopment project. When she is discussing the Sands, she mentions that the City met with the corporation to ask that the remaining buildings would be re-used, but she does not say that they insisted on saving all of them, nor did the city specify that the site should be used in way that preserves and interprets the historical narrative of Bethlehem Steel. This is telling, because it supports the thesis that this redevelopment project's lack of centralized plan is detrimental to the historical integrity of the site.

Steve Donches, President and CEO of the National Museum of Industrial History, has a similar point of view in the sense that he clearly believes in the preservation of the heritage of site, but this could mean a few different things. Preserving the 'heritage' of the site could be interpreted as saving all the structures within the site, or it could mean saving just a few key important structures that could tell the story. While I could have easily asked him to clarify this, I actually liked the vagueness, because it demonstrates not only the imprecision of the current redevelopment plan, and it also represents the ambiguity that many people feel when facing the decision of how to save such a huge industrial site.

Amey Senape, founder of the grassroots group Save Our Steel, represents a more rigid preservationist view that every single structure, no matter their condition or history, must be saved. She argues that we need the buildings and the enormous scale of the plant to remain in order to properly tell the historical narrative of Bethlehem Steel. This is the

primary reason I wanted to include her, because she is such a vocal and strong-willed preservationist. She most closely reflects the overall thesis, because she advocates adaptive reuse but also the importance of historical interpretation to tell the story of Bethlehem Steel and its place in the community. I asked her simple, straightforward questions, because I was concerned that her interview would seem too much like I was forcing my own ideas. However, considering the amount of support she receives through her organization, I believe she represents not only her own ideas but those of a large portion of the community, as well.

The interview with Mark Demko of ArtsQuest focuses the most on the pure economic impact of the redevelopment project. While he does mention the history of Bethlehem Steel, he talks mainly about transforming it into a ‘destination.’ Although I did not interview anyone from Sands Bethworks Gaming, I believe they have a similar take on the redevelopment. ArtsQuest, more so than Sands, is interested in the revitalization of the South Side for their own purpose – namely, to bring arts programming to the area. Interpretation is not central to either parties’ interests, and ArtsQuest in particular demonstrates the common belief that adaptive reuse can be too expensive for some partners in the site redevelopment. What I found interesting about this portion of the film is that the two entities that are bringing the most tourism to the site have not actually adaptively re-used any of the buildings. The ArtsQuest Center, a performing arts center, is a new construction, as is the new PBS 39 Broadcast Center building, and the Sands Casino and Hotel. Except for the Stockhouse, which will be turned into a Discover Lehigh Valley Visitors Center, and the National Museum of Industrial History, which is only in a development stage at present, there are no plans for

the redevelopment of any of the remaining buildings. This failure to focus on or actively plan for the fate of numerous historical structures demonstrates the uselessness of the current patchwork “preservation” approach.

There were several issues and ideas that I could have included in the film, but ultimately chose not to use. For instance, I could have spent much more time on the controversies behind the building of the casino or the demolition of Hammer Shop No. 8. Devoting more time to them, however, would have meant detracting from the overall theme, and indeed, would have changed the theme entirely. The idea behind this film was not to focus solely on the failures, but rather to demonstrate the complexities and hardships of any redevelopment project. Ultimately, this is not an ‘activist’ film – I wanted it to be a thoughtful, academic film with an argument that still allows the viewer to form their own opinions. I am perfectly happy, as both an academic and filmmaker, to have people disagree with the viewpoint presented in the film.

The reason I chose to do a film was the possibility of reaching a broader audience. Films can provide a powerful message through the use of visuals and sound, and they are also more accessible to the general public than an academic paper. Specifically for the Bethlehem Steel site, I felt the use of images would drive home the argument, because seeing the grand yet dilapidated structures of the Steel plant illustrates the need for preservation and adaptive reuse, as well as historical interpretation on the plant site. The interviewees allow the audience to explore different topics and opinions to which they can immediately react, while providing a human dimension to the film’s discussion of preservation.

My goal with this specific public history product is to encourage debate and discussion over the benefits of historic preservation and adaptive reuse, but also to illuminate those who may not know much about preservation and its advantages. I'd like the film to speak for itself, but I am happy to discuss my own viewpoints and those presented in the film with any interested parties. I would like the film to be seen both by those who are familiar with the subject and those who may not have as much knowledge about the state of the Bethlehem Steel site. I hope it sparks debate regarding both the intellectual and practical aspects of preservation.

