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To cite this article: Paul A. Shackel (2017): Immigration heritage in the anthracite coal region of Northeastern Pennsylvania, Journal of Community Archaeology & Heritage, DOI: 10.1080/20518196.2017.1385947

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/20518196.2017.1385947

Published online: 11 Oct 2017.
Immigration heritage in the anthracite coal region of Northeastern Pennsylvania

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ABSTRACT

Since 2009, the University of Maryland’s Anthracite Heritage Project has been performing research in Northeastern Pennsylvania, exploring the history of labour and immigration and connecting it to the region’s contemporary communities. The racialization of the newest immigrants, those from Eastern and Southern Europe in the late nineteenth century, plays a role in how we remember labour history and operationalize it today. Understanding these past struggles allows us to view the newest immigrants in a different way. Engaging local communities and trying to develop a shared heritage, in this case a heritage of immigration, has had some success, although there remains varying views of heritage and our work still has some barriers to overcome.

KEYWORDS

Historical Archeology; heritage; migration; racialization; Northeastern Pennsylvania

Introduction

Since 2009, the University of Maryland’s Anthracite Heritage Project team has been conducting research in Northeastern Pennsylvania (NEPA) in some of the area’s historic coal patch towns Figure 1). Our goal is to examine the rise and fall of the anthracite coal industry, and address issues related to inequities in the community, past and present. The region’s population consists of a well-established, traditional community; descendants of Eastern and Southern Europeans. Their ancestors were part of the last major migration to the USA before federal laws severely limited immigration in the early 1920s. The region developed for several generations without any new major influx of outsiders until about 2000. According to the 2000 US federal census Hazleton, one of the region’s major cities, was mostly White with only about 4 per cent of the population self-identifying as belonging to a minority group. By 2010 about 37 per cent of the population identified themselves as non-White, and the majority are Latino (sometimes referred to as Hispanic1). Since 1960, the Latino population in the USA has surged from about 3 per cent of the total population in 1960 to over 18 per cent in 2015 (Pavao-Zuckerman et al. 2016, 204). Today, the amount of the Latino minority population in Hazleton is about 46 per cent and by 2020 the city will probably consist mostly of minority individuals. The newest Latino populations are coming from the Dominican Republic via New York City’s Washington Heights area as well as Northern New Jersey (Longazel 2016).

The Anthracite Heritage Project began in 2009, as an effort to collect oral histories from community members in NEPA and to document the public memory of work and labour in the area. That year we began collecting oral histories related to work and everyday life in the anthracite coal region. In the winter of 2010 we initiated a survey to locate the site of a little-known labour incident known as the Lattimer Massacre. This work, some of which is described below, recovered the physical evidence related to the massacre, such as bullet casings, and a tin drinking cup, among other items. Most
importantly, the survey also stimulated community dialogue about the way the massacre has been remembered (Roller 2013; Roller 2015; Shackel and Roller 2012; Shackel et al. 2011).

In 2012 and 2013, the Anthracite Heritage Project performed archaeological investigations at two shanty enclaves in the towns of Lattimer I (now known as Lattimer Mines) and Lattimer II (now known as Pardeesville). In 2014, we were once again excavating in Pardeesville, although the work occurred on a formerly company-owned double house once occupied by people of Eastern European background. The Anthracite Heritage Project began archaeological excavations at Eckley Miners’ Village in 2015, a well-preserved mining town which the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania now owns, and interprets to commemorate the life and work of coal communities in NEPA. The work focuses on the housing provided to the newest immigrants to the community, a set of company-owned double houses located on the periphery of the town (Roller 2015; Shackel and Roller 2013; Westmont 2017). In 2017, we began a programme documenting the existing outbuildings associated with the many surviving domestic structures (Figure 3).

