

ARTICLE

Without a Roadmap: Reflections on the Emergent Methods of Community-Based Archaeology

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Abstract

Community-based archaeology does not always arrange itself cleanly into standard frameworks of practice. As archaeologists, our relationships with communities are situated and emergent. It stands to reason that our methods should be as well. Several years ago, as a graduate student at the start of a community-based project, I remember my anxious desire for a roadmap—a prescribed set of methods that would guide my work with and in community. Actual practice, however, demonstrated that roadmaps have little utility on this type of terrain. Community-based archaeology is rooted in relationship building as much as research design, and relationships push us to reorient how we do (and write about) archaeology. This article examines my on-the-ground and emergent experiences using three methods during a community-based project: (1) working with oral histories as narrative sources, (2) navigating community archives in the field, and (3) learning and applying close-range photogrammetry. I argue that examining *how* methods emerge and change during community-based projects is a valuable aspect of archaeological practice and that a narrative approach to discussing methodology allows us to interrogate how specific challenges push us to develop creative and interdisciplinary ways to do archaeology with others.

Resumen

La arqueología comunitaria no siempre se integra con claridad en los marcos de las prácticas tradicionales. Como especialistas en arqueología, nuestras relaciones con las comunidades son situadas y dinámicas, por lo que es lógico que nuestros métodos también lo sean. Hace varios años, como estudiante de posgrado al inicio de un proyecto comunitario, recuerdo la necesidad que sentía de tener una hoja de ruta: un conjunto prescrito de métodos que guiara el trabajo con y en la comunidad. Sin embargo, la práctica me demostró que las hojas de ruta son poco útiles en este tipo de terreno. La arqueología comunitaria se basa tanto en la construcción de relaciones como en el diseño de la investigación, y justo son esas relaciones las que nos impulsan a reorientar nuestra forma de hacer (y escribir) arqueología. Este artículo examina mis experiencias en campo y las que surgieron a partir de tres métodos aplicados en un proyecto comunitario: (1) el trabajo con historias orales como fuentes narrativas, (2) la exploración de archivos comunitarios en el terreno, y (3) el aprendizaje y aplicación de la fotogrametría de corto alcance. Argumento que examinar cómo surgen y se transforman los métodos durante proyectos comunitarios es un aspecto valioso de la práctica arqueológica, y que un enfoque narrativo para discutir la metodología nos permite interrogar la forma en que determinados desafíos nos empujan a desarrollar formas creativas e interdisciplinarias de hacer arqueología con otras personas y comunidades.

Keywords: close-range photogrammetry; collaboration; community archives; community-based archaeology; oral history

Palabras clave: fotogrametría de corto alcance; colaboración; archivos comunitarios; arqueología comunitaria; historia oral

In August 2017, I turned off my GPS and stepped out of my rental car onto the dirt road beside Holy Cross Catholic Church in D’Hanis, Texas. I was a second-year PhD student from the northeast United States, and as a stranger in this small town, I felt viscerally out of place. The church picnic in D’Hanis is an annual homecoming event attended by family members from across the country, which I had learned about through a chance encounter with an ad in a local newspaper (Figure 1). Showing up alone to parties was not part of my archaeological training, and although I knew that doing so was a logical way to build community connections, that did little to reduce my nerves. I entered the church.

It turned out there was little time for nerves. The ensuing six hours were a whirlwind of introductions, trading contact information, and making plans. I met people who would become collaborators and friends over the next eight years. I wrote pages of fieldnotes that night, trying to capture names and details, but what quickly became clear is that developing relationships was not something I could meticulously plan. There is an openness inherent to relationship building and to community-based work, a shifting of personal accountability that extends beyond a research question or design—and that was a lesson I was only going to learn in community. There was no methodological roadmap for this: it was something community members and I would need to figure out together.

Despite months of background research and planning, this experience marked a clear beginning to the community-based projects that emerged over the next several years. I had come to Texas with pre-conceived ideas about the project and its research design. My initial research question was comparative: How did D’Hanis and its sister colony Castroville develop into distinctly different towns through time, despite shared origins as nineteenth-century Alsatian settlements in Texas (Markert 2022a, 2022b)? My research design included conducting oral history in both communities and mapping ruins in D’Hanis to re-create the layout of the original settlement. I had made some community connections when I had participated as a PhD student in my adviser Ruth Van Dyke’s archaeology project in nearby Castroville (Van Dyke 2017).

This preparation got me on the plane to Texas, but once I arrived, I was faced with a different kind of navigation, a different set of choices. The annual picnic was the start of several relationships, which multiplied as the project progressed and gradually pushed me beyond my original research design and questions. With others, I came to appreciate the ruins themselves as sites of memory, to question the ways that different migrations affected heritage and landscape, and to explore how digital methods could expand shared questions about and access to sites—none of which I had envisioned at the outset of the project.

In this article, I explore what came after the church picnic: the emergent methods that were informed, transformed, or prompted by engagements with community. Charting a course in collaborative or community-based work can be difficult. How do we communicate *how* to do archaeology with communities if there is no one-size-fits-all methodology? I do not frame this as a problem but a provocation, taking seriously the fact that community-based work is challenging and that being challenged makes us stronger researchers and research partners.

Community-based and collaborative approaches have transformed archaeological research over the past three decades (Montgomery and Fryer 2023; see also Agbe-Davis 2010, 2011; Atalay 2012; Colwell 2016; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008; Franklin 1997; Little and Shackel 2014; Nicholas et al. 2011; Silliman 2008; Wylie 2015). Archaeologists have addressed the best practices, challenges, and benefits of working with communities (e.g., Franklin 1997; Supernant and Warrick 2014; Tully 2007; Westmont and Clay 2021) in discussions that have found homes in publications like the *Journal of Community Archaeology & Heritage* (e.g., Cipolla and Quinn 2016; De Nardi 2014; Rizvi 2022). Some of the core goals of community and collaborative archaeology are the co-construction of knowledge, shared decision-making, and shared benefits from outcomes of the research at each stage of a project.

Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson (2008) proposed the concept of a “collaborative continuum” along which goals and relationships fluctuate and must be constantly assessed and negotiated over the course of a project (for an updated framework that includes colonial and Indigenous control, see Colwell 2016). There is no roadmap, no one-size-fits-all set of methods that works for every collaborative context (Chilton and Hart 2009:87), and no single “community” or “public” with a static set of interests in a

Holy Cross Church
 1847 **ANNUAL** 2017
HOMEcoming CELEBRATION
170th Parish Anniversary
in D'Hanis
Sunday, Aug. 6th
Holy Cross Parish Hall
 310 FM 2200 S. • D'HANIS
 MASS: 5:30 pm Sat. & 10 am Sun.

