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Ball State University Historic Preservation Alumni Newsletter www.bsu.edu/preservation
ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: ELIZABETH JOHNSON - MSHP CLASS OF 1998

For this issue’s Alumni feature, we catch up with Elizabeth Johnson, BSU MSHP Class of 1998. Upon graduation, Johnson was hired by the South Carolina Department of Archives and History (SCDAH) and has served as the Deputy State Preservation Officer since 2007. She was gracious enough to take a little time out of helping to guide the efforts to repair damage done by heavy flooding in October of last year to talk with us about her path to preservation by way of Muncie.

Preservation + Innovation:
Hi Elizabeth! So, where are you from originally?

Elizabeth Johnson: I was born in Baton Rouge, LA, but moved at the age of four to the mountains of western North Carolina, specifically to the small town of Cullowhee, which is the home to Western Carolina University, where my dad was a professor of computer science. It is about an hour west of Asheville, NC, and 30 minutes from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

P+I: Were you interested in history and or architecture as a child?

EJ: Not until I was a teenager. Cullowhee was a beautiful mountain community but with few obvious historic buildings. When I was 14, I participated in a local British-American Exchange and got to spend a month that summer with a family in England. They lived in a small village in Sussex in a cottage from the 1600s, complete with a narrow circular stair and head bumping big beams. They loved historic places and gardens and were members of the British National Trust. I remember going with them to castles and historic houses and cathedrals. That experience opened my eyes to historic architecture and history. It hadn’t occured to me that you could study historic buildings.

P+I: From there you worked for The Customer Center after graduation. What kind of work do they do?

EJ: It was a marketing research firm, focused primarily on doing research about advertising for the agri-business sector of all things. So we worked for large companies that made agri-chemicals, pesticides, medicines for livestock, etc.

P+I: Why did you decide to move on to graduate school to get your Masters?

EJ: Working for the Customer Center I got to travel around the country, mostly in the Midwest but also as far as California. When I would go to a new place and have a little spare time, I found myself always wanting to see their historic places. I remember going to Iowa and visiting one of the National Trust sites, Brucemore, the bridges of Madison County and John Wayne’s boyhood home. During this time I had also become a member of the National Trust and so was getting their magazine and seeing examples of historic places all over the country. That combined with my introduction to historic architecture in London as an undergrad led to my realization that architectural history and historic preservation were actually a field in which to work, one that I found more interesting than the market research I was doing. I figured that one way to break into the field was to go back to school and study in the field. I originally thought I’d probably work at a historic house museum, as my
first exposure to the field was through Old Salem, a living history museum in Winston-Salem. I really had no idea of the wide range of organizations involved in the field, such as state historic preservation offices, or of the advocacy involved at a preservation nonprofit at the state or local level.

**P+I: What ultimately drew you to Ball State University?**

EJ: I liked the idea that the program was in the architecture school and that the focus was on buildings and architecture. Other programs nearer to NC focused more on history or planning. I also liked the idea of living in another part of the country.

**P+I: I see you did your internship with the National Trust. What did that entail?**

EJ: I was very fortunate to land that internship and get to live and work in DC for a summer. My project was to research and write an Information Series booklet on the topic of how SHPOs and statewide nonprofits could work and partner together. Strengthening nonprofit preservation organizations was a real focus of the National Trust during that time and I worked for the director of that effort. Little did I know that I would end up working in a SHPO and interacting with a statewide nonprofit. The Trust also would arrange for its group of summer interns to make site visits to projects and organizations around DC to learn more about the field.

**P+I: You’ve been with the SC Dept. of Archives and History in some capacity since you graduated from BSU. How did you end up in South Carolina?**

EJ: After finishing at Ball State, I was offered a job with the SC SHPO as the local government coordinator, basically working with our Certified Local Government and encouraging other local governments to become CLGs. I did that for four years and then became a supervisor in the office, and then the deputy SHPO when my boss retired.

**P+I: What are some of your responsibilities as Deputy SHPO?**

EJ: We are a very small staff so I handle some of the Section 106 project reviews directly for a few agencies. Also, I currently organize the state preservation conference, partner with our nonprofit organization to do the statewide awards program, send a monthly newsletter, hire and train new staff, answer questions from staff and the public, attend our Review Board meetings, go on site visits to projects, negotiate agreements for Section 106, serve on the steering committee for our online GIS cultural resources information program, and am currently writing our new state preservation plan. I’ve also had the opportunity to work with the National History Day program in South Carolina, develop the state tax credit program in the state, serve on the NCSHPO board, and the SC Hall of Fame board.

