1996

Downtown as a Classroom: Social/Architectural History of Beaufort

Lady's Island Middle School

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PURPOSE:

We live in a town rich in history and architecture, yet nowhere in the 12-year curriculum are these subjects taught. The students and staff of Lady’s Island Middle are working to rectify this omission. The purpose of “Downtown As A Classroom” is to discover (via oral histories and written records), write, illustrate and publish a top-quality children’s account of folklore and fact based on Beaufort’s architectural past and present.

The basic premise is that every building tells a story. It is these family stories which 150+ eighth graders, representing the full spectrum of student population, will learn and preserve. By extending education beyond classroom walls into the community, students become active participants in a wide range of the humanities—architecture, written and oral history, storytelling, creative writing, dance and visual arts. It is this experiential component which sets the program apart from traditional textbook learning. It is our conviction that by seeing, hearing, reflecting, creating and participating, students will acquire not just impartial facts but a personal appreciation and understanding of their hometown.

OBJECTIVES:

- Students explore new information. “Downtown As A Classroom” could be subtitled “Downtown Discovery” for discovery is a key component in the project. Information is not given but sought. Students become active participants in the learning process.
- Students exercise a variety of communication skills. Learning is not limited to reading and digesting others’ knowledge; instead, our student anthropologists learn by listening and questioning, researching and reflecting, writing, editing, and critical thinking.
- Students are provided the opportunity to talk with an older, and oftentimes disparate, population. Adults reminisce, and adolescents imagine. And in this hi-tech world, to spark the imagination of today’s youth by simple dialogue is a challenge, yet one which we believe this program accomplishes.
- Students are introduced to commercial architecture under the guidance of FMF Architects and Main Street Beaufort, USA.
- Students discover social histories of families associated with downtown Beaufort, with emphasis on family/business anecdotes from 1895-1995 and limited to the parameters of a nine-block commercial area.
- Students compile information (audio/visual recordings and written reports) and produce a top-quality publication. Proceeds from the sale of the book will provide seed money for future Downtown Discovery projects.
- Students will demonstrate they can make a valuable and unique contribution to their community. Their publication, letters, and oral history recordings will be added to the archives of Historic Beaufort Foundation, Beaufort County Historical Society, and Beaufort Museum. This is the school’s gift back to the community.
- Students will benefit from school/community partnerships whereby middle school students and downtown workers share a positive learning experience and an appreciation of each other.
ACTIVITIES:

60 structures have been identified for suitable “adoption”. Students work in pairs using “their” building as “specimen” for the project. It is the humanities experiences and coordinating activities which are the essence of “Downtown As A Classroom”.

Social History:
- Introduction of Beaufort history by local historians
- Oral histories collected from long-time residents, merchants and property owners
- Library research (newspapers on microfilm, Historical Society records, etc.)

Architecture Design and History: (FMF Architects & Main Street Beaufort)
- Guided walking tours of commercial district
- Introduction to design, particularly the Beaufort style
- Architectural Scavenger Hunt
- “Box City”: 3-d model construction of specimen buildings and lesson on city planning
- Photographing and illustrating specimen buildings
- Slide presentation of downtown & flannel board activity demonstrating storefront transitions

Visual & Communication Arts:
- Honors art students illustrate each structure
- 8th grade art students design and quilt Downtown Beaufort wall hanging
- Students experience recording recollections using A/V equipment

Language Arts:
- Letters of inquiry, invitation to speak, and thank you notes to speakers
- Interpretation and summary of collections written and edited for publication
- Class discussion/reflections on “whys” of Beaufort’s development, critical thinking exercises

PROJECT POPULATION:

- Approximately 150 eighth grade social studies, visual and communication arts, excels and alternative students, representing a true heterogeneous sampling of the school’s population.
- Approximately 75-100 community representatives participating as speakers, advisors, volunteer chaperones
- Three organization/business collaborators-FMF Architects, Main Street Beaufort, USA and Beaufort Museum
- 7 faculty members plus community/school coordinator and administrators from Lady’s Island Middle School

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Beaufort, SC 29902
525-4264/525-4341 (fax)
Margaret Rushton, Project Director
Lowcountry

Downtown in focus

Beaufort buildings a lesson in history

By John C. Williams
Carolina Morning News

BEAUFORT — Joseph Lipsitz was born 75 years ago in an apartment above his family's store downtown Beaufort's Bay Street. Today, the store's still there and so is Joe, but most everything else downtown has changed. Two owners to storefronts at attitudes. As Beaufort's star has risen as a tourist destination and as a Hollywood set, restaurants and gift shops have replaced the hardware store and groceries that once served locals.

"Downtown has come back," Lipsitz said, "but it had a life all ages."

Catastrophic life, both social and architectural, is the challenge for a group of Lady's Island Middle School students.

Enrolled in an interdisciplinary class called "Downtown As A Classroom," students work in pairs to "adopt" downtown commercial structures. They research the building's history and interview people for their recollections about the building. This spring they will compile a book of their work detailing different storefronts.