Overall, this film has been challenging both creatively and academically. It began as a study in heritage tourism, and although the redevelopment project discussed in the film will inevitably lead to more tourism in Bethlehem, the story of historic preservation and planning for historic preservation and adaptive reuse took center stage. This was not necessarily a conscious decision, but I believe it happened because preservation is the first step to heritage tourism. With more time and more resources, I would very much enjoy continuing to tell this story and showing the growing pains and future successes of Bethlehem's struggle to preserve the Steel site. I believe a study like this one would benefit the field of public history because it would demonstrate how a post-industrial site can (or cannot) be redeveloped without a centralized plan – the remaining question, however, is whether they can do so in a way that not only preserves the structures but also preserves and interprets the heritage of the site in a thoughtful, respectful, and truthful manner. Answering this question would be beneficial to the field of public history, because it is an issue with which many communities still struggle.

## Annotated Bibliography

City of Bethlehem, "Historic Conservation District," Planning, Zoning, and Permits, [http://www.bethlehem-pa.gov/dept/planning\\_Zoning\\_permits/images/historicMap02\\_high.jpg](http://www.bethlehem-pa.gov/dept/planning_Zoning_permits/images/historicMap02_high.jpg) (accessed June 9, 2011).

City of Bethlehem, "South Bethlehem Historic Conservation Commission Design Guidelines," (Bethlehem, PA: 2004).

City of Bethlehem, "Draft Preservation Plan for the City of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania," (Bethlehem, PA: 2010).

The City of Bethlehem's resources were extensively used for both the film and the written supplements. In particular, the information regarding the South Bethlehem historic conservation district was utilized to provide a broader understanding of where preservation has already occurred and where it will be occurring in the future. For instance, the Historic Conservation District image demonstrates that the Bethlehem Steel site was not included and therefore not subject to the protection the Conservation District provides. The Design Guidelines were useful for their descriptions of South Bethlehem architecture, and the type of preservation that is encouraged. For example, there are both residential and business guidelines, indicating a variety of preservation purposes. The draft of the new historic preservation plan was especially useful because it discusses new goals for preservation as it pertains to the Bethlehem Steel site. It lays out exactly what Bethlehem hopes to gain from historic preservation, namely:

- 1) An essential strategy for maintaining Bethlehem's unique sense of place.
- 2) A powerful tool for economic development and community revitalization.
- 3) A significant generator of jobs, income and tax revenues.
- 4) A key element of the environmentally sustainable city.
- 5) A vital approach to understanding how diverse cultures have come together to shape the society we know today." (4)

Having this background information for the documentary was essential to understanding the way the City of Bethlehem approaches preservation and the path that preservation has taken in conjunction with the Bethlehem Steel site.

D.K. Shifflet & Associates, "Pennsylvania Heritage Tourism Study," (McLean, VA: May, 1999). Accessed at <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/recstudy/finalreport.pdf> on June 9, 2011.

Hargrove, Cheryl. "Heritage Tourism." National Park Service, Office of Cultural Resource Management. Accessed at [crm.cr.nps.gov/archive/25-01/25-01-4.pdf](http://crm.cr.nps.gov/archive/25-01/25-01-4.pdf) on July 25, 2011.

Heritage Tourism Program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, "Chronology: Cultural Heritage Tourism Movement in the U.S.," Accessed at <http://www.culturalheritagetourism.org/documents/CHTChronology2.pdf> on June 22, 2011.

Mandala Research, "New Study Reveals Popularity of U.S. Cultural and Heritage Travel: Large, Affluent Market Focuses on History and Tradition." (Washington, D.C.: Mandala Research, 2009).

These four resources were critical to my understanding of the overall field of heritage tourism and its relationship to historic preservation. These resources indicate the phenomenal rate of growth that heritage tourism has experienced in recent years. This was useful for my purposes because it demonstrates the reason why Bethlehem would want to utilize the Bethlehem Steel site for heritage tourism – there is clearly a lot of money to be gained from a heritage tourism site. These resources provided the basic facts and figures to paint a broader picture of heritage tourism and South Bethlehem's potential participation in it.