**P+I: How is South Carolina recovering from the flooding it experienced over a year ago and how have you aided in the recovery process?**

EJ: We’re making progress, but much remains to be done. Many bridges have been repaired and most folks whose homes were damaged are in temporary housing. We’ve met a couple of times with FEMA staff to review our existing programmatic agreement for how to review federal projects under Section 106. Few historic buildings were damaged as best we can tell. The Columbia Canal, built 1820s, enlarged 1880s, still used today

Dedication of the historical marker for the Myrtle Beach Colored School. (Photo courtesy of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History)
for water for the city, had the most significant and noticeable damage with a 60-foot breach in it. We’ve visited the damaged area and talked with the city and FEMA about the canal. The repairs haven’t started yet, but it will likely be in the multi millions. I have also handled a few expedited reviews for our SCDOT as they replace washed away bridges.

**P+I: What kinds of things are you and the SHPO office doing to prepare for future weather events/resiliency/climate change?**

**EJ:** We haven’t tackled anything specific to climate change. We continue to work to make access to our historic property information easier, releasing a 2.0 version of our online GIS, and preparing to scan all our historic survey cards. We have supported a couple of local projects through sub-grants that provided detailed information about historic buildings in the low country in case they had to be repaired after a damaging event. One was a 3D laser scan of a colonial era church. I think some of our local governments along the coast have begun to look at the issue and formulate policies at the local level. We are tracking this issue and trying to learn from the experiences of others.

**P+I: Do you have any wishes and or hopes for the future of historic preservation?**

**EJ:** That somehow the message of reusing and rehabbing continues to spread and gain acceptance among the broader public. It would be great for the continued use and reuse of older and historic buildings to be the first choice rather than something that communities have to rally around and force the decision makers to value. I wish that the desire for new and shiny would be replaced with an appreciation for the durable, well made, and well-cared for. Also, I wish the digital revolution would make it possible for small and rural places to be realistic choices for folks to live in and be able to afford to care for their historic buildings. I think the successes in communities around the country, large and small, have shown that this is possible, and that people gravitate towards established, durable, places and spaces. I just hope that the momentum continues to grow so that instead of wanting to spend millions for a new building, decision makers would prefer instead to spend money to repair and rehab an existing one.

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**PRESERVATION EVENTS**

**ASHP PRESERVATION CAREER DAY**

February 24th  
College of Architecture and Planning Building  
7 pm in Room 410  
Five local preservation professionals (and Ball State alums) will be speaking about their careers and providing advice for up and coming preservationists as they look to enter the job market. For questions please email Andrea Kern at ansowlie@bsu.edu and see article page 6 for more information.

**SPRING BREAK**  
March 7th - 11th

**ASHP SPRING FIELDTTRIP**

April 16th  
Louisville, KY  
Join the Associated Student for Historic Preservation as they travel to Louisville, Kentucky to visit a few of their many preservation successes and tour an in-progress project. For questions, please email Leigh House at slsmith5@bsu.edu or Ryan Hamlett at rmhamlett@bsu.edu.

**PRESERVING HISTORIC PLACES, INDIANA’S ANNUAL PRESERVATION CONFERENCE**

April 26th - 29th  
Vincennes, IN  
Save the dates and join us in celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act and our great state’s bicentennial. Keep an eye out for our program head Mary Ann Heidemann and students presenting their theses, both on Thursday and our BSU alumni get-together following dinner on Wednesday night (time and place TBD) and student presentations. The conference agenda can be found here.
VINCENT MICHAEL VISITS BSU

Chair of Landmarks Illinois. He has worked in the field of heritage development, tourism planning, community planning, historic architecture, education and design in a wide variety of capacities.

Dr. Michael presented his lecture “From Main Street to Heritage Areas: The Power of Preservation” to an assembly of students from all disciplines within CAP, before continuing on to Indianapolis to lecture at Indiana Landmarks the following day. Though he was preaching to the choir for the MSHP attendees, Dr. Michael touted the importance of including heritage conservation in planning for the future. Hopefully, some of the assembled audience came away from his lecture with a new perspective on what preservation IS. Rather than a singular, rigid approach for all situations, Dr. Michael suggested that it is an opportunity to work with a community and ask “what is special about your place and how can we bring it into the future?”

ASHP TO HOST PRESERVATION CAREER DAY

Associated Students for Historic Preservation (ASHP) Vice-President Andrea Kern spearheaded the organization of CAP’s Historic Preservation Career Day which will be held Wednesday, February 24th at 7 pm in the CAP building Room 410.

Timed to coincide with the final day of the Architecture Job Fair, ASHP’s HP Career day will feature preservation professionals from several walks of life, many of whom are also Ball State alumni.