27th Annual Softball Tournament Sunday - 8 am
Breakfast Tacos - 8 am till gone
at the field concession stand

Beef & Sausage
BBQ Plate \$9
 w/ all the trimmings 11:30 AM - 2 PM

Tamale & BBQ Sandwich sale
in the afternoon

Bingo • Raffle (\$5000 Top Prize)
Handmade Quilt Raffle
Horseshoes • Kids' Games • Plant Booth
Crafts • Cake Booth • Silent Auction
Country Store • Water Slide • Jumping Castle
Flea Market • 5-Hole putt-putt golf
Karaoke in the Beer Garden
Air-Conditioned Hall • Plenty of Shade
Free Parking

Figure 1. Phone photograph of the newspaper ad in the *Hondo Anvil Herald* for the Holy Cross Church annual homecoming celebration (Patricia G. Markert, 2017).

site or the past (Agbe-Davies 2010; Supernant and Warrick 2014). Working with communities requires flexibility, a willingness to listen and change course, a principled openness to challenge and growth, and an ongoing commitment to establishing what ethical archaeology looks like in dialogue with others

(Ardren 2002; Supernant et al. 2020). Sharing the particularities of our approaches—the stories and relationships that underlie the research—can be just as important as sharing the findings and outcomes.

For archaeologists, research with communities has been scaffolded by theoretical, methodological, and ethical scholarship and dialogue happening throughout the discipline (e.g., Beck and Somerville 2005; Chilton and Hart 2009; Little 2002; McDavid 2002, 2011; Pyburn 2011; Reid 2022; Singleton and Orser 2003; Supernant and Warrick 2014). Black Feminist and Indigenous archaeologies have provided a model for community-centered and interdisciplinary approaches rooted in relationships and accountability, with several transformative works that ground archaeology in practices of care (Atalay 2012; Battle-Baptiste, 2011; Supernant et al. 2020; see also ongoing work at Estate Little Princess in Flewellen et al. 2022). Ethnographic archaeology and archaeological ethnography (Castañeda and Matthews 2008; Hamilakis 2011; Meskell 2005, 2012), as well as approaches to applied, activist, and liberatory archaeologies (e.g., Atalay et al. 2014; Barton 2021; D’Alpoim Guedes et al. 2021; Flewellen et al. 2021; Fryer 2023; Lans 2024; McGuire 2008; Mullins 2011; Stottman 2018), offer provocations toward reflexive and relational research with others. These works demonstrate the value of locating ourselves within our research, with many doing so through the critical work of narration.

All research constitutes a form of relationship building, a process that generates not just data but also connections between researchers and the others involved (Lyons and Supernant 2020:10; see also Wilson 2008). Community-based archaeology centers this relationship building and actively engages with the possibilities and constraints of these relationships by approaching communities as processes, rather than static places or things (Agbe-Davies 2010:385). Although not all community-based projects may identify as “collaborative,” they all require collaboration (i.e., at its most basic, working with others).¹ Here, it is useful to approach collaboration as a question that frames an ongoing dialogue in a relationship: What does it mean to work together, and how will we accomplish it? Answers require continual negotiation. They are variable and changeable, full of those possibilities and constraints inherent to relationships.

Because there is no roadmap for work with communities, it is useful to look at everyday practice for inspiration: how methods emerge from relationships, how relationships affect the research process, and what types of engagements are prompted by archaeology during and after archaeological projects. This requires some tacking back and forth between method and context. In the following sections, I reflect on three methods that, prompted by relationships or engagements in community, emerged or changed during the course of the project: oral history and narrative analysis, community-based archival research, and close-range photogrammetry. Instead of offering guidelines or instructions, I narrate the process and consider how working with others shaped the project’s questions and methods. I also address the possibilities and challenges of community-based work, recognizing that we occupy different privileges, positions, and bodies as researchers and that this too shapes projects.

A Brief Detour into Historical Context

I draw the following examples from the Old D’Hanis Archaeological Mapping Project and Castro Colonies Oral History Project, which explored the ways that place-making emerged in the wake of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Alsatian, German, and Mexican migration to Medina County, Texas (Markert 2020, 2022a, 2022b). Medina County is located on the unceded ancestral homelands of the Ndé Kónitsaąí Gokíyaa (Lipan Apache). It is a settler-colonial landscape, divided, mapped, and settled through the Republic of Texas’s adoption of New Spain and Mexico’s *empresario* system, which offered land grants to colonization companies in exchange for settlement (Weaver 2005). D’Hanis was one of four German and Alsatian colonies founded in the 1840s by *empresario* Henry Castro on the land west of San Antonio (Jordan 1966; Morgenthaler 2009; Van Dyke 2017; Waugh 1934; Weaver 2005). The presence of the towns was strategic, enabling the Republic of Texas to populate and secure territory west of its growing cities against incursion from Mexico while advancing a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Lipan Apache and the Comanche Nation (Ayles 1995; Babcock 2016; Campbell 2003; Panich and Schneider 2014). The contracts specifically stipulated the recruitment of white European colonists (Cohen 1897).

D’Hanis was the last and farthest west of Castro’s colonies. Alsatian and German settlers built rock houses and a Catholic church there, and their descendants spoke a dialect of Alsatian until World War II

(Roesch 2012). After the construction of the railroad in 1881, many families relocated a mile and a half to New D'Hanis, which developed around the depot. The rock homes of the old settlement were later rented and purchased by Mexican migrants fleeing the Mexican Revolution; they encountered social, ethnic, and linguistic segregation in early twentieth-century Texas (De León 1985; De León and Stewart 1983; Montejano 1987).

Within this landscape, the research emerged as a multifaceted and interdisciplinary process. My initial questions focused on the nineteenth-century Alsatian past before expanding to encompass the town's more layered histories, and I drew on new methods as relationships and circumstance prompted me to think outside the frameworks I was familiar with. Eventually, I defended and published a dissertation. To understand project trajectories, we often take a big-picture approach, but in the following sections, I examine how research directions change during smaller moments, interactions, or experiences in the field.

From Oral History to Narrative Analysis

In August 2018, I met a 93-year-old resident of D'Hanis at the local Dairy Queen. We sat at the table where she would eat lunch each day and discussed my work and her experiences while eating fish sandwiches. Past and present converged over fast food and ice cream. She asked whether I had time to take a drive, and I told her I did. We finished eating and went to my rental car. From there, we drove to the nearby Hondo Airfield where she had worked as a teenager during World War II, a period when speaking German or Alsatian in public was prohibited. The car's air conditioner ran at full blast while she spoke, a necessary annoyance given the heat. In the car, listening to her above the hum, I began to consider the ways that World War II had profoundly shaped landscape and identity in the community.

