

ARLIS/NA + VRA and AASL Conferences

Lightning Round: Co-constructing and Documenting Place

Friday, March 11, 2016, 3:30-4:30 p.m.

Location: Westin Hotel, Puget Sound Room

Instruction: Supporting the Traveling Studio Cindy Derrenbacker, Architecture Librarian Laurentian University, Sudbury, Ontario, Canada

Introduction—Background and Context

It is a pleasure to address you on the topic of *Instruction: Supporting the Traveling Studio*. I serve as architecture librarian for Laurentian University's new School of Architecture with a northern orientation and a design-build focus that opened fall 2013 in downtown Sudbury, Ontario, Canada—a four-hour drive north of Toronto and a ten-minute drive northwest from the main university campus. We are in our third year, with three classes of seventy students each. We are working towards provincial accreditation with the Masters as the terminal degree with an estimated total of 400 full-time students (250 undergraduates, 120+ graduate students) and 18 full-time faculty. Annually at present, the school is adding new classes, faculty members, and courses as it becomes fully operational.

This past summer, one faculty member took the lead in the development of a third-year, full-semester studio taking place, in part, off site, in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario—a four-hour drive west of Sudbury on the border of Canada and across the St. Mary's River from Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. I learned some of the details of this northern building studio in mid-August and determined to provide enhanced library support.

The Northern Building Studio

The studio gave students the opportunity to provide input into a building renewal/restoration project called Destination North Inc., which, as described on its Web site, is “a living centre for ecology, culture, and wilderness experience at the former St. Mary's Paper Mill in the Sault.”

The northern building studio reflects our conference theme “Natural Connections” as its purpose was for the architecture students to investigate how to create local business, visitor and tourist markets by repurposing an historic paper mill on the bank of St. Mary's River in the Sault. The students researched the community, its past and present, including its indigenous roots. They learned about the historic steel and logging industries, as well as the railway running through the natural, rugged landscape—a landscape that includes the potential for river-sourced energy. At the end of the semester, the students brought forth their design solutions to restore and renew the St. Mary's Paper Mill industrial campus--solutions intended to revitalize this once prosperous northern Ontario community.

The students' initial assignment was to research and document four themes central to the Destination North project: community, economics, market, and integrated restorative development. These themes were to be further conceptualized with reference to design thinking, sustainability, material culture, and social and geological history. The investigation of St. Mary's Paper Mill was to begin in Sudbury utilizing online, library, and archival resources, followed by on-site research and documentation in the Sault. Given the general lack of familiarity with the site, I knew instinctively I should prepare initial supporting documentation for the students as they researched this historic site from afar.

"It Takes a Village"

I began by searching Laurentian's library catalogue, with incomplete results. I touched base with the university archivist who directed me to limited in-house archival materials (both photos and books) and several Laurentian colleagues--an academic librarian who had developed a northern Ontario bibliography and an historian who had recently written on the rise and fall of newsprint in Ontario. I also contacted the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library; a librarian directed me to the locally created *Historical Forestry Database*. Finally, I spoke with an amateur archivist associated with Destination North Inc. whose family had worked at the paper mill for generations.

Material Collection and Creation of Handout

Based on my research and conversations with these professionals, I created a double-sided handout with online and print resources that the students could consult for preliminary research. I borrowed materials from various outlets, short-term, in an effort to gather disparate materials and make them accessible through the architecture library. In addition, the Laurentian University historian who wrote on the rise and fall of newsprint was invited to give a lecture to the class.

Site Visit

I subsequently travelled to the Sault to St. Mary's Paper industrial campus for the third-year students' initial site visit, sitting in on a presentation by the developer and touring the site first-hand. I met the amateur archivist; she had developed a display for the students and faculty during the visit.

Conclusion--Broader Applications and Assessment

So to conclude, would I always go to these lengths to support a traveling studio? The answer is "no." This is in part, because at present, I am simply one librarian with no support staff and I cannot respond with this level of service to every off-site endeavor. That being said, I felt the nature of the research was challenging and that the students would be better served if I did some initial groundwork so that they could more easily access the information they required to develop summary graphic presentations, maps, a topographic model, and at the latter part of the semester, a market kiosk and final renderings and models. I was also aware that next year's third-year class would be involved in the same studio and so my efforts would benefit another class. My strategies for supporting the students were not

groundbreaking, but I am confident they could be adapted successfully for other traveling studios.

How could I enhance this traveling studio in the coming year? Given the bilingual nature of our program and the region, I could source relevant French materials. I could also gather additional information on the historic influence of the First Nations people in the Sault. Perhaps I could employ social media in some capacity...I welcome suggestions from all of you gathered here today. Thank you.