While the Anthracite Heritage Project always had a community-oriented focus, it became clear that much of the traditional White population of Eastern and Southern European descent feels threatened, as the new immigrants bring new customs, ideas, and language to the region (Chavez 2008). While the early stages of our programme focused on the lives of the historic immigrants, it became clear to us that we needed to help develop an inclusive heritage with universal values that includes both the new and old communities that claim this area as home. Our focus became the heritage of immigration. Promoting this new heritage value is a way of mediating the vast differences between the traditional, established community and newest residents – with the goal of acknowledging differences and finding a common ground, which is the focus of this article.

**Historical background**

NEPA is located in the northernmost reaches of the Appalachian region. While anthracite coal was discovered in this area in the late eighteenth century, large scale extraction of this carbon fossil
fuel did not begin until the mid-nineteenth century. The development of railroads and canal systems during this era greatly improved access to markets and the extraction and shipment of large quantities of coal ignited the burgeoning industrial revolution, which enabled US industries to become international leader in manufacturing (Palladino 2006).

Many coal patch towns developed with increased coal extraction and the influx of immigrants. The early nineteenth century newcomers to the coal fields came primarily from England, Wales, and Germany. By the mid-nineteenth century they came from Ireland. By the end of the nineteenth most of the newcomers were from Eastern and Southern Europe, and were described as Polish, Slovak, Ruthenian, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Italian, Russian, and Lithuanian (Blatz 2002, 27; Palladino 2006). This large-scale migration to the region created a ready workforce, usually with more available workers than jobs. Surplus labour allowed the coal operators to keep wages relatively low with the threat that there were more available hungry men willing to move into the labour system (Roller 2015).

Figure 2. A street side advertisement promoting the coal industry in one of the local communities in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Provided by author.

Figure 3. Streetscape of Eckley Miners’ Village. Provided by author.
The anthracite coal industry thrived from the 1850s and peaked during the First World War (WWI) era, employing 180,000 people. The industry soon began a gradual decline of output as competition from other fuels, like oil and natural gas, gradually penetrated the market. While the demand for anthracite coal increased slightly during the Second World War (WWII), the coal industry in NEPA virtually collapsed in the 1950s (Dublin and Licht 2005). The Knox Mining disaster in 1959, in which there was a cave-in and the Susquehanna River flooded a network of mines, further crippled the anthracite industry. Only several small corporations surface mine today, employing a few hundred people in the anthracite coal extraction, a far cry from the industry’s massive size a century ago. Coal extraction continues to shrink every year with the increased popularity of inexpensive natural gas in the USA.

Deindustrialized NEPA

Deindustrialization is the widespread, systematic disinvestment in the basic productive capacity of a region. It began in NEPA following the end of WWI and accelerated after WWII. This region relied on one industry from the early nineteenth century, and because the local economy failed to diversify, the decline of the coal industry has had a devastating impacted on the region’s economy (Bluestone and Harrison 1982, 6–9). While the post-WWII USA was called the affluent society, NEPA never experienced this prosperity. For instance, while employment increased 21 per cent in the USA from 1947 through 1957, it only increased 4 per cent in the anthracite region (Wilson 2003, 184). Despite the region’s dramatic decline in population in the 1950s, the unemployment rate soared to about 18 per cent. Mines closed at a rapid pace, and those that remained open operated only two or three days a week (Dublin 1998, 10; Keil and Keil 2015).

When high unemployment hit NEPA, many women found jobs in the newly arrived garment factories. While textile mills began to develop in the region during the late nineteenth century, many textile operations came to the area in the early and mid-twentieth century, fleeing the organized labour movement in the Northeast. In many cases women became the main provider of their households after WWII (Dublin 1998, 29). The textile industry flourished for a few decades in NEPA, although capital once again mobilized, this time in the 1970s and 1980s. Textile operators fled organized labour, first moving to the south and eventually locating off-shore. By the early 1990s Hazleton and most of NEPA was left without a major industrial centre or a diversified economy. Commercial businesses could not survive and Main Streets throughout the region were slowly abandoned. As a result, the long-term deindustrialization in NEPA created major demographic shifts. There was a significant outmigration as households sought opportunities in other regions. Some of the smaller patch towns were completely abandoned, and some stood still in time with significantly fewer households and a growing number of abandoned buildings with the hope that the coal industry would be revitalized (Dublin 1998; Wolensky, Wolensky, and Wolensky 2002).