That same month, I interviewed one of the last fluent speakers of the Texas-Alsatian dialect. Born and raised on a farm outside Castroville, he did not learn English until he attended elementary school in town. He and others told me how Alsatian-speaking Texans would refer to outsiders from San Antonio as *Amerikaners* well into the twentieth century. As an adult, he had become somewhat of a celebrity in Alsace and traveled there regularly. With my tape recorder in hand, we sat in his pickup truck as he played me a CD he had recorded with a country and western band in France, translating classic country songs into Alsatian. I began to consider the ways in which language was inseparable from understanding space, history, and identity in this place.

Days later, I found myself in another pickup truck with a Mexican American resident of D'Hanis who took me to visit the house where he had lived as a child with his grandparents. It was now in ruins. His grandfather had escaped the Mexican Revolution and arrived in D'Hanis in the early twentieth century during a time when the town was deeply segregated, with a Spanish-speaking and English-speaking church and school. He purchased the rock house in the 1940s, which had been built nearly a century earlier by an Alsatian migrant. In a separate interview, his sibling reflected on living in that house and shared stories about how speaking Spanish was punished in school well after desegregation in the 1950s. When the archaeological crew later recorded the rock structure, these stories layered across the built landscape, and I began to consider what that might mean for analyzing and presenting our findings.

These are three examples of how oral history encounters prompted shifts in project questions and approaches. Conducting oral histories was an early part of the research design for the project.² Based on my previous oral history experience (Barton and Markert 2012), I was prepared to conduct interviews in a variety of settings, recognizing that the traditional sit-down interview, although preferable for sound quality, was not always possible in the field. Often, I talked with people in cars and trucks. After an initial informed consent process, I would keep my recorder handy in whatever setting I was in, following the lead of my interviewees. Sometimes interviews would unfold over multiple sessions and in a variety of settings as we picked up threads from previous conversations.

The nature of oral histories is emergent, so although this did not constitute a shift in methods, the conversations began to shape the way I approached other parts of the project, such as my analysis of archaeological landscapes (i.e., ruins) and the ways I approached multiple migrations in my research question. Understanding the multilayered conversations we were having about place and history demanded interdisciplinary analyses. Drawing from prompts during my coursework in the four

subfields, I turned to linguistic anthropology methods to make sense of the ways people narrated these landscapes, their migration histories, and language through time.

Oral history encompasses both method and data (Abrams 2010). As a method, it decenters the archaeologist as the sole producer of knowledge (McDavid 2002); creates opportunities for ongoing dialogue between the archaeologist and community (Beck and Somerville 2005); creates space for the co-production of knowledge that challenges erasure and contested heritage narratives (ike 2024; Reid 2022); positions archaeological sites as sites of memory (Moshenska 2007); and highlights archaeological work as a situated, meaningful, and political project (González-Tennant 2014). As an anticolonial methodology, oral history can create space for community-driven dialogues that recenter narratives away from the colonial frameworks that forefront violence and toward generative frameworks rooted in experience and hope-based resistance (Montgomery 2023). In the world of community-based and collaborative archaeology, oral history is a tool for making archaeology relevant, accountable, and dialogic in both practice and interpretation.

As data, oral histories function as sources of narrated information that can contribute to more holistic interpretations of the past. Abrams (2010) provides several critical lenses through which we might make sense of oral historical data: as performance, memory, and co-created document, among others. As an archaeologist, I wanted to treat the oral histories I collected with the same systematic consideration as the archaeological data. I also recognized that in my oral history work I was recording stories with descendants of European settler communities and Mexican migrants of the twentieth century. The contested histories we explored together involved themes of settler colonialism, Indigenous displacement, segregation, and notions of belonging. There is the risk of simply perpetuating settler narratives and mythologies without analytical care. This, and some of the unexpected provocations of the encounters discussed earlier, encouraged me to use narrative analysis to understand not just what people were saying but also how they were using language to create meaning, memory, and identity through storytelling (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012; Perrino 2011, 2015).

We recorded more than oral history interviews over the course of the project. After transcription, I coded them based on emergent themes. I then selected narratives, re-transcribed them based on linguistic conventions (Figure 2; De Fina 2011), and conducted narrative analyses to examine patterns in language, storytelling, and content to understand strategies that people were using to make and convey meaning about place, history, and migration. Some examples of patterns were interactional elements of the interview itself (Wortham 2000), the racialization of language (Rosa 2016), how narrators call on known and imagined “figures of personhood” (Koven 2015) or evoke other’s voices in their own storytelling (Wortham 2001), how they navigate notions of time and space (Bakhtin 1981; De Fina 2003; Dick 2010; Perrino 2015), and how they orient themselves and others in the world (Modan and Shuman 2011). These linguistic analyses informed how I analyzed both my archaeological and narrative data, prompting me to think about the ways people also draw on meaningful concepts in material interactions (Bakhtin 1981). They also helped me make sense of space and time in multigenerational processes of place-making, from settler-colonial mythologies to the spatialization and segregation of language (German, English, and Spanish; Markert 2022b).

I sent the final product—the published dissertation—to people I interviewed and included in the analysis, some of whom have (self-reportedly) now read my full dissertation. Some have even given me paginated notes. This serves as a reminder that data collection and publication are mere moments in a broader conversation that is the co-production of knowledge within communities. Oral history also reminds us of this broader conversation: despite scholarly efforts to diligently record, transcribe, publish, and set things on paper, oral narratives continue to exist in a more dynamic sphere of relationships and dialogue. We enter this sphere when we work with communities. It provides necessary perspective to the work that we do.

Into the Community Archive(s)

In 2017, in the parking lot of a public library, I met a local resident who would later become a regular partner in historical research. From the back of his pickup truck, he pulled out a box filled with stacks of old papers—old letters and correspondence, receipts, ledgers, jail records—all from around the 1890s.

Transcription Conventions

(Adapted from De Fina 2011)

((laughter))	Nonlinguistic actions or sounds
(.)	Pause in speech (>1 second)
.	End of declarative statement (falling intonation with noticeable pause)
?	End of interrogative statement (rising intonation with noticeable pause)
,	Continuation of same utterance after slight pause or change in intonation
> <	Speed of utterance increases
< >	Speed of utterance decreases
—	Latched utterances by the same speaker or by different speakers
<u>Underline</u>	Repetition
Bold	Emphatic stress
[]	Overlap between utterances

1	PM	So, <did your parents speak German in the home when you were,>
2		[or Alsatian?]
3	ER	[Ah, my], my grandmother Haby, my mother's mother spoke Alsace .
4		Ah, my daddy's mother spoke German .
5		But not to me .
6		I was the only grandchild for seven years, on both sides,
7		and so as a consequence, I would —
8		— >I can remember, < the girls and the boys telling them,
9		“Now, you talk to that child in English. (.) Mama, quit that.” ((voice raised))
10		((Laughter))
11	PM	So, they wanted to, them to talk to you in [English? No?]
12	ER	[Yes.] They wanted them to learn the English language,
13		and they wanted this child not to learn German.
14		[Or Alsace.]
15	PM	[So, you never], you never learned, never [learned German or Alsace?]
16	ER	[No, I didn't.]
17		When I, I got older, I could make myself understood sometimes,
18		but nowadays, the Spanish comes before the, the German or the Alsace, yes.