Holt, Sharon Ann. "History Keeps Bethlehem Steel from Going off the Rails: Moving a Complex Community Process toward Success," *The Public Historian*, 28, no. 2 (Spring 2006).

This article was a significant resource for this project. Similar to my own work, Holt discusses Bethlehem's efforts to preserve and interpret the Bethlehem Steel site, and focuses primarily on the on-going efforts of the local community to work with private developers to adaptively re-use the site. Holt examines the complicated relationship between private and public entities, including local government, private companies, and community groups; Holt finds that this interaction is fragile and expensive, with the site itself often becoming the loser. Although historic interpretation may be a community priority, there are numerous practical problems, especially financial, when dealing with private entities. It is a double-edged sword, because the private entities are often essential to redeveloping and giving new life to the historical site. Much like my own work, Holt finds that "industrial sites are daunting to preservationists not just because they are usually huge and frequently toxic but also because they represent essential economic resources" (32). She also takes issue with the lack of true leadership in the preservation of the Steel plant.

This article was also crucial because it demonstrates how much has changed in Bethlehem, and so quickly. Holt published this article in 2006, and even just in five short years, plans for the Bethlehem Steel site have transformed. My documentary "In the Shadow of Steel" argues that the lack of a centralized plan is detrimental to the redevelopment of the Steel plant, and Holt's argument about the fragility of the public/private alliance also supports this. The lack of strong, coherent plan of action leaves historic interpretation in a precarious state, even if the community supports it.

Holt's work was essential because it establishes that the Bethlehem Steel redevelopment project has been complex and uneven for many years.

Hurley, Andrew. *Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010).

Hurley's book describes the process by which historic preservation has been used as a way to urban revitalization. He discusses how inner cities have been transformed from impoverished and crime-ridden to stable and economically viable communities through preservation initiatives. He focuses on government tax incentives, architectural guidelines, and the establishment of historic districts, and how they raise property values and encourage new business and tourism. He argues that inner-city communities can be strengthened and stabilized by putting a premium on the public interpretation of historic landscapes through grass-roots efforts. Hurley uses several case studies to demonstrate his point.

This resource was useful because South Bethlehem was seen by many as an economically depressed, crime-ridden area after the Steel plant shut down. While it was never as dire as many of the areas Hurley discusses, there are still parallels to be made because much of South Bethlehem's current revitalization outside of the Steel site is based on the preservation and re-use of its historic downtown business district. New restaurants, shops, and businesses have opened within the past decade, capitalizing on the South Side's 'quirky' nature and architecture. Hurley's argument about revitalization through the interpretation of historic landscapes can be applied to South Bethlehem, both its current historic conservation district and the Steel plant. One of the major hopes for the Steel redevelopment is a more prosperous and economically viable South Side.

Lowenthal, David. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

In this book, Lowenthal discusses the pitfalls of the celebration and reverence of history, claiming that nostalgia is primary motivator of our interest in the past. His work is meant to serve as a warning against blindly commemorating the past, and that nostalgia itself is not the same as historical interpretation.

I used this as a resource primarily because there is a concern that redeveloping the Steel site will be subject to too much nostalgia. There are still so many steelworkers and community members who remember Bethlehem Steel at its height, and they have their own opinions regarding how the Steel plant should be redeveloped. While their memories are important resources for the historical interpretation of the plant, it is also critical that their nostalgia does not color or alter the history presented.

Page, Max and Randall Mason, eds. *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*. (New York: Routledge, 2003).

This volume of essays contains a wide variety of case studies of historic preservation all across the United States. It discusses the very beginnings of preservation, and the role it has had in urban development and tourism. It also touches on preservation battles and their meaning, as well as the changing nature of the field itself.

This book was an important basic resource when figuring out how to approach this project. It gave me a good knowledge base to work from when examining the Bethlehem Steel redevelopment, and gave the project context. Knowing what has happened in other parts of the country was essential to understanding the quality and merit of the Steel site revitalization.