Bluestone and Harrison (1982, 12) describe the fundamental struggle between capital and community and quote from planning theorist John Friedman:

The capitalist city has no reverence for life. It bulldozes over neighborhoods to make way for business. It abandons entire regions, because profits are greater somewhere else. Deprived of their life spaces, people’s lives are reduced to a purely economic dimension as workers and consumers – so long, at least, as there is work. (Freidman quoted in Bluestone and Harrison 1982, 47)

Instead of providing new employment opportunities, a higher standard of living, and enhanced security, the decisions of managers has resulted in just the opposite.

Hazleton had a population of 38,000 during WWII, declined to about 21,000 by 2000, and now it hovers at around 25,000 residents. Other surrounding towns have felt the impact of the declining coal industry and the flight from the region. For instance, the town of Shenandoah, which once had a population of 25,000, now has about 5,000 residents. Mahanoy City, which once had a population of 15,000, now has about 4,000 residents (Bahadur 2006; Englund 2007, 887; Tarone 2004, 128).
Hazleton’s decline is more complicated than industry abandoning the area. The economic blight of the region has its foundation in the conscious decisions of the coal barons not to encourage higher education in the area. When they did philanthropic giving related to higher education, they helped to establish colleges outside of their region. They wanted a readily available, uneducated population to toil in the underground mines. Their lack of education and skills also meant that the population here had less value in the job market. So, while the cities of Wilkes-Barre and Scranton eventually worked to establish colleges, it was not until 1934 that the Penn State University established a campus at Hazleton. According to the 2012 census, 26.7 per cent of Pennsylvania’s population has an undergraduate degree or higher. The counties in the anthracite region have an average that is about half of that of the state (Keil and Keil 2015, 119). Because of the lack of higher education opportunities in the area, many technical industries do not look to NEPA as fertile ground for establishing their high tech business and manufacturing. The lack of higher educational opportunities created a ‘youth flight,’ a phenomenon that continues today (Tarone 2004, 5).

The low regard for higher education still exists among some community leaders. A television show that discusses local concerns – the Sam Lesante Show – interviewed community leader Louis ‘Booty’ Beltrami, a former coal operator and now a restaurant owner and local political activist. He heads the ‘Political Watchdog Group’ (SSPTV.com). In the show Beltrami spoke about waste and fraud, and mentioned his concern about what he perceived as the excessive welfare being doled out to the new immigrants. He also said that ‘we’ should not aspire to send everyone to college. After all, he noted, ‘who’s gonna grease your car?’

In the 21st century, the anthracite region continues to lag behind in almost every economic indicator in Pennsylvania. For instance, the average weekly wage is about 20–25 per cent lower than the rest of the state. In 2012 the poverty rate for Pennsylvania was 13.2 per cent, while in several counties in the anthracite region, the rate was well above 16 per cent (American Community Survey 2012 in Keil and Keil 2015, 91).

Several published (in print and on the web) surveys regarding the region’s general health and well-being indicate that this area is the unhappiest place in the USA, a product of the region’s declining employment and economic outlook, as well as its poor general health, among other factors. For instance, economists compared 367 MSAs (Metropolitan Statistical Areas) in the USA in a study that considered overall happiness. NEPA (Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Hazleton MSA) is ranked last (Glaeser, Gottlieb, and Ziv 2014). Because of its poor economic standing it is one of the least expensive places to live in the country, which is seen as a tradeoff by many of its residents (Guydish 2015; Kiernan 2015). Recent studies by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention show a high rate of deaths related to heart disease in the American South among the White population (Steckel and Senny 2015), and this high incidence rate reaches into Northern Appalachia, which includes the anthracite coal region of NEPA.