Figure 2. Linguistic anthropology transcription conventions (adapted from De Fina 2011) and an example of an oral history excerpt, re-transcribed for narrative analysis as part of the Castro Colonies Oral History Project (Patricia G. Markert, 2022).

He told me that as a child, he had saved these papers when one of the old buildings in D'Hanis was demolished in the 1950s. He also had a binder of hundreds of photographs that he had accumulated over the years by visiting other community members and scanning their images. This was my first introduction to a community culture of archiving in Medina County, a practice that was rooted deeply in place, history, and relationships. He allowed me to take the box into the library and create digital records for my own growing collection of materials. This experience repeated itself often throughout the next several years, and I came to realize that the process of archiving was itself an act of community building and place-making (Bastian and Flinn 2019; Flinn 2007; Flinn et al. 2009).

Archival research is a core component of historical archaeology, and archaeologists have incorporated archival materials into projects in creative and interdisciplinary ways (Beaudry 1988; Flewelling 2020; Norton 2020; Platt 2020; see also ike [2024] and Alicia Odewale and Parker Van Valkenburgh's Mapping Historical Trauma in Tulsa (MHTT) from 1921–2021 Project). I originally approached archival research as background research, working with established archives like the Portal to Texas History (University of North Texas Libraries) and University of Texas San Antonio's (UTSA) Special Collections to piece together historical context for the projects. I expected I would encounter primary source materials like photographs in people's homes, but as I developed relationships in the community, scanning personal archives emerged as its own form of fieldwork.

At nearly every house that I visited, someone had some form of historical documentation that they retrieved for me to digitize. In response, I developed an on-the-go digitization method to quickly scan

materials, which consisted of an iPad Pro, a scanning application (iScanner), a portable arm to hold the tablet parallel to the table, a foldable LED light, and a piece of black poster board. I scanned boxes of old newspapers and photographs, arrest records and store ledgers, letters that had been translated from German, personal collections, and scrapbooks. Sometimes, as in this section's opening anecdote, the archive traveled to me. I recorded materials in restaurants and coffee shops. I also digitized physical materials in businesses—maps and plats at local surveyors' offices—and institutional archives, such as folders of newspaper clippings and photographs at the Institute of Texan Cultures at UTSA. Not all these were primary source materials. Folks shared copies of local histories, pamphlets, and published materials (e.g., Jack Finger's self-published 2012 book, *A Walking Tour of Beautiful Downtown D'Hanis . . . With Detours*), and I scanned these as well. By 2019, I had amassed more than 3,500 digital images, including photographs, maps, letters, self-published family histories, newspaper clippings, and albums (Figure 3).

At the beginning of the project, I underestimated the sheer amount of archival material that community members would share with me during our work together. The items I scanned for my own research were a mere sample of a much larger, ever-evolving community archive. Through my own process of creating a digital archive, I began to recognize how relationships, movement, and trust factored into the ways that people navigated archival research and shared materials in community. I was being invited into spaces of archival expertise and allowed access to personal decisions and collections. Importantly, this archival network existed long before I arrived, and my presence became yet another part of that living archive.

My methods for digitizing archival records, as it turned out, also produced a way to visualize the day-to-day interactions on which community-based research is built. When I sat down to sort through the material, I realized that the iPad had an added feature—it geolocated each scan—allowing me to map an entire two years of archival research onto the landscape using ArcGIS (Figure 4). Given that the archive reflected direct work with community partners, it became a manifestation of the relationships and movements needed to participate in this practice of community archiving. It may not have produced a roadmap, but it reflected the routes and places we occupied together during the research process. It also opened up possibilities for further analysis, including an examination of the ways that archival materials repeat across this landscape (e.g., representing shared materials) or present gaps, fissures, and erasures in community and history (Flewellen 2020; Hartman 2008), such as the division between Mexican and Alsatian-German representation in the materials, a present-day reflection of the segregated landscape under Jim Crow and its legacies.

The nature of the community archive is similar to that of the oral histories: it exists in and through relationships, in a state of constant flux, and is fluid where my recording and publishing practices attempted to make it concrete. My research archive is part of a broader practice of collecting that continues in the community, and understanding it as such prompted me to think about archival materials—and the histories and identities inherent to those practices of collecting—in ways I might not have otherwise.

Close-Range Photogrammetry: Ruins as Sites of Digital Engagement

When it came time to record the ruins of Old D'Hanis, my team and I arrived with notebooks, iPads, hard hats, hedge clippers, and a chainsaw. The archaeological component of the research took place in November and December 2018, building on a year of preparation and community-based exploratory work. With the launch of the Old D'Hanis Archaeological Mapping Project, we set out to record six structures that dated to the early decades (1847–1860) of the Old D'Hanis settlement: five rubble-rock ruins and one log dogtrot cabin.³

The goal of the archaeology was to record and map the structures and their locations using a range of methods, from architectural elevation drawing to geographic information systems (GIS). This contributed to an analysis of architectural and spatial decisions made by Alsatian and German migrants in the early decades of the settlement. After more than a year of community conversation, I was also interested in the decisions and place-making practices of later occupants who shaped the buildings, including generations of descendants and Mexican families who made the old rock houses their homes in the early twentieth century. As we cleared the structures (Figure 5) and then drew and photographed them, we were attentive to the biographies of the buildings themselves: a change in building material, an addition

