Jonesville Exhibit

VFTH

11/24/22

The African American neighborhood known as Jonesville, that was dismantled in the 1960’s to make way for the expansion of WKU’s campus, lives on in an exhibit at the Kentucky Museum.

Amy Bingham talks to some of the community scholars who helped bring the stories of Jonesville to life in this week’s View from the Hill.

“The children in the community, that represents the curiosity of what takes place on the hill.”

Artist, community scholar and Jonesville descendent Alice Gatewood Waddell, who’se mother and grandfather were raised in Jonesville, says the buon fresco mural she painted along with other artists tells the story of both joy and sadness in the community.

“And if you look at the gestures and the posture of the images, the couple, you can see there’s a lot of sadness and a lot of disappointment.”

The permanent mural at the entrance of the Kentucky Museum leads into the “What Happened to Jonesville” exhibit.

“I think what the exhibit shows is what a vibrant community it was and what happened to that during urban renewal.”

Museum Director Brent Bjorkman was among the instructors for seven individuals who were trained as community scholars to bring the exhibit to life.

“We had Jonesville related people that were interested in this and they started interviewing their family and friends and that’s what the narrative that drove this exhibit is all about.”

Jonesville descendant Wathetta Buford says serving as a community scholar on this project was a huge learning experience.

“My grandmother was one of the ones that had to move but I left here, say, within two years of that. I’m sorry I didn’t know a lot about it cause I could have helped her with some things.”

Through her research, Gatewood-Waddell found a piece of paper where her older sister, at the age of 15, was asked to put her math skills to work.

“That was her assignment from my grandfather. So this is the letter when she figured out who all was getting what.

The exhibit is part of an ongoing commitment to acknowledging the destruction of Jonesville….

“You know adults kept business away from children back then so we didn’t exactly understand the process as being probably as unfair as it was.”

….and celebrating the resilience of its residents.

“It’s really a jumping off point for a further conversation that’s gonna go on with the President’s reconciliation work group because it’s a multi year initiative.”

With this week’s View from the Hill, I’m Amy Bingham.

The Jonesville exhibit is expected to be relocated to the African American History Museum once it opens in the spring.

###