Rosenzweig, Roy and David Thelen. *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

Rosenzweig and Thelen's work was an essential resource for this project. The book is based around a survey of over 1,000 Americans that focused on how the public feels and thinks about the past and the way it is presented. The authors found that many Americans like to feel a more personal connection to the past; for instance, they even prefer the word "heritage" to the word "history." The authors argue that those in the public history field need to understand how Americans perceive history in order to successfully implement historical interpretation.

This resource was valuable because it demonstrates the critical role the public plays in the success of any historical site. Those in charge of developing any type of heritage site need to be aware that the public brings their own expectations and desires to a historic site. For the Bethlehem Steel redevelopment, this has not been fully and clearly addressed as of yet. The Bethlehem community has their own view of the Steel site, but other visitor expectations need to be considered as well if it is to be economically successful. This work again supports the thesis that a clear plan for historical interpretation needs to be developed for the Bethlehem Steel revitalization to be successful, because it explains what visitors are looking for and how those in charge of redevelopment can ensure both the historical integrity of the project as well its financial success.

Stanton, Cathy. *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial History*. (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006).

Cathy Stanton's work in the *The Lowell Experiment* was the most-used resource for this project, because it examines a very similar subject. Stanton focuses on Lowell, Massachusetts and how it reinvented itself from a crumbling, post-industrial town into an innovative, successful heritage site. She writes about the role of public historians in the process, and uses Lowell as a case study to determine the possibilities and limitations of their contributions. Since this redevelopment occurred just when the field of public history was emerging, and Lowell was one of the first to attempt this type of redevelopment, it offers an excellent case study of how history can be used to not only boost the economy through tourism, but also to interpret an industrial site for a modern audience.

This book is important for several reasons; first, it demonstrates the challenges public historians face when working with other entities, such as local governments or private companies; second, it shows the possibilities that exist for a large industrial site to be successfully redeveloped; and third, it shows why certain types of features, such as arts and culture facilities, have been included in so many revitalization projects. Being the first major test site for this type of revitalization, Lowell set the precedent for many communities. Its creation of a national park, which focused heavily on historic interpretation of labor history, and the inclusion of arts facilities, set a huge example. It blended heritage and cultural tourism in a way that was replicated all over the country.

This book was so useful for my case study of Bethlehem, PA because Lowell and Bethlehem have faced many of the same issues. The struggle for public historians in the

1970s discussed in this book is one that is still faced by many – how to balance their academic training with the demands of popular culture. Historic interpretation took center stage in Lowell, drawing from local memory as well as professional historians’ research. Bethlehem can learn much from the ‘Lowell Experiment,’ because Lowell’s experience contains both the problems and successes of a completed redevelopment project.

Stipe, Robert E. ed. *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

This volume, much like the Max Page book, served as a solid foundation for understanding the theories, philosophies, and strategies of historic preservation in the United States. It discusses successful approaches to preservation, and helped to establish a solid theoretical basis for the documentary. It was imperative to understand these basics before considering the merits of the specific redevelopment project in Bethlehem.

Wallace, Mike. *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).

Wallace’s work was useful because not only does he discuss Bethlehem specifically, but he also provides a much broader discussion of public memory and its meaning for heritage sites. Wallace focuses on the trivialization of history that he sees as pervading American culture. He discusses the process by which history gets interpreted for the general public, and the role that memory, politics, and current events play.

Wallace does discuss the early plans of Bethlehem Steel’s revitalization, when even the Disney Imagineers were involved and there was a plan for an amusement park set amongst the industrial buildings. This multimillion-dollar idea clearly never came to fruition, but the fact that it was even suggested raises a red flag. Wallace has a strong

argument in this book, but it was useful for this project because it demonstrates the pitfalls of catering to the interests of the general public. It again shows how difficult it is to obtain the delicate balance between historical integrity and public appeal. The fact that the Bethlehem Steel redevelopment still does not contain an entity that solely focuses on the history and heritage of the site shows that this balance has not yet been achieved.

### Biography of Author

Alison O'Connell was born on May 13, 1987 to Vincent and Mary Ellen O'Connell in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. She graduated *summa cum laude* from Lehigh University in 2009, receiving a B.A. in History. She is also currently working toward a Certificate in Historic Preservation from Bucks County Community College. She can be contacted at [occonnell.alison@gmail.com](mailto:occonnell.alison@gmail.com).