Speakers include:

- Britta Anderson, Architectural Historian at Butler, Fairman and Seufert, Inc., received her Bachelors in Anthropology from Purdue and before coming to BSU receive her MSHP in 2013.
- Emily Mack, newly appointed director of Metropolitan Development by Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett. Mack, who revieved her MSHP from Ball State in 2003, was most recently Business Development Leader at CORE Planning Strategies and was the focus of the last issue of Preservation + Innovation’s alumni spotlight.
- Christopher Myers, Preservation Planner for the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission, received his Bachelors in Urban Planning from Ball State and stayed on to receive his MSHP in 2014.
- Raina Regan, Community Preservation Specialist for Indiana Landmarks Central Regional Office. Prior to working with Landmarks, Regan worked as an Architectural Historian for the Indiana Army National Guard after graduating from BSU with her MSHP in 2010.
- Benjamin L. Ross, LEED AP of Ratio Architects in Indianapolis. Ross, who received both a BArch (2006) and MArch (2008) from Ball State, will share his experiences as Preservation Specialist for a major architectural firm.

We are fortunate to have such a fantastic group of alumni come share their experiences with current club members and CAP students who are on the cusp of embarking upon preservation careers of their own.
MSHP STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: LEIGH HOUSE

Leigh House in Turkey this past August, photo - L. House

Leigh House has been a long time fixture within the CAP building, having pursued her dual masters degrees in Historic Preservation and Architecture after receiving her BArch in 2014. As she enters her penultimate semester in Muncie, we wanted to sit down with her and ask her about her time spent at Ball State.

Preservation + Innovation:
So where do you call home, Leigh?

Leigh House: I’ve spent most of my life in Corydon, Indiana, so that’s where I call home.

P+I: And you’ve been here at Ball State for the past fifteen years, is that right?

LH: Ha! It sure seems that way! I started my freshmen year in 2010, so it will have been six and a half years when I’m done.

P+I: Have you always been interested in architecture?

LH: Yes, I’ve wanted to be an architect since the 3rd grade when I learned about Frank Lloyd Wright. Like a lot of young architects, Wright was my inspiration. I was also into Greek mythology, which developed into an interest in neoclassical architecture, which is why I also pursued historic preservation.

P+I: Why did you end up choosing to come to Ball State?

LH: That was pretty easy actually. All the way back in the 6th grade, my sister told me that I should go to Ball State because they had the best architecture program in Indiana. So since then I knew that I was going to come here. I was able to get a full ride scholarship for my undergrad and that helped a lot too. It definitely made Ball State much more attractive than some other in state options.

P+I: Were you aware of Ball State’s historic preservation program when you started here?

LH: I didn’t really learn about it until the spring of my freshman year. I immediately thought it was interesting. It was a program that was under represented within CAP, had to do with historic architecture, and was an opportunity to supplement the design skills I was learning I thought “this is something that I could really get into.”

P+I: You opted to stay here not only for your MArch, but decided to go double masters degrees and get your MSHP too. When did you decide you were going to venture down that academic path?

LH: I pretty much knew from the start that I was going to stay to get my masters degree in architecture since its required to get your license. I decided that I wanted to do the preservation program as well during my 3rd year. But during my 4th year, I was unsure if I was going to do both, or just one or the other. I ended up deciding to do both to help broaden the fields in which I could potentially work. It was also the guidance of (HP Instructor) Susan (Lankford) and (2015 MArch and MSHP graduate) Josh Stowers who encouraged me to do both. I had known Josh from high school and knew he was getting his MArch, but didn’t realize he was doing the double masters like I was considering. I thought it was interesting that we were two people from the same hometown who were pursuing a very unique path. Having him as a mentor through the process really helped me decide to do both.

P+I: What kind of internship opportunities have you had while in school?

LH: Since I’ve been doing the double masters, I’ve not had as much time to pursue as many internships as I had wanted to. But two summers ago, I had an opportunity to intern with Gensler in Washington D.C., the largest architecture firm in the world. There was just one of those random email notices we receive asking students to submit, specifically looking for students who were skilled in (the building design software) Revit. Though I was hoping to intern with a firm in Indianapolis that specialized in preservation, Gensler just kind of fell into my lap. I applied in the middle of a really busy week and forgot about it until I got a phone call from them.

P+I: Would you tell us a little bit about your studio project for Mies van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House?

LH: It started out as my 1st year architecture graduate studio project with (Professor) Jonathan Spodek and turns out that it’s going to be entered into the 2015-2016 National Trust International Student Design Competition, so I’m very, very excited about it. It’s a proposed visitors center for van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House in Plano, IL. The existing visitors center leaves something to be desired and they are looking to build an updated facility to improve
the overall experience for visitors. I took the Midcentury Modern architecture elective last semester and was inspired by Mies. Getting to design something to complement his work is very exciting. And the fact that it is a National Trust project, I felt that my experience with both program allow me to look at the project in a way that many student competitors might not approach it. I still want to do a few more edits to it before I submit it in May based on suggestions I’ve received within CAP, but they pick winners in July and hopefully I’m one of them!

