

# What Middletown Read

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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## Abstract:

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In order to create a promotional tool for the project of *What Middletown Read* at Ball State University, we have joined our talents to bring together a video to illustrate the importance of the project, and to explain to those outside the project what important work is being done. To achieve this, we interviewed members of the researching team and historians to demonstrate the background aspects of the project and the significance it will hold for historians and all potential researchers. Ultimately, we hope that this project will offer a positive and informative view of the project to interested subjects should the team choose to share it in digital form. The video will also be housed as a part of the local history collection in the Ball State Archives and Special Collections for public viewing. Alyssa has used her talents honed at Ball State for filming and editing, as Rachel contributed her visual marketing skills to create the existing look of the video for distribution in addition scheduling and communication.

## Acknowledgements:

We would like to thank our respective advisors, Nancy Carlson and Dr. Frank Felsenstein for helping the finished version of this project to take shape. We would also like to thank the following people for offering their time and expertise to be interviewed for this video: Dr. Frank Felsenstein, Dr. James Connolly, Dr. Maria Staton, Kelly Hacker Jones, and Dr. Bruce Geelhoed. In addition, we would like to extend our thanks to Trevor Frohberg, Music Engineering student at Ball State University, for providing the original music found in the video.

Abstract and acknowledgements are a joint collaboration of Alyssa Hartle and Rachel Wynn.

Introduction:

During the Fall Semester of 2007, Rachel Wynn approached me about the possibility of working on our Honors Thesis together. Rachel had done work as a researcher for the *What Middletown Read* study that is underway at Ball State. She felt that creating a promotional video for the project would be an excellent Senior Thesis. As a marketing major Rachel felt that she knew what the video needed to be successful, but she did not possess the video production skills necessary to complete the task. This is where I came in as a Telecommunications major. The project turned out to be a perfect outlet for both of our majors. The following are entries from a journal kept during the process of making this video.

January 8, 2008

Today we had our first official meeting of the semester about the *What Middletown Read* video. Visiting Rachel in the archives was my first chance to see the registers and books that are being studied, and are the basis of our project. The books are very visually interesting, but there's only so much you can do with them in video. I love the look and smell of really old books. However they all look very similar to each other, which makes me worry about the visual interest that can be created in the video.

I learned a little more about what the *What Middletown Read* research project is about. They are using the logs to see what books were most commonly checked out of

the library during the time for which the logs pertain, and then they are going to further investigate to see the social and economic implications of what books were checked out by different groups of people. At this stage in the research, no one knows who checked out which books. Only the names of the books that were most commonly checked out are known.

During this meeting, we discussed what we want to be in the video. This is still a little confusing to me because I do not know everything about the project. Including enough visuals to make the video engaging may be challenging. I'm worried that the video may turn into a series of boring interview shots with a few photos in between. The motion class that I am currently in has me excited about the possibility of special effects layering to make the project more visually interesting. I would love to be able to layer interviews over images of the ledgers and the old library building.

The only major concern that I have at this point in the process is that the division of work will make it hard for me to compile the video in a fully comprehensive way because I do not have all of the information. I'm not used to having someone else arrange interviews and ask all the questions. It will be a new experience.

January 2008

I met with Nancy Carlson today for the first time about the project. She was very encouraging about the idea and said that it sounded promising. Her main suggestion was that we include a Top 10 countdown of the most commonly checked out books of the time. This would draw people into the video more than a story focused solely the

research process would. This seems like an excellent idea to me because I was worried about creating audience interest. Nancy also gave me the name of a Fritz Dolak in Bracken Library who can determine what clearances are needed for images that we use in the project.

January 18, 2008

Rachel and I had our second meeting together. We determined a timetable with a goal of having a rough draft of the project completed by mid March. This would give us plenty of time to fine tune things and finish the project in time for graduation. I am a little concerned about finishing on time. This is based mostly on stories I heard from my cousin about not getting her thesis approved at the last minute. This is not something that I wish to happen to me. Rachel has found someone to do the musical score for us. This is nice because it eliminates the need for obtaining clearances on music.

February 4, 2008

Today I spent some time arranging locations for filming interviews this week. I spent a little bit of time getting lost in downtown Muncie before I looked up directions to the genealogy center. Once found, the location turned out to be a gem. The librarian was very nice and willing to let filming take place with very few questions asked. She even showed me to a location in the building that has been set up with film interviews in mind. She also offered to have the librarian on duty at the time of filming set out the ledgers so they can be viewed on film as well. The level of cooperation offered pleasantly surprised me.

Bracken library is proving to be more of a problem, and it's needed in the more immediate future...tomorrow. I can't figure out a good location that will be visually interesting as well as quiet enough to get good audio levels. I also haven't been able to get formal permission for filming. I wish Rachel had been able to get permission from archives to film in there. I think that may have been our best location within the location.

We're filming two interviews tomorrow: Dr. Felsenstein and Kelly Hacker Jones. Rachel is in charge of the interview questions, which is weird for me. Interviewing is usually my favorite part of making documentary type pieces. I like questioning people and finding out why they do what they do. It's a really of out of character thing for me because I'm naturally introverted and quiet, but it's something that I really like. I'm sure I'll get the opportunity to throw in a few questions after Rachel is finished if I come up with something.

Hopefully Dr. Felsenstein will be able to give us the research information that contains the names of the most commonly rented books when we meet with him tomorrow. I would really like to start compiling images related to the books themselves.

I'm feeling pretty confident with the amount of progress we're making this week. I'm starting to get more excited about the project as we're becoming more active with it. I'm really looking forward to the editing process.