In 2014, Gallup and Healthways released a report, the State of American Well-Being, detailing American well-being with regard to emotional health, work environment, physical health, healthy behaviours, and basic access to health care. The CEO and President of Healthways and the Chairman and CEO of Gallup write in their introduction to the State of American Well-Being report that well-being has a direct impact on worker productivity. Generally, high well-being means a healthier and more content population that is more productive and helps create economically vibrant communities. In the USA, chronic disease and obesity is on the rise, health care costs continue to increase and relationships in the workplace have declined. It is time, they say, for business leaders to take notice (Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index 2014). The report is meant to be a tool for employers, governments, and health care providers to help them develop strategies to improve their organizations and communities.

About 178,000 people across the USA were interviewed in 2013 for the State of American Well-Being report, including a sample size of 1,092 from NEPA. The survey ranked NEPA 177th out of 189 metropolitan areas with regard to general well-being (Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index 2014). Regional newspapers, like The Citizen’s Voice (Halpin 2014), reported: ‘Region’s Residents
among Most Miserable.’ Experts in the region indicate that the results are probably related to the continuing regional economic downturn. The director of the social work programme at Misericordia University described the survey results as a result of the community being afraid of change, ‘because they’ve been burned so many times resulting in this almost fear cycle’ (Halpin 2014).

Hazleton and Xenophobic fears

The continuous downward mobility of the region and its generally poor health and well-being has encouraged the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to create economic tax free zones in 1999 – The Keystone Opportunity Zone – which attracted almost a dozen distribution centres to the Hazleton area including Office Depot, Amazon, American Eagle Outfitters, Michael’s Craft Store, Wegmans, and a Cargill meat packing plant (Jackson 2015). While there has been a steady out-migration of the traditional White population, many Latinos have come to the region to work in these low skilled jobs. While Hazleton’s population stood at about 21,000 residents in 2000, within five years the city had grown to about 31,000 with approximately 30 per cent of the population identifying as Hispanic (Bahadur 2006; Englund 2007, 887). In much the same way that the community’s European ancestors fled poverty and oppression, many of the new Latino immigrants coming to NEPA are escaping similar circumstances in their homelands. They are coming to Hazleton and other communities in the region searching for a new beginning while seeking low paying unskilled jobs in the region’s new economy.

In response to the influx of Latinos to Hazleton came the perceived threat to an existing way of life, a phenomenon found throughout much of the USA (Chavez 2008). The city’s mayor, a descendant of Italian immigrants, and the city council, passed an ordinance in 2006 titled ‘Illegal Immigration Relief Act’ (IIRA) because they felt that the federal government was not doing its job controlling immigration (quoted in Englund 2007, 888). The IIRA punished businesses if they hired an undocumented immigrant, by suspending the business owner’s license for five years for the first violation, and 10 years for each subsequent violation. It also required all renters in Hazleton to go to City Hall to prove their citizenship, and prohibited landlords from knowingly renting or leasing their property to undocumented immigrants. A fine of $1,000 a day was established for renting to undocumented immigrants. It also established English as Hazleton’s official language (Bahadur 2006, Englund 2007, 884; Kroft 2006).

In November 2006, a federal judge granted a temporary restraining order which suspended the implementation of the IIRA (Englund 2007, 891). On July 26, 2007, the District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania ruled that the IIRA was unconstitutional (Baratta 2007). Municipalities cannot create laws to restrict their movement or justify ordinances because the new immigrant is depleting local resources. Also, immigration is under the jurisdiction of the federal government, not under local or state jurisdictions (Dobbs 2007; Englund 2007, 898–899). Rulings by both the US District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania in Scranton in 2008, and the 3rd US Circuit Court of Appeals in 2010, concurred that the Hazleton law was unconstitutional. In June 2011, the Supreme Court asked the Circuit Court to rehear the case because of the ruling that upheld portions of a similar law in Arizona. After a new hearing in 2012, Circuit Court again ruled Hazleton’s law unconstitutional. On March 3, 2014, the US Supreme Court voted not to hear an appeal of the Hazleton law, ending the fight for legislating against undocumented immigrants (Jackson 2014).