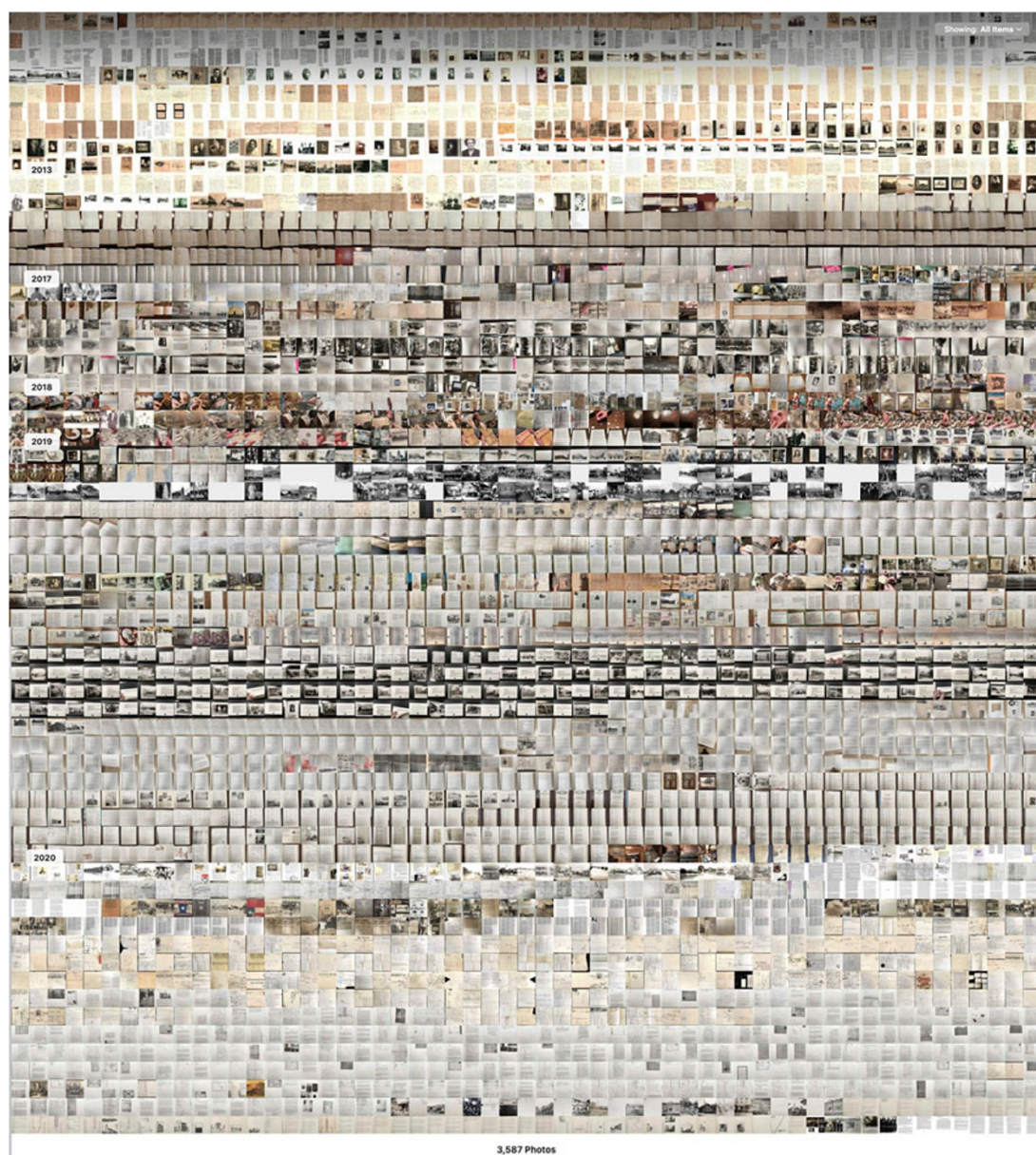


Figure 3. Nearly 4,000 digital scans from community-based archival research, taken using an iPad Pro and compiled/organized by date in the Apple photos app (Patricia G. Markert, 2021).

or expansion, evidence of remodeling, or the (occasional) inclusion of modern amenities like plumbing or electricity. The crew conducted surface survey, mapped areas of the structure by hand, photographed surface finds and architectural details using a project iPad, and completed scaled elevation drawings of walls and significant architectural features such as fireplaces (Figure 6).

After clearing, we photographed the extant walls and surrounding landscape to create 3D models of the structures.⁴ A month or so before heading to the field in 2018, I had learned about close-range photogrammetry as an archaeological field method and decided to add it to the project. This choice ended up shaping the project in significant ways. At the time, photogrammetry was emerging as an accessible, fast, and low-cost method for imaging sites, buildings, objects, and landscapes with a high level of accuracy and precision (Prentiss 2016; Sapirstein 2016; Sapirstein and Murray 2017;

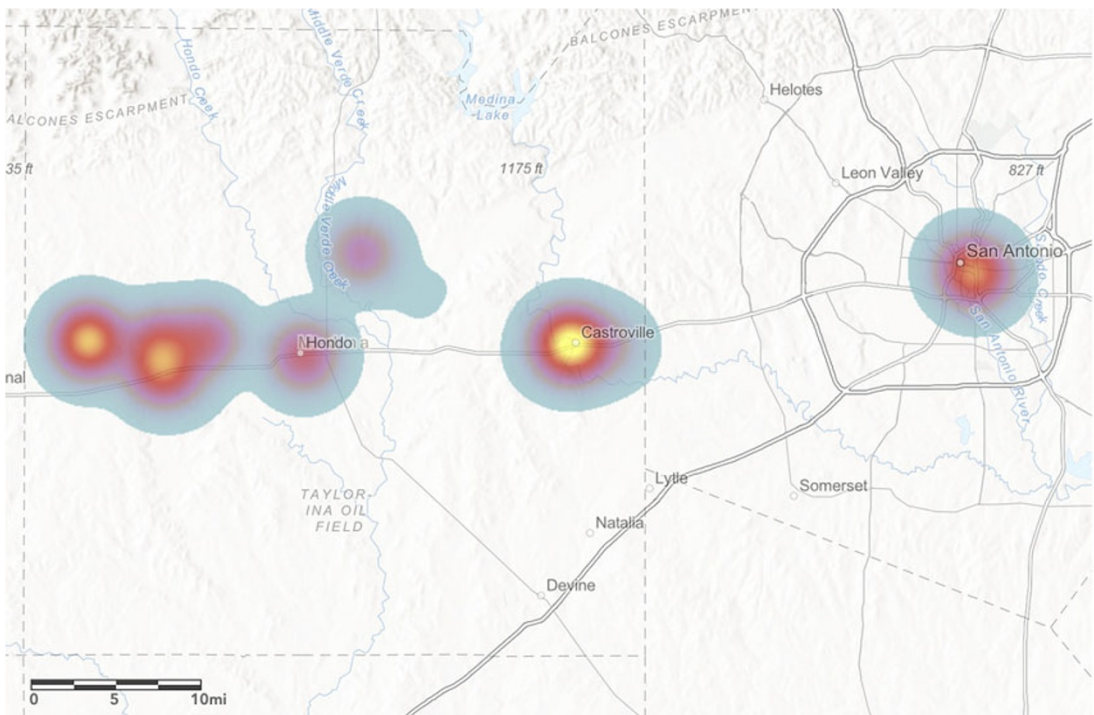


Figure 4. Heat map generated in ArcGIS Online by inputting the geotagged locations of digital archival scans taken using an iPad Pro during fieldwork (Patricia G. Markert, 2021).



Figure 5. Photographs of one of the ruins recorded by the Old D'Hanis Archaeological Mapping Project, before and after the crew cleared overgrowth (Patricia G. Markert, 2018).