P+I: This past August, you went on a week long trip to Italy and Turkey with Professor Spodek. What did you take away from that experience?

LH: Wow. Just so much! It was my first trip outside of the country. I enjoyed seeing a different culture and seeing a different way of approaching historic preservation. They take a very technology based approach in Europe, particularly in Turkey and Italy, where some of my fellow students were from. Getting experience with a different perspective on what we do was something that I really appreciated.

P+I: You currently serve as the Associate Students for Historic Preservation (ASHP) public relations officer. What have you gotten out of working with the preservation student organization in the past few years?

LH: I ended up falling into the role of public outreach for ASHP. I feel like it’s improved my communication skills, definitely, as far as reaching out to students and professionals alike. I’ve loved leading the ASHP CAP photo contest and getting to work with the other officers to develop activities and trips. We’re currently assembling a club fieldtrip to Louisville for April that’s looking like it will be a lot of fun.

P+I: At long last, you are nearing the end of your time here at Ball State. As you approach graduation, where do you want to be professionally in five or ten years?

LH: My ultimate career goal would be to become the historic architect of Louisville. That would just be amazing. Less specifically, I really want to work as an adaptive reuse architect. The next step after graduation is to get my license. Within ten years, I’m playing around with the idea of getting my doctorate in Architectural History so that way I can have the capacity to have an academic career if I want to follow that path. If I do head that route, I’m considering MIT and then possibly teaching at the University of Kentucky in Lexington.

P+I: Is there anything that stands out to you as something that you’ve gotten out of Ball State that you don’t think you would have received at another school?

LH: Learning so much about sustainability. It is such a big focus right now within CAP but also applies to preservation. Sustainability is something that I was immediately enthusiastic about. Working with (architecture professor) Daniel Overbey and seeing the project that he did for the Indianapolis Zoo really emphasized what was possible if I really developed my skills with sustainable design and building systems. Also, when I first started out in CAP, I don’t think I fully appreciated what could be accomplished with digital fabrication. I was very enamored with the image of the old school architect who sits at their drafting with their little desk lamp and draws everything by hand. I know that other institutions also teach Revit and 3D printing, but we’ve made such a push in that direction here at CAP that I think it’s one of our real strengths. □
MUNCIE HEART BOMBING WITH PRESERVE GREATER INDY

On February 6th, ASHP teamed up with members of Preserve Greater Indy, a preservation advocacy group out of Indianapolis, to embark upon a “heart-bombing” of Muncie. Heart-bombing, which was started by Buffalo, NY’s Young Preservationists, is an effort to engage social media to help draw attention to historic buildings and places that could use a bit of extra attention or love by its community. Past heart-bombing events have included affixing giant, decorated Valentine’s Day hearts to abandoned or under-utilized buildings. However, because one person’s preservation effort is another person’s trespassing and vandalism, Muncie’s heart-bombers chose their targets with great care and consideration.

Some locations that where the recipients of some preservation love were the Rainbow Cathedral at 326 W. Charles, the blue & white service station at Madison and Adams Streets near downtown, and the Kitselman Mansion (cover photo) on the grounds of the Hazelwood Christian Church.

To round out the day, some of the group made the drive north to the quickly disintegrating remnants of the “Ski-Hi” drive-in movie theater. Traveling to the Ski-Hi, which was in operation from 1956 to 2005, presented a bit of a dilemma for the group of young preservationists. The motivation behind heart bombing is to draw attention to a structure that is in need of a new use. And while there is certainly nostalgia for the drive-in theater era, in a world where traditional movie theaters are having to scramble to stay relevant, there’s little hope for reviving the Ski-Hi. Pieces of steel have been periodically falling from its screen near the heavily trafficked Routes 3 and 28. Delaware County has set its sights on demolishing the Ski-Hi, calling it the “most dangerous building in the county.”

While we agreed that saving the Ski-Hi was unlikely in spite of our efforts, we ended up making the journey to see her before she goes and think of the thousands of Hoosiers who gazed at her flickering screen on a thousand warm, summer nights.

- Ryan Hamlett
CONTACT US!

We want to hear from you! Though the newsletter will be taking the summer off, the fall semester is right around the corner. Call or email to let us know about an alumni project you’d like us to feature in future issues or simply let us know how we’re doing! And click on the icons to the right to like and follow us on Facebook and Instagram!

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