While the anti-immigration legislation was being contested in the higher courts a large number of Latinos did not want to deal with the xenophobic sentiment and by 2010, the city’s population declined from 31,000 to about 25,000. Along with the White flight, and despite many Latinos leaving the city as a result of the IIRA, the percentage of the Hispanic population has continued to increase steadily (Bahadur 2006; Englund 2007, 887). The anti-immigration fervour only increased over the next several years even though the city will probably be a majority minority city by the 2020 US federal census (Gass 2007).
While the coal barons have disappeared, the modern corporations with their fulfillment centres in NEPA have taken their place. In general, these large distribution centres have developed in suburban and semi-rural areas in the USA where the average wage is low and unemployment is relatively high. In the Hazleton area nearly 5,000 people are employed in the Keystone Opportunity Zone in unskilled, low paying jobs. These companies control a vast amount of the region’s capital, much like the coal operators did a century ago, thereby controlling the lives and livelihood of the area’s residents, including the new immigrant.

Our project in the community

Archaeology projects that focus on communities and labour, such as at Ludlow, Colorado, brought publicity to the place and made public the conditions labour unions fought for in the past and are working for in the present (Ludlow Collective 2001; McGuire and Reckner 2003; Saitta 2007; Walker 2000). William Logan (2012) notes that when developing cultural heritage for a place the community should also consider cultural diversity and enforcing human rights. Following Logan’s (2012) lead as well as the examples from Ludlow, one of our goals for the Anthracite Heritage Project is to develop universal meanings – heritage that will allow us to connect the narrative of immigration and racialization to the contemporary population. Our goal is to build bridges between the disparate communities by developing a common heritage in this racially tense and poverty-stricken region (Little and Shackel 2014; Putnam 2000). Developing universal meanings and a common heritage allows us to link the past and the present and facilitate an exploration of both historic and contemporary concerns related to social justice issues (American Association of Museums 2002). Connecting and creating a civil discourse between established and new immigrant communities has been a major issue in Hazleton and the development of a common heritage is one strategy being used to help better integrate the new population into the narrative of this economically depressed area.

Initially, our research programme was interested in the new immigrant that came to the region at the end of the nineteenth century and we began to explore the treatment of these people coming from Southern and Eastern Europe. The dominant ‘English speaking’ community racialized them – the process of assigning people to groups based on physical or cultural characteristics. This process helps create the perception of inferior or socially unequal groups. Racialization creates racially meaningful groups that previously did not exist. Those classified as ‘other’ are seen as inferior to the group creating these classifications (Omni and Winant 1983, 51; Orser 2007, 9). The new immigrants were placed in the lowest levels of an evolutionary hierarchy, which justified their exploitation.

The new immigrants went on strike in 1897 to protest a Pennsylvania tax on all unnaturalized workers. They were also demanding the same pay as the ‘English speakers.’ While marching towards the coal patch town of Lattimer on a public road they were fired upon by the sheriff and his deputies, killing 25 men and wounding 38. An autopsy on those killed indicated that many of the men were shot in the back while fleeing from the confrontation. A subsequent trial found the sheriff and his deputies innocent because the jury determined that riotous conditions existed (Aurand 2002; Greene 1968; Novak 1977; Pinkowski 1950; Roller 2015; Shackel and Roller 2012; Turner 1977, 1984).

Based on our initial conversations with the traditional (Eastern and Southern European) community it became clear to us that the Lattimer Massacre was important to the community, even though little recognized outside of the region. As a result, in 2010, Michael Roller (a member of our team) posted a message on the ‘Histarch’ list serve explaining that we need expert help to conduct a metal detector survey to locate the massacre site. Within 20 minutes Roller was contacted by Dan Sivilich, who volunteered his time as well as the effort of others to locate the site. Sivilich’s organization is known as BRAVO (Battlefield Restoration and Archaeological Volunteer Organization), which operates out of Monmouth, New Jersey. BRAVO is a nonprofit organization, and all of its members are volunteers. They mostly work with state and federal agencies to help document historic battlefield sites. Sivilich has family roots in NEPA and he is the first generation not to go into the coal mines,
so he took this request as a challenge, as well as an opportunity to participate in his former community’s heritage. BRAVO spent two weekends working at the site. Sivilich was thrilled to offer his expertise and bring his BRAVO team to the aid the project. While there are newspaper accounts and fragments of the trial reporting exist, this survey was as a way to add a material component to the narrative of the new immigrant. The metal detector survey located several bullets dating to the time period of the massacre (Roller 2015; Shackel, Roller, and Sullivan 2011; Sivilich 2011).