Yamafune et al. 2017; Yilmaz et al. 2007). Close-range photogrammetry generally consists of photos taken by hand. Although many projects use drones to capture photographs, which provides an exciting set of possibilities, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are not always the most accessible or cost-effective

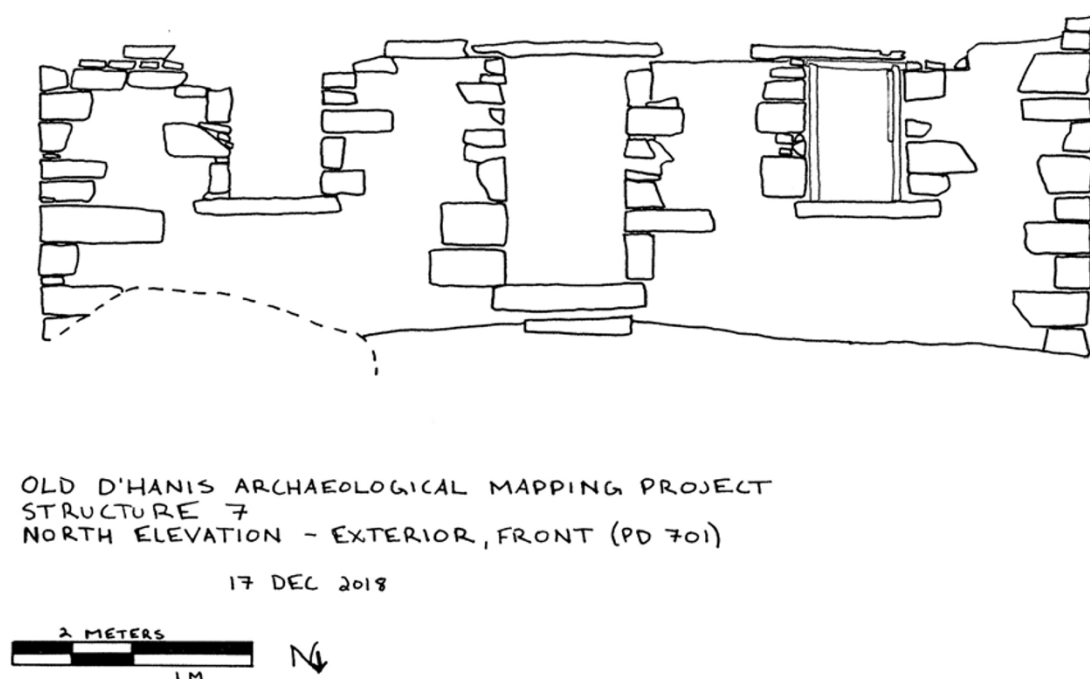


Figure 6. Architectural elevation drawing of one of the ruins recorded by the Old D'Hanis Archaeological Mapping Project (Patricia G. Markert, 2018).

option, and trees and brush would have made their use difficult at several of the ruins we recorded. Although time and effort are trade-offs, close-range photogrammetry provides a layer of relative accessibility to the 3D modeling of architectural features. It is possible to implement this method with a DSLR camera, a laptop with a graphics processor, and photogrammetry software such as Agisoft Metashape Pro.⁵ I included photogrammetry as a method late in the research design process in part because I was curious—would it work?—but also based on a strong sense that the 3D models would enable important types of engagement for the research and in community.

The models made a range of analytic options available to me digitally: creating scaled plan views of the structures in Adobe Illustrator (Figure 7), setting scales and measuring between points, and zooming in and out to reassess structural details. But beyond the research, the models became new sites for community connections and knowledge sharing. This builds on an emerging body of literature on digital, multimodal, reflective, interdisciplinary, and community-based approaches to mapping and GIS in archaeology (De Nardi 2014; Gillings et al. 2019; González-Tennant 2016; Norton 2020; Platt 2020; Warner-Smith 2020; see also Bodenhamer et al. [2015] for perspectives from the digital humanities).

Many of the sites we recorded remain inaccessible for several reasons—safety, private property, or difficult terrain—so the models became an important point of access. Although we conducted site visits and tours during fieldwork, many of the people I worked with were in their eighties and older. Visiting a ruin, which could require some hiking and climbing over tricky terrain, was simply not possible. During and after fieldwork, I was able to bring preliminary models to people's homes or to community events, allowing us to compare old photographs and discuss our observations of the ruins (Figure 8). The ruins were sites of memory and nostalgia, often with direct familial connections, so the ability to view and explore them virtually was a valuable option for those with limited access and mobility.

The models also became, and remain, sites for remote engagement. In 2020, sitting in an apartment in Eugene, Oregon, during the early months of the COVID pandemic and with the thick smoke of the wildfires outside my window, I presented the 3D models to community members at a Castro Colonies Heritage Association meeting on Zoom. We were able to look closely together at architectural details

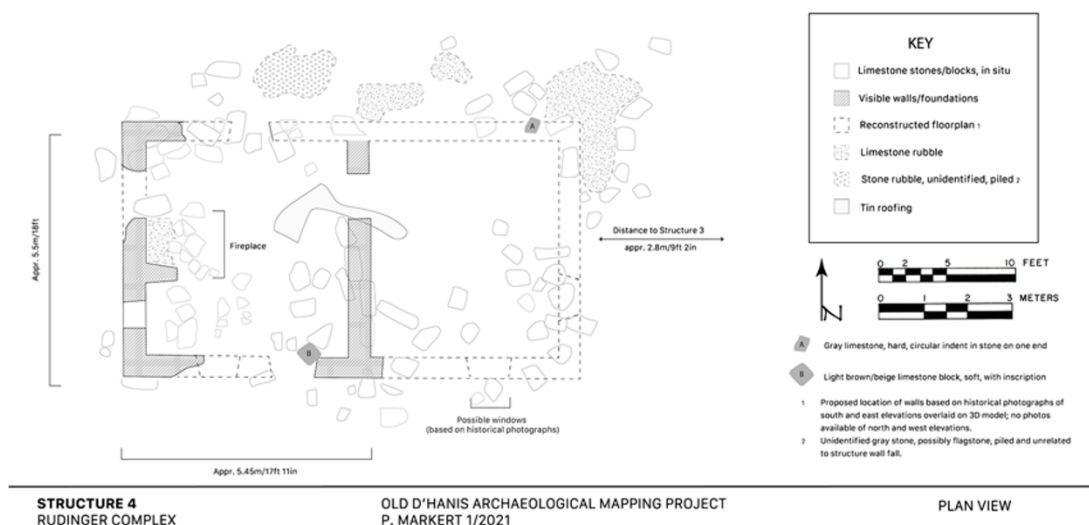


Figure 7. Digital plan view created in Adobe Illustrator using scaled 3D model generated in Agisoft MetaShape Pro (Patricia G. Markert, 2021).

despite the thousand-mile distance. Later, in 2025, I sent files from a more recent model I had made of St. Dominic's Church (this time using a DJI Mavic 3E drone) to community partners in Texas from my home in London, Ontario. They 3D printed the model, adding structural elements as part of a local effort to stabilize the ruin. In 2018, we could not have envisioned either scenario, but the process of photogrammetry had enabled a continued conversation around the archaeology that transcended time, space, and circumstance.

