



Frequently Asked Questions

What is City of Stories?

City of Stories is a mobile app and a website that will introduce people to Holyoke's history and culture through a series of walking tours. People will have the choice of going on the walks virtually or in person.

How is it different from most historic walking tours?

Historic walking tours usually focus completely on the past. They provide historic images of buildings and summaries of the past significance of each building or historic site. Some stops on the City of Stories tours will also provide this kind of information. But City of Stories will also alternate between providing information about the distant past and stories about life in Holyoke in the recent past.

Why does City of Stories take this approach?

The History Room is engaged in an ongoing effort to provide opportunities to preserve the history of Holyoke's more recent past. The history of the recent past is easily lost because we often don't distinguish between what's historic and what's ephemeral. Much gets thrown away, especially when people move or pass on. And while historians today are interested in the history of daily life and in the lives of so-called 'ordinary people,' ordinary people do not think of their lives as historically significant. They often don't think too much about saving or preserving records of their lives, much less giving those to an archive to preserve. (The fact that cell phone photos have started to replace family photograph albums makes the long-term preservation of personal and family history even more challenging.) In Holyoke's case, the history of the recent past is also the history of the local Puerto Rican diaspora. With the largest concentration of Puerto Ricans outside of Puerto Rico, Holyoke has a very important place in the broader history of the Puerto Rican diaspora.

In 2023, Holyoke will celebrate its 150th anniversary as a city. The Puerto Rican diaspora in Holyoke began almost 70 years ago. So the history of the Puerto Rican diaspora is almost half as long as Holyoke's history. It is not all that recent. Yet the community's ability to explore and ask questions about the Puerto Rican experience in Holyoke by looking at historical sources is still extremely limited.

How will City of Stories help address this issue?

Well, in part, by highlighting places and events along the walking tour routes that are significant in the history of Holyoke's Puerto Rican diaspora. The South Holyoke tour, for instance, will include Broderick House, which was once the rectory for Precious Blood Church on Cabot St. and is now a sober living community run by the Sisters of Providence. But in the 1980s, during a period when some local funeral parlors were unwilling to provide services to Holyoke's Latinx community, the Sisters invited families to wake their dead at Broderick House. The issue led to an investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination. So we can use that 'stop' on the tour to tell a part of that chapter in history through news clippings held at the History Room. Other stops will feature Latinx and Puerto Rican organizations and businesses, or will have pictures of public murals that no longer exist.

But we only have a few examples like this of how to include the history of the Puerto Rican diaspora on the tours. The rest will be determined by those who collaborate through the *story-sharing part of the project*. Right now, we are inviting members of the local Latinx and Puerto Rican communities who have

stories about coming to, living in, or working in Holyoke to think about what they would like to see on these tours—in essence, to tell Holyoke’s story through their own personal experiences.

What will participants in the story-sharing part of the project be asked to do?

How people choose to collaborate on the project will be up to them. We use the word ‘stories’ very broadly. Some people might like to record full oral histories. If so, we would archive the full oral history at the Library and put the portion they choose in the City of Stories app. Others may have briefer anecdotes about living in Holyoke to share. Still others may have photographs from the 1950s- present for us to scan and will be able to tell us the stories of when and why they were taken.

Some people might not want to share their personal experiences, but may have great ideas about what topics an inclusive history of Holyoke should cover. Or they may wish to interview a friend or relative for the project. We can support that interview process. If participant does want to create a recording, that person’s contribution can become a ‘stop’ on one of the tours, almost as if you are walking down the street and have the opportunity to stop and hear a local resident’s personal story or anecdote. Latinx- and Puerto Rican-led organizations, businesses, groups, and religious organizations are also very welcome to come forward to contribute their histories.

We do have story-sharing prompts, such as: What do you want your children or grandchildren (or the people of that generation) to know about your life in Holyoke? Can you share a personal experience that illustrates what you want remembered? It might not be about Holyoke, per se, but about your family’s life *in* Holyoke. Others might want to think about this question: Is there a place, a sport, an event, a group, or organization (or something else) that gives you a sense of connected-ness in Holyoke? Responses could describe anything from family traditions to involvement in public organizations or events.

But City of Stories is not about answering our questions; it’s more of an invitation to share with the project ideas about what questions should be asked... What are the stories that need to be told?

What else do you want people to know about the app?

The app will be in Spanish and English and is pretty easy to navigate. It allows us to include still images, text, audio, and video—and we are excited about these multimedia features. And it is expandable. As long as we maintain the annual subscription, we can revise or add stops to tours when there is call do that. We hope to unveil at least one tour in Fall 2022 and the rest in early 2023 (if not before).

This project is funded by a MassHumanities Expand Massachusetts Stories Grant, with funding from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. We are collaborating with Holyoke Media to create and preserve participant recordings.

What should a person do if they have ideas for what to include on the tours or would like to share a story or life story?

The first step is to [contact one of us](#) (Alex Santiago or Eileen Crosby) or fill out our [bilingual Interest Form](#) on the Ciudad de Historias page of the Library’s website. We will get back to every person to find out what they might want to contribute to the project. Anyone who gets involved will be invited to participate in an optional community history workshop where participants can get practice sharing personal stories and listening in a supportive way to the stories of others. The workshops will also start a discussion of what community history is and why it’s important.

Website and bilingual Interest Form: <http://www.holyokelibrary.org/historycityofstories.asp>

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Phone: (413) 420-8107

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/ciudadhistoriasholyoke/>