The archaeology survey at Lattimer Massacre site recalls the struggle between labour and capital and its material remains, highlighting the horrifying story of the racism that ‘justified’ the killings at Lattimer. The archaeological survey is one research programme that is helping to reawaken the memory of the Lattimer Massacre and illuminating the implications of race and racialization that enabled the exploitation of the foreign-born working class, a phenomenon being operationalized today. These points were made in the local newspaper when we discussed the results of the survey. As a result, I received some negative responses from former Hazletonians via email. One person wrote:

Crime and murders/s are [now] common place … My old high school has gangs!! This all happened when illegals from NEW YORK came to Pa … Not to work, like the aliens of the past came, but to sponge off the social welfare programs and bring the big city crime of NYC … . Lou Barletta [the city’s major] was trying to protect the interests of the citizens of Hazleton … . So please don’t rush to judge the people of Hazleton (email letter to the author, February 19, 2012).

Some citizens have written editorials in the regional newspapers responding to the anti-immigrant attitudes of local government officials by calling upon the memory of Lattimer to teach about tolerance and justice. People write about their Eastern European ancestors, who met prejudice and resentment about a hundred years ago. One editorial writer stated; ‘Read what happened to your ancestors in the Lattimer Massacre. “Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it.” Accept all people of Hazleton as ‘one people’ (Klemlow 2009).

**Helping to change the dialogue**

With the city’s reoccurring financial constraints, and now having to pay the court costs of close to $1.5 million USD for pursuing the IIRA, the City of Hazleton does not have adequate resources to support all of its citizens’ needs. With the development of the tax-friendly trade zones and the growing need for low wage workers, the City of Hazleton now has a large unskilled workforce, and the majority are Latino. Many of the newcomers work in the Keystone Opportunity Zone and are employed through temporary employment services. They receive little or no benefits, such as health insurance and unemployment benefits. They receive relatively low wages, which results in 67 per cent of students in the Hazleton Area School District coming from families that have an annual income that is below the poverty line (Longazel 2016; Shackel 2016).

There is an urgent need to assist and provide services to the city’s underserved population. While the city and county governments have made it extremely difficult for the new immigrants to feel welcomed, community groups now provide some needed services. It is reminiscent of the Progressive Era, where local and national community organizations developed to help the urban poor and the new immigrant in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Gates 2002, 25). Smaller non-governmental organizations (NGOs) fill this urgent need, some with amazing success. For instance, the Hazleton Integration Project (HIP) developed as a response to the lack of city support for children of all backgrounds in the underserved areas of Hazleton. The project developed under the leadership of Joe Maddon, manager of baseball’s Chicago Cubs, and his family members and close friends. Maddon grew up in Hazleton and was distraught seeing the racial tension in his hometown making national news (Hazleton Integration Project 2016).

The local community and politicians did not immediately embrace HIP. For instance, the owner of Jimmy’s Quick Lunch in downtown Hazleton said that some of his customers are not fond of what Maddon is trying to do for the underserved population. As he put it, ‘The talk over the counter —
that’s exactly what they say … They say, “Oh he doesn’t live here. He doesn’t know what it’s like to live here. He needs to find out” (Hine 2015). Some cynics of the HIP project have labelled Maddon as an ‘enabler’, providing needed resources to an undeserving community.

HIP purchased the former Catholic school of the parish (Most Precious Blood) and named the project and building Hazleton One. There is now a newly-refurbished basketball court and a playground. Hazleton One offers music classes and there is an industrial sized kitchen in the basement, which helps to provide meals to families in need (Hine 2015).

