

Historians Seek Your Downtown La Crosse Stories!

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University of Wisconsin-La Crosse historians are calling for stories about downtown La Crosse's past and present through *Hear, Here*, an innovative project that expands the way we look at history.

“Most people grew up with history that emphasized dates of when a building was constructed or a war was conducted,” said Assistant History Professor Ariel Beaujot, Ph.D. “People represented in history texts were famous or political and military leaders. With this partnership between UW-L and Downtown Main Street, Inc., we take history to the street level – collecting stories of people who worked, lived and shopped in downtown La Crosse.”

The goal is to match the voices of people with specific places downtown. Beaujot, her students, and community members are searching Oral History files in Special Collections in UWL's Murphy Library to include such recollection as:

- An old man recalling how he once delivered packages to prostitutes downtown.
- An activist who chained herself to an historic building to bring attention to historic preservation issues.
- A scuba diver who saw the wreckage of the War Eagle, which sank in the Mississippi River in 1870.

Equally important are stories of people today. They should relate to a specific place, whether it is a building, a park, a garden, alley, or even an empty lot.

“Maybe you were proposed to in Riverside Park, or your mother took you to the Doerflinger's Department Store tea room for lunch,” Beaujot said. “Your story also may be about seeing Elvis perform at the old Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium. The kinds of stories we seek are as varied as the people and places of downtown La Crosse.”

In April 2015, *Hear Here* will post signs at downtown locations that have stories linked with them. Individuals seeing the signs may call a toll-free number from their mobile phones (or listen on line) to first-person accounts of these places.

Once the project is up and running visitors may record their own stories. After listening to a recollection, stay on line to add your own. Our mission is to collect as many stories as possible, so that this project can continue to grow in the future.

Why Hear, Here? To build pride in downtown, and to learn more about the places and people who have lived, worked, and visited downtown.

What's Your Story? Contact the Hear Here team at stories@hearherelacrosse.org, visit our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/HearHereLaCrosse>, or stop by our booth at Historic Downtown Day at 3d and Main Street.