From Whence We Came to Where We Will Go: Sharing the Stories of Immigration, Economic Opportunity, and Sustainability in the Little Cities of Black Diamonds

Ohio University Appalachian Teaching Project

OHIO UNIVERSITY 1804

LITTLE CITIES OF BLACK DIAMONDS
Our Future Grows from Our Past

www.lcbdohio.org

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Little Cities of Black Diamonds

The Little Cities of Black Diamonds are small, historic coal mining towns in Southeast Ohio, spanning four counties. During the late 1800s, this region of Ohio experienced a coal boom, with the industry becoming a major part of the economy. After the initial boom of coal mining, the industry began to decline, which has continued for several decades. The region now has a legacy of coal mining heritage and towns searching for alternative economic activity.

The Little Cities of Black Diamonds (LCBD) Council is a historic preservation and community development organization based in Shawnee, Ohio. We worked with the LCBD council to help their mission of educating the community about the history of immgration in the little cities region. Building off of last year's momentum, the LCBD council put on a successful online festival.

LITTLE CITIES OF BLACK DIAMONDS FEST 2021
From Whence We Came
A Virtual History Festival
OCTOBER 4TH - OCTOBER 5TH

Above is the cover image featured on the virtual LCBD Fest website lcbdohio.org.

Moving from Local to Virtual

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the annual LCBD Fest that is usually hosted in Shawnee was not held in-person for the past two years. Council members were innovative and decided to host the festival online.

Our Intro to Appalachian Studies class created a social media campaign to promote the festival. The social media campaign focused on generating interest in students' research related to the topics covered during the LCBD Fest. The goal of the campaign was to reach a wider audience within the Appalachian region and beyond. The social media campaign also serves as an archive for viewers to see the history of their community, even after the conclusion of the festival.

In addition, our Sociology of Appalachia class created and delivered an online survey for the attendees of LCBD Fest. The goal was to collect data that helped the LCBD council learn about the demographics of attendees, overall enjoyment of attendees, and the benefits or drawbacks of hosting a week-long online festival.
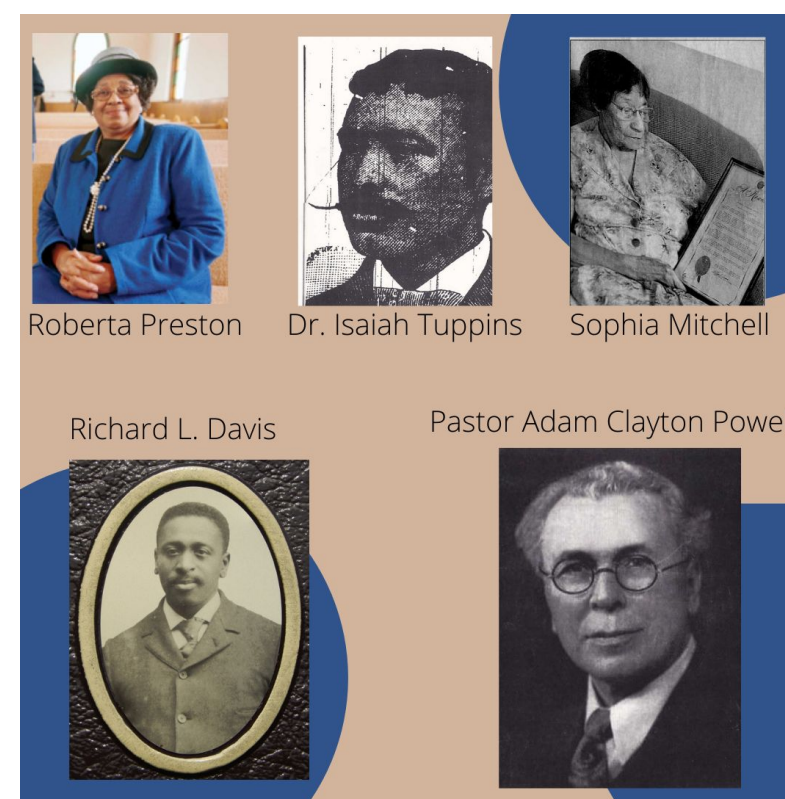
What We Did

In the Intro to Appalachian Studies class, we were divided into five groups based on the migratory groups of the LCBD Fest: African American Migration, European Migration, Earliest Coal Town Settlements, Turn of the Century Migration, and Modern Migration. Each group member was assigned a leadership position, such as creative director or team leader.

After gathering information and attending a LCBD meeting, students completed research on their topics while using the LCBD Archive to compile articles, photos, and other documents to create posts for the LCBD social media. The depth of this research allowed both students and the larger community to learn more about subjects than they might have at an in-person LCBD Fest. This content was then shared on LCBD's Instagram and Facebook accounts during the festival. On each day of LCBD Fest, a different topic was released.

The Sociology of Appalachia class was divided into three groups: data collection committee, report committee, and presentation committee. Survey questions were based on the survey from 2020, but students made important adjustments to the questions so that the survey was more applicable to the content of the 2021 LCBD Fest. For instance, the questions were updated to ask respondents about what they learned from the 2021 LCBD Fest and what format they prefer for the fest. Qualtrics was used to create the survey, which is used for data collection and statistics. The survey was then shared during LCBD Fest.

Instagram: @thelittlecitiesofblackdiamonds
Facebook: Little Cities of Black Diamonds

Above are examples of the photos that we used to create LCBD social media content. Images retrieved from the LCBD Archive.

What Did We Find?

After the LCBD Fest ended, data were collected from the posts. We tracked the interactions on Facebook and Instagram and compared them to the normal traffic that the website and social media pages typically receive. For the LCBD Fest, there were a total of 6 student posts in a span of 5 days. The class also experimented with TikTok to create short, informational videos to reach a younger audience. Overall, our data between likes, shares, and comments indicated interaction with over 300 people across LCBD social media.

Through the survey, we were able to collect important data, including attendee satisfaction, streaming access, and why respondents specifically enjoyed certain events. Overall, the attendee satisfaction results were very positive. Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with each event on a scale of 1 to 5. When the averages of ratings for all events were computed, the scores were also very high. No event had an average rating lower than a 4.2 out of 5. We were also able to see what aspects of the festival were most enjoyable for attendees, and the examples below show what was most meaningful to respondents.

"The importance of telling stories."

"The positive engagement with the community"

"The diversity of Little Cities of Black Diamonds"

"Conversations and stories from local people."

Looking Toward the Future

Despite the setbacks of the ongoing pandemic, the 2021 LCBD Fest was able to succeed and have a wide reach. This year's festival featured a more accessible format through the social media posts and the website virtual content. After presenting our results to the LCBD Council, they discussed plans to bring the LCBD Fest back to an in-person setting, while also incorporating the accessibility of online content related to the event. The respondents of the survey also supported a hybrid format for future LCBD Fests. Hopefully, the innovation sparked by the changes in 2020 and 2021 will lead to greater engagement with the LCBD historic preservation and community development efforts.

For further questions, contact Dr. Tiffany Arnold at arnoldt2@ohio.edu and Dr. Rachel Terman at terman@ohio.edu.