In a city with few amenities to help the underserved population, HIP came forward to provide needed resources for the youth of the community. Hazleton One and the other NGOs survive on the generosity of local and national corporations donating funds for the operation and upkeep of the facilities. The fact that the majority of the schoolchildren in Hazleton come from families living under the poverty line is a product of the numerous blue collar, low paying jobs in Hazleton. Ironically, corporations can pay low wages, and yet when they make donations to the NGO to help underserved children, they are seen as partners, contributing to the needs of the community.

On several occasions we went to the Hazleton One community centre on Saturdays and provided presentations to the students about archaeology, followed by overviews of some of the artefacts we found in a previous excavation. While bringing some of the typical items we found in the archaeology, like pipe stems, shell-edged whiteware, and marbles, we also brought along a few religious items that the Latino students could connect with, like part of a rosary, a portion of a porcelain crucifix, and a medal with a figure inscribed of Papa Pio IX, which is the Italian for Pope Pius IX (reigned as pope from 1846–1878, the longest-serving elected pope). The students were most intrigued with the religious items. These religious objects helped to make a connection between the values of the new Latino immigrants and the historic immigrants. Both groups relied on religious faith to aid and guide them through poor economic conditions while dealing with larger xenophobic fears.

The University of Maryland sponsored an archaeological heritage programme that is a six week field school that I directed. Graduate students from our Anthropology program have co-directed the project (previously Michael Roller, and Camille Westmont, and most recently Kyla Cools and Katie Boyle). We recruit on average six undergraduates from the University of Maryland and the region’s colleges and universities to participate in the field training. In 2017, we began a preservation and archaeology field school where students also learn to document and record the existing structures at the site.

During the summers of 2014, 2016, and 2017 we were able to recruit students from the Hazleton Area School District to participate in our archaeological excavations. Each year about half of the six high school students were of Latino background, and some came with the encouragement of the Hazleton One Board members, Bob Curry and Elaine Maddon Curry, as well as Mrs. Raffael Billet, of the Hazleton Area Academy of Sciences.

Our Hazleton One students tend to be first-generation Americans with connections to the Dominican Republic. In our six-week programme, our college students begin to mentor the Hazleton area high school students. The high school students are mentored in archaeology as well as in other subjects related to higher education, and life in general. While working side by side with their college student mentors, they also worked with other high school students, who are of Eastern European descent. The high school students quickly learned to excavate, take notes, and curate artefacts. While we often discussed issues related to immigration, the partnering of college students with high school students lead to many other discussions, including issues related to higher education. There were discussions about GPAs (Grade Point Averages) and taking seriously the SATs (Scholastic Aptitude Test for college admissions), which would increase their chances of earning scholarships and help them earn admission into good colleges and universities. Providing this mentorship is important, since Hazleton area schools are ranked relatively low in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. These easy dialogues between the high school and college students serve as excellent experiences and provide a freer exchange of information than is otherwise possible. This work environment allows students to socialize with others outside of their social comfort zones, learn a
bit of archaeology and preservation, and learn something about what is needed to be successful in a higher education setting.

Over the next several years our archaeology project will continue to focus on issues of immigration, and our message to the public is that our project is exploring the lives of the region’s immigrants. While the new immigrants of the late nineteenth century faced many hardships – like language barriers, different customs, and working in the lowest paying jobs – these are the same challenges that the new Latino immigrant is facing today in NEPA. With every newspaper and television news interview, we are prepared with a message and ensure that that we connect our historical work to contemporary immigrant issues. For instance, The CitizenVoice.com (Jackson 2015) reported on our work and message:

As Westmont and Shackel study the difficulties that immigrants faced in the coal towns around Hazleton, they are aware of the similarities to immigrant life in Hazleton today. Westmont said the Irish immigrant miners living at Eckley with a dozen other people in a half-double home aren’t much different from Latinos earning low wages and sharing an apartment to save money today. “The social scorn, the legal isolation that existed 150 years ago is exactly what people today are going through”.