Layered Pasts and Emergent Interdisciplinarity

During archaeological fieldwork in 2018, a crew member and I conducted a driving tour of D'Hanis with a then 99-year-old member of the community, someone who became a good friend over the course of the project and has since passed away. At her prompting, we slowed at the ruins but stayed in the car, glimpsing them through the sparse brush. A few buildings were visible for the first time in recent memory due to the clearing efforts of the crew.

Stopping at one structure, which was little more than a few standing walls, she told us, "This was a beautiful house. Oh, I loved this house." We talked about her memory of the building, its L-shape and brick patio that was now barely visible under a thin layer of soil. She reminisced about the woman who had lived there, a rather severe aunt whom she remembered walking to town in her black dress each day. Others in the car, members of a younger generation, talked about playing in the ruins of the house and being chastised by their parents. The archaeological crew had just finished recording the site, so drawings, architectural details, and surface finds were fresh in our minds. Several different engagements with place mingled in the car as the ruin sat silently in our view. I was reminded of an earlier driving tour with another local resident and friend, a member of D'Hanis's Mexican American community, and his memories of the solid walls of his childhood, now a ruin.

What these moments demonstrate is that although I am separating methods in this discussion, they and the data they produced were inseparable in practice. One final methodological challenge that emerged was how to engage with the wide range of interdisciplinary data collected during the project. How do we present multifaceted data in a way that reflects the process of its creation—the way that community-based work prompts us toward interdisciplinary research? I reflect on this briefly, acknowledging that the answer to this question is a long-term one that is still in progress.

These landscapes of memory are not visible in the ruins we recorded, but they became legible through these engagements with people and place. When I wrote the architectural analyses for the buildings



Figure 8. Nineteenth-century photograph of one of the structures recorded by the Old D'Hanis Archaeological Mapping Project alongside the 3D model of the ruin, generated using Agisoft Metashape Pro (photograph courtesy of E. Rothe; 3D model by Patricia G. Markert, 2020).

after three years of community-based fieldwork, the result was an interdisciplinary layering of data: oral histories like these alongside archival fragments, drawings, and models of the ruins themselves. Learning to thoughtfully layer interdisciplinary data was yet another method that community-based work made necessary. Data drawn across methods create new conversations and insights, allowing us to think about places and people's engagements with them across time and space. In my dissertation—the first publication of these results—the layering of data created multigenerational biographies of the buildings and their residents. They traced the histories of the structures across multiple periods of occupation, use, and abandonment, examining the different meaningful engagements that families and communities formed with the buildings through time, across both Alsatian-German and Mexican migration to D'Hanis.

We are continuing to experiment with interdisciplinary applications six years later. In June 2024, with a team of students from Western University, we traveled to Medina County to present the initial version of a virtual archaeology game called *Discover Old D'Hanis*. This game layers the reconstructed landscape of D'Hanis (ca. 1880) with 3D models, artistic reconstructions, archival data, archaeological notes and photographs, and excerpts from oral histories from German, Alsatian, and Mexican descendants. Players can walk through the town, discovering data points and piecing together a story of the place, its history, and its community through time. The student team comprised two fourth-year computer sciences students, who designed the virtual world and gameplay, and a master's student in music, who contributed historic sound design and an original composition based on German folk music.

Nearly 100 community members—many familiar faces and many new ones—attended the event. In an astonishing, entirely unprompted moment, members of the older generation in the crowd began to sign a German folksong as the music student presented the songs that inspired her work (Fohn 2024). This new arm of the project is a work in progress, but it illustrates how new applications and research directions continue to emerge through ongoing conversations with students and community members.

Challenges and Opportunities for Community-Based Archaeology

Working with others is challenging work because relationships are challenging work. An archaeology rooted in relationships has the potential to challenge, unsettle, and change us (Kelvin and Hodgetts 2020; Lyons and Supernant 2020:10; see also Rizvi 2020). The relationships through which we build community-based projects, like any relationship, are understandings between people. In whatever capacity, we are sharing our lives and something of ourselves with others. It is a matter of trust as much as ethics, and it is a two-way-street.

The positions we occupy as researchers require an ongoing commitment to transparency, humility, accountability, and an openness to change and new direction (see Westmont and Clay 2021). At the same time, centering community requires recognition that our titles and resources are hollow without welcome and access from those with (and for) whom we work. Outside academic or professional frameworks, sharing power and building trust may not resemble traditional methods like meetings or discussions. They might look like sharing a meal, accepting an invitation, taking a car ride, attending a funeral, or getting to know each other's toddlers and grandchildren as years pass. My daughter has now joined me in Texas three years in a row. She has spent time at people's homes and at community events, ridden in trucks on ranches, and fed sheep that graze the ruins of Old D'Hanis (Figure 9). Many of my long-term community partners have watched her grow, and she knows their names. I have been privileged to have her join me, though managing childcare alongside project and community commitments has taken considerable work (2025). Her presence has become an indelible part of the fabric of the project.

One challenge here—in addition to doing archaeology as a parent (Camp 2019)—is nurturing relationships beyond the bounds of a research project. Doing so can be wonderful and generative, but our ability to build long-term relationships as archaeologists, and often as outsiders, may not always match our willingness or desire. Constraints like time, funding, graduate degree timelines, travel, family, and the demands of new research projects exist for everyone in different variations and capacities, and they too change over time (Rizvi 2020). There is no easy answer or one-size-fits-all solution, except for a commitment to dialogue and transparency, a respect for the very real work of building relationships, and an awareness of our limitations.

It is also important to recognize that it is often, if not always, a privilege to engage in community-based research as an academic. A roadmap to community-based practice does not exist because we, as researchers in community, occupy different identities, bodies, and social privileges that shape the way we move through the world with others, as well as our own experiences of safety and access. The research methods I describe here are situated and contextualized by my presentation as a white, able-bodied, cisgender woman in South Texas. As a researcher, I can confront issues of racialization, segregation, and settler colonialism from a place of relative safety, if not without some discomfort. Many places in the United States, including the state of Texas and farther afield, are taking strategic legislative, political, and policy-based actions to exclude and harm BIPOC, LGBTQAI2S+, and immigrant members of their communities, as well as archaeologists or students seeking to do this type of work. Indeed, fieldwork and professional settings writ large can still be unsafe spaces for many archaeologists, particularly minoritized members of the discipline (e.g., Hodgetts et al. 2020; Markert et al. 2025; Meyers et al. 2018; Voss 2021a). This raises ethical issues for community-based archaeology that we must collectively address in our politics and professions (D'Alpoim Guedes et al. 2021; Franklin et al. 2020; ike et al. 2020; Voss 2021b).

