

**Exploring Rural Kentucky Through Documentary Art:
Supplementary Resource Set 2 | Documenting Local History Using
Primary Sources
- For the Student -**

BACKGROUND READING

One of the jobs of governments in the United States is to provide safe roadways. Some roads are built and maintained by the federal government. Others are built by state or local governments.

In Kentucky, state road construction is the job of the [**Kentucky Transportation Cabinet**](#). Before roads are built, studies are done to determine if the road will cause a harmful impact to the environment or to the *cultural landscape*. The Transportation Cabinet works with other state agencies to determine how to *mitigate* any harmful impacts. To mitigate means to make the impact less severe.

A cultural landscape reflects how people have interacted with a place over time. In Creelsboro, the cultural landscape includes how the surrounding land has been used for farming as well as how the land has been used for a town. It includes the homes and other structures that people have built and their cemeteries, and also features of the natural environment that are important to the people who live there.

Obviously, constructing a road is going to change the cultural landscape. One way to *mitigate* the damage is to *preserve* key landscape features. Another way is to *document* the story of the people who lived in the place.

Janie-Rice Brother is an architectural historian. She is often asked to survey areas before roads are built. She studies the homes, buildings, structures, cemeteries, and significant natural features of a community.

But she wants to study more than just the visible built environment. She wants



Janie-Rice Brother in the field, studying a log house, an element of Creelsboro's cultural landscape.

to know the stories behind the buildings. She wants to know why people established their farms where they did; why they chose a particular style for their homes. She wants to discover what was important about the stores in the town and what role the Cumberland River played in the history of this valley.

To discover the back stories, she turns to additional *primary sources*. She collects *oral histories* from residents. She documents family photographs and visits the *archives* in the local library. By doing this, she helps to *preserve* the cultural heritage of the community.



As librarian Kristina Daffron looks on, architectural historian Janie-Rice Brother takes photographs of old newspapers at the archives in the Russell County Public Library, Jamestown, Kentucky.

It is important to collect stories and information about the history and cultural heritage of any community. It becomes critically important when that community is about to be disrupted by something like the construction of a new road. It is not enough to collect the information. It also must be shared with the public. The complete documentary [***Creelsboro and the Cumberland: A Living History***](#) and the [***website***](#) developed by Voyager Media Group, Inc., (video producers) and [***Using Primary Sources***](#), a short video clip from the documentary, share the work of Janie-Rice Brother and others in documenting the history and heritage of this community. The video would be considered a *secondary source*.



Aaron McClure House, 1800s. Credit: The McClure Family.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What primary sources did Janie-Rice Brother use to document the cultural heritage of Creelsboro? What primary sources could we use to learn about our own local history and cultural heritage?
2. What did Janie-Rice Brother discover about the ways that people used the land and made a living in the Creelsboro community? How is land used in our community? How do people make a living?
3. What kinds of buildings did Janie-Rice Brother document in Creelsboro? What buildings would help to tell the story of our community?
4. What kinds of information did Janie-Rice Brother find by exploring cemeteries? What might we discover by exploring local cemeteries?
5. Where did Janie-Rice Brother go to do archival research? Where could we go to do archival research on the history of our local community?
6. What kinds of documents did Janie-Rice Brother find in the local library? Do you know what kinds of resources might be available in our local library?
7. What artifacts (including photographs) did families share that gave Janie-Rice Brother a glimpse into the lives of people who lived in Creelsboro in the past? What kinds of artifacts do you have that tell something about your personal history? What artifacts do you have that have been passed down to you?
8. Why did Janie-Rice Brother collect oral histories from local people? What might she learn from their stories? Who could you interview to find out something about our community's history? What kinds of questions might you ask?
9. Why was Janie-Rice Brother interested in collections of oral histories that had been made in the community in the past? What might she learn from these? Are there any oral history collections we could use to learn about our community, state, or local history?
10. How could we share with the public information we might collect about our community? Should we make a video, a blog or vlog, or a website? Should we have a community presentation? How should we archive our project for future generations?

ESSAY VOCABULARY (in *italics* in the BACKGROUND READING)

archives: a collection of documents or records

cultural landscape: the imprint that a group of people have made on the natural landscape

to document: to create a record of something

mitigate: to make the impact less severe

oral histories: the collection of information through a recorded interview

to preserve: to protect and maintain

primary source: an artifact, document, photograph, recording, or other source of information that was created at the time under study

secondary source: created by someone who did not experience first-hand or participate in the events or conditions you are researching