Then, a subsequent article in the local Spanish language newspaper that serves the Hazleton area had quotes from us explaining that, “Exploring the history of immigrant life is important for this region’s heritage,” he (Shackel) said, “because immigration is still part of the community’s contemporary identity.” The news article described the project as it focused on Back Street in Eckley Miners’ Village, a neighbourhood where new immigrants tended to settle as they pursued a livelihood in the mines. In the same newspaper, Camille Westmont, a PhD student at the University of Maryland, explained:

People today talk a lot about the hardships of men when they first arrived, but women experienced many of the same setbacks as men: they didn’t always speak the native language when they got to Pennsylvania, they were cut off from their families back home, and people literally attacked them, but they still wanted the best for their children and their community. I see a lot of parallels between those women and immigrant women today (Poder Latino News 2015).

**Changing the narrative**

Many view the ethnic tensions between the established English-speaking population and the newcomers from Southern and Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth century as a distant memory with few connections to life in the contemporary community. The silence surrounding these historic tensions related to class, poverty, and racism and the connection to the contemporary immigrant population is quite deafening. What we remember and the meaning of the past that we embrace has ramifications on how we live our everyday lives.

The persistence of the new Latino community in the Hazleton area is amazing. Despite facing obstacles like underemployment and persistent racism, places like Broad Street, Hazleton’s main avenue, now has a growing number of enterprises – restaurant, grocery stores, clothing stores, and Botánicas (retail stores that specialize in selling folk medicine, religious candles and statuary, and other products considered magical or as alternative medicine) that cater to the new Latino population. The 100 or so new businesses throughout the city are playing a significant role in helping to revitalize the economy of the community. Recent newspaper articles in the Philadelphia Inquirer and coverage by NPR (National Public Radio) no longer mention the Illegal Immigration Relief Act, but rather describe the revitalization of the downtown area with new merchants catering to the Latino population as well as programmes like HIP (Klibanoff 2015; Matza 2016). There is now a bit of hustle and bustle in the downtown area that has not been seen for several decades. Because of the new Latino population, Hazleton’s downtown is vibrant, especially when compared to the many other faltering communities in the anthracite region.

The history of the racialization of historic populations has a universal value for teaching and learning about how we approach issues of race today as the composition of communities change with the
influx of new populations, many from foreign lands. Our heritage programme is part of a larger movement in the community as NGOs develop to aid the new immigrants. By developing a message that emphasizes universal values our goal is to help create a platform that will bridge the differences between the newcomers and the traditional population. While our success is partial, our persistence in helping to develop a shared heritage will only help shape the new community, developing a diverse past and a more inclusive present.

Notes

1. The term Latino refers to individuals from Mexico, Central and South America (including Brazil), and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. Most people in our study area conflate ‘Latino’ with ‘Hispanic’ (as do we, in this paper). However, in other contexts (such as the national census), the term ‘Hispanic’ is a linguistic term that can refer to non-Latinos of Spanish (European) descent.


5. Those who have difficulty accessing to facilities or care due to economic or social status, race, religion, language group, ability, or some other category.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the hard work and dedication of the many people who participated in the Anthracite Heritage Project in various leadership roles, including Dr. Michael Roller, Camille Westmont, Justin Uehlein, and most recently Kyla Cools and Katie Boyle. The many college students and high school students participating in the project has made this a rewarding experience for me and the local communities. The Hazleton One Board members, Bob Curry and Elaine Maddon Curry as well as Raffael Billet, of the Hazleton Area Academy of Sciences have worked hard to recruit high school students to participate in this program. I am also grateful to Dr. Bode Moran, Site Administrator at Eckley Miner’s Village, who invited us to work and explore the archaeology, preservation and history of Eckley. Bode also introduced me to the literature related to the recent surveys of health and well-being in NEPA. Every year Joe Michel, long-time resident of Eckley shared his life story of growing up in Eckley with our field school students, providing a wonderful context for life in coal patch towns. Thank you all!

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International Journal of Historical Archaeology 16 (4): 761–775.