Collaborative approaches are time-consuming and expensive; even when we get creative, field research costs money and relationship building takes time. I was fortunate to receive funding to do



Figure 9. My daughter and I at the children's archaeology exhibit I designed for the Castro Colonies Living History Center, Castroville, Texas, taken two years apart (photos taken by Jeremy Trombley, August 2023 and June 2025).

this work from both local and national sources, all of which expressed support for community-based approaches. Financial barriers already pose steep obstacles to entering and succeeding in archaeology (Heath-Stout and Hannigan 2020). Engagements with community, collective project planning, public-facing outputs, and maintaining relationships can mean slower routes to publication and other traditional milestones on the tenure track. The professional landscape is changing slowly, but

community-based work remains challenging to fund (Montgomery and Fryer 2023), even though targeted funds like the Wenner-Gren Engaged Anthropology Grant offer opportunities that did not exist a decade ago.

Concluding Thoughts for Paths Forward

As Natasha Lyons and Kisha Supernant write in their introduction to *Archaeologies of the Heart* (2020:10), “Without the relationships we build, archaeology would not be possible, yet we do not always appreciate the impacts those relations have on the ways knowledge gets generated in our field and the ways we interpret the past.” When I started this project, I had a research design: I sought to compare two nineteenth-century towns using a set of methods that seemed appropriate to the task: oral history, archaeological survey and mapping, and some archival research. On paper, it is easy to check the boxes: I used those methods, these were the limitations, these were the results. But what I had not quite anticipated was the power of relationships and the ways they prompted me in new creative directions throughout the process. The dissertation I wrote four years later reflected a shared exploration of space, archives, ruins, and stories that exceeded the bounds of what I alone would have thought possible when I arrived at Holy Cross Church in 2017. Rather than engaging with a single migration event, it reflected the many intersecting migrations that shaped the area (Markert 2020), its (often contested) heritage, and the vibrancy of its communities.

Being able to develop, communicate, and execute a research design is a necessary skill in archaeology, one I now have the privilege of teaching graduate students in my classes. In teaching and mentoring, we can also take care to orient students to the flexible and relational realities of fieldwork with communities. Methods may change. Projects will change. The product may not be what we envisioned, but it will reflect the relationships we developed along the way, and those relationships and experiences have the potential to shape the project as much as (if not, at times, more than) our initial conceptions.

This article has been an exploration in charting the ways that methods emerge in conversation with community and how relationships lead us in new directions as we move through the research process. It has also been a practice in narrating the small moments and interactions that shape projects and their methods. There is no roadmap for community-based research, but there is the work of building and navigating relationships and of being open to the occasionally unexpected directions that research can take when we work with others. In hindsight, walking into the church at the start of this project was a practice in confronting the unknown and a lesson in letting go. It may not have been outlined in my research design, but the act of showing up and being present—that day in 2017, and all the times that came after—became one of the most critical and necessary methods for building a community-based project. When we locate ourselves in community, we follow each other’s lead.

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Data Availability Statement. The oral history and archival data from the project were collected under Institutional Review Board (STUDY00000108) approval through Binghamton University and are not available publicly. The 3D models generated as part of the project are publicly available through the project's Sketchfab.com page, www.sketchfab.com/fieldnotesfromtexas. At the time of publication, an early-access version of the *Discover Old D'Hanis* game is available for free download on Steam, with instructions and updates posted to www.discoverolddhanis.com.

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Notes

1. Collaborative archaeology projects are often defined by the level and scope of collaborative decision-making and control by community members at each stage of a project (Colwell 2016; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008). Such models are incredibly important, particularly for projects by/for communities harmed by settler colonialism, enslavement, white supremacy, and genocide. Archaeologists should not be the only or the most prominent voice leading the research. I opt for the term “community-based” rather than “collaborative” for the projects I discuss here because the latter type of collective decision-making and control was not possible at many stages, for a variety of reasons: the sheer number of relationships, folks being busy with their lives and unable to participate in the way academic frameworks require, people coming into the project and wanting to engage in different ways and for different periods of time, and maintaining some academic control meant I was able to ask questions that I thought were important about settler colonialism and segregation while also addressing community needs and interests. In general, I followed others' leads regarding their involvement and tried to honor the wide variety of ways that manifested.
2. My interviews generally began with an informed consent process, a loose list of questions, an overview of the procedure, and the introduction of equipment. We would generally schedule oral histories at homes or a public location like the genealogy room of the local library. To record the interviews, I used a digital voice recorder (ZOOM H2N), as well as a backup (usually an iPhone, iPad, or MacBook Pro). After the informed consent process (Binghamton IRB STUDY00000108, approved 8/10/17), we would start with some information to orient the interview—the date and location, our names, the interviewee's date of birth—before beginning the conversation. Interviews conducted with individuals and groups lasted anywhere between 45 minutes and three hours. Postprocessing included transcription and coding using MaxQDA, a qualitative data analysis software.
3. Dogtrot houses are a common style of log construction throughout Texas. Their floorplan generally consists of two log pens, or rooms, on either side of an open area, covered by a single roof (Jordan 1978). This structure is the only remaining example of a log building in D'Hanis and was featured in Terry Jordan's *Texas Log Buildings* (1978:72–73), where he noted that aspects of its construction might relate to techniques learned in Alsace or Switzerland.
4. Photographing a structure for photogrammetry requires careful attention to surfaces and planes. The goal was to create systematic photosets of a 3D object (in this case, a ruin) that could be imported into Agisoft Metashape Pro to generate the 3D models (Sapirstein and Murray 2017; Yilmaz et al. 2007). The photographic process feels a bit like an elaborate dance. Standing several feet back, stopping at approximate 3-foot intervals around the structure, I would take a series of vertically aligned shots (i.e., ground level, hip level, shoulder level, above the head). This process was repeated around the entire perimeter and then again in each of the interior spaces, with extra care taken to record doorways, windows, and other smaller features. Each structure yielded about 700 to 2,000 photographs, depending on its size. This process took between 30 minutes and three hours, but it allowed for attention to small details that translated to the models themselves. Drone photogrammetry may have sped this process, but the tree cover made this impractical, if not impossible, and I believe the work benefited from this careful attention to the material structure. While cost effective, manually capturing photographs for close-range photogrammetry can be a labor-intensive process that requires a lot of time standing and moving, something that will not be possible for everyone.
5. I used a MacBook Pro with an i7 processor to generate the earlier models for this project, some of which would take 1–2 days to process. With increased processing power and newer machines, a wider variety of laptop and desktop computers can adequately run Agisoft and other photogrammetry software. As a faculty member at Western University, I have used a Lenovo ThinkStation, which can process the same models in hours. Once imported, Agisoft Metashape Pro aligns photos by algorithmically identifying millions of points of convergence between the images, which it then uses to generate three-dimensional point clouds and meshes. Then, there is postprocessing: “cleaning” with the select-and-delete function, filling holes, generating textures, and preparing for export.

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