"We're teaching Beaufort history with the premise that every building tells a story," Margaret Rushton, project director

for their recollections about the building. This spring they will compile a book of their work detailing different storefronts.

"We're teaching Beaufort history with the premise that every building tells a story," Lipsitz said. Last week, three students met with Lipsitz to hear his account of downtown's history. Lipsitz Department Store at 225 Bay St. opened in 1908 with his father. Max Lipsitz ran a clothing store and grocery. Lipsitz's grandfather, Joseph Lipsitz, came to America from Lithuania in the late 1860s. In the 1890s and '90s, it took a full day to reach Savannah, either by boat or by train and ferry. Journeying to Charleston involved a 10-mile ride over a muddy road to Beaufort, followed by a train ride. For those reason, Lipsitz was born in his family's apartment, one of three located above the department store, he told the students.

The downtown of the 1920s and '30s looked far different than today, he said. A blacksmith shop stayed busy on Bay Street, and restaurants such as the Busy Bee Café, pharmacy, jewelry stores and groceries all did good trade.

"There was a lot going on here, but it was all for locals," Lipsitz said. Beaufort didn't begin to hit its stride as a tourist destination until the early 1930s, marked in part by "The Big Chill" in town. Over recent years, other movies have featured Beaufort, including "The Prince of Tides." "Forrest Gump" and "Something to Talk About."

RESEARCH: Lee Green, 13, asks Joseph Lipsitz, 75, about the history of his store. Green is accompanied by Beth Bayne, 14. Both students are eighth-graders at Lady's Island Middle School participating in a yearlong interdisciplinary program called "Downtown Is The Classroom."

"Downtown is a good lesson," Lipsitz said. "My grandfather and grandmother are always telling me how Beaufort is going to lose its charm and become a tourist destination. It's a good learning experience about a new town," he said.

"We get to learn the history of Beaufort," added Beth Bayne, 14. "Nothing has changed since I was a child. We are a tourist destination now."

Lee Green, 13, said he's enjoying the project as a way to learn about his new home. "My mom is in the military, so we travel a lot. It's a good learning experience about a new town," he said.

Shakilla Wilson, 13, put it more directly.

"We live in Beaufort, we should know Beaufort History."

With help from people such as Lipsitz, that history is coming alive again.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1996
Match the examples below to architectural elements found in downtown Beaufort.
Mark your answers (building address or business name) in the spaces provided.
You may list as many examples as you can find, the goal is to find at least one of each example.

**STOREFRONT**

A typical downtown commercial building has four (4) major components:
Cornice, Fenestration, Piers and storefront.
Each of these components is made of specific architectural elements:

1. **Beaufort Bank**
2. **Thomas Law**
3. **Black Stones**
4. **Lipsitz & Craftsman**

- **Typical Upper Facades**
- **Typical Storefronts**

**ROOF TYPE**

1. Magic Touch
2. Bag
3. Button and Bow
4. Main Street
BRICK PATTERNS

1) The Harvey & Battery P.A.
2) Thomas Law Building
3) The Bank Building

NAME: Erin Gardner
TEAM: 503

STUDENT EVALUATION
field trip—DOWNTOWN AS A CLASSROOM

The level of information covered:

a. at the Beaufort Museum for the 20th Century Beaufort Exhibit was
   too elementary ______ just right ______ too advanced ______

b. by the Main Street presentation on the development of downtown buildings was
   too elementary ______ just right ______ too advanced ______

c. during the Carriage Tour was
   too elementary ______ just right ______ too advanced ______

d. in the Architectural Scavenger hunt was
   too elementary ______ just right ______ too advanced ______

Please rate the speakers’ presentations (5=excellent 1=poor)

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Total list of speakers:
Mr. Harry Chakides
Mr. Joe Mix
Mrs. Debbie Fielden
Mr. Henry Chambers
Mr. VonHarten
Judge Peterson
Mr. Neils Christensen
Mrs. Rose Mark

Additional comments about the speakers:

I enjoyed the pictures he had of Beaufort long ago.

List 3 new facts you learned during the field trip:
1. I learned about how the families had their business downstairs and lived upstairs.
2. I learned that the houses faced south so they could get the summer breeze.
3. I learned that in one of the on Bay Street there was really a ghost inside. A young girl said it.

What I liked most about the Downtown trip was:

I liked most about the Downtown trip was looking at the different houses and how they were built.

The trip could have been improved by:

The trip could have been improved by going inside more of the houses.

For the spring field trip I recommend:

I recommend going into Lipitz and talk to them.
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field trip—DOWNTOWN AS A CLASSROOM

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Additional comments about the speakers:

List 3 new facts you learned during the field trip:
1. The purposes of the old houses in the old point.
2. I found out why all of the ceilings were high.
3. The purposes of the way the buildings were made.

What I liked most about the downtown trip was:

The thing I liked about the trip was the carriage ride.

The trip could have been improved by:

It could have been improved if we could have gone in the building that we were assigned to.

For the spring field trip I recommend:

I recommend that we go inside the buildings and a boat ride.