February 5, 2008

Interviewing Dr. Felsenstein went well. I must admit that he intimidates me, so I was a little worried about the interview. His interest and investment in the *What Middletown Read* research is impressive. I was unaware of his discovery of the ledgers

until this interview, which in itself was a little awkward in its execution. Everyone involved was a little nervous. Rachel and I didn't quite know what we should do for this first interview, and I think Dr. Felsenstien was weary of being on camera. The office was very cramped, which made setting up difficult. Dr. Felsenstein was on the phone as I was setting up the camera and lights, which made me feel uncomfortable and worried about making too much noise. During the interview the bell tower rang once in the middle of a question, so we had to redo it. Also there was a glitch in the tape when I rewound it, so we had to refilm the answer to the first question.

We also interviewed Kelly Hacker Jones in the library today. I found a shot that I like, so that was fantastic. It was a quiet corner on the third floor with rows of bookshelves in the background. The library's policy on filming turns out to be pretty lax. You can film wherever you want as long as you only film whom you brought with you. You can't get anyone in the background on film without his or her permission, and you aren't allowed to ask anyone else if they will be on film. This wasn't a problem because of the isolated area that we used. This interview went pretty well. Kelly was a little nervous and had to take a minute to think about how to phrase her answers a couple of times. There weren't any real problems though.

Rachel is asking each person the same interview questions with only slight variations. I'm not sure if this will give us enough sound bites to use, but there is always the possibility of voiceover.

February 7, 2008

We interviewed Maria Staton today at the genealogy center. This interview really peaked my interest in the project. Maria is genuinely interested in the history of the people the researchers discover within the pages of the ledgers. She provided examples of patrons and what they needed to sign in order to check out books. She spoke of guarantors, which I never knew existed. These were people that were more highly regarded members of society who were listed almost like a reference. They guaranteed that a patron would be reliable with the books. The most fascinating part of this to Maria was that women did not always list their husbands as guarantors. She was also able to mention at least two books that were popular at the time. The execution of this interview was not very good. First of all, I forgot to bring a tape with me. Luckily Rachel and I got to the location early to set up, so I was able to call a roommate to drop the tape off. (Shout out to Tyler...you saved me!) The shot was difficult to set up. I was given a location with a fireplace in the background, but the fake fire wouldn't ignite. There were no conveniently located outlets, so the light was in an awkward spot. Also, Maria is very soft spoken, and there were lots of loud noises coming from microfilm machines in the background. I had to ask Maria to repeat herself several times.

While we were at the genealogy center I got some b-roll of Rachel going through some microfilm and looking at a database online. I also got some footage of the outside of the genealogy center and the Muncie Public library. I'm not sure that I will use this because it's not the same library building in which the ledgers were discovered. Also, the genealogy center is not really relevant to the focus of the video.

February 17, 2008

I logged and captured the interviews that we have so far. The footage all needs color correction. I don't know what my problem is in obtaining footage. I apparently really suck at it. I think it looks good when we're on location, but then I see it on the screen later and it's horrible. Hopefully the color correction works out when I'm editing the final piece together. I think it will. Another slight problem that I noticed was that I didn't have ambient sound on the b-roll that I shot. I'll need to go back and get some Foley for the sound of the microfilm.

March 29, 2008 - Last Interview

We interviewed Dr. Geelhoed the other day, and it was the most challenging interview yet. Rachel and I had the interview shot prepared in his office while he was out of the room. As soon as he walked back in he started talking. He wasn't even completely in his chair when he started answering questions. I had to rush over and hand him the microphone. Halfway through the interview he asked if the camera was on. It was very odd. Dr. Geelhoed's position as former chair of Middletown Studies gave him a unique insight into the project. He was able to explain the historical significance of the research in relation to Muncie as Middletown. His sound bites should explain why this research is significant and how it can be used by other cities.

March 23, 2008

I am completely freaking out about this thesis. It seemed like there was so much time to get things done, and we were working pretty steadily. However, the last couple of weeks have not been productive...mainly because of me, and now I am completely freaking out. I want this project to be good, but I'm not sure that I'm capable of making it good. I need to be working on it every spare minute that I have right now to make myself feel better, but I'm sick, so that's not happening. Also, I'm feeling really guilty because I haven't had a meeting with Nancy Carlson in a long time. I really need to do that, but I feel like I need to have more to show her when I do. GRRRRRRRRRRRR. Everything is falling apart.

April 9, 2008

I showed the rough-cut to Nancy yesterday. By rough-cut I mean extremely rough-cut. It just had the interviews spliced to show the story. There was a sample of color correction done so that she could get an idea of what the final result will be. Nancy had a lot of really good suggestions that put me on track for adding in the b-roll. My favorite suggestion, which seems really obvious, but which I never would have thought of is using page turns as transitions. While this has the potential in other videos of looking like a cheesy eighties infomercial, with this subject matter it is the perfect fit. My worst suspicions were confirmed during this meeting...the movie is boring. Music and b-roll should help. On Nancy's suggestion, I'm going to add some pauses in between sections to keep the pace more on track and give people time to think about what was just said. The last major development of this meeting was that the name of the video has been changed. Due to the fact that the research has not been fully compiled, and there is no

official list of all the books that were checked out, Nancy felt that it would be unfair to tell the audience that they were going to be seeing “What Middletown Read”. So, I’ve decided to call it “What Middletown Read: The Discovery” because it is more about the research process than the actual results of the work.

#### EDITING---DATES AND HOURS HAVE MELDED TOGETHER

The initial process of editing was extremely tedious. Cutting down all of the raw interview footage took countless hours. I could only work in two-hour increments because I would get so sleepy listening to the interviews over and over. It was like sitting through a classroom lecture. I really thought I was going to go crazy.

In the process of cutting up the footage, I found that Dr. Connolly’s interview was the most dynamic. His sound bites were the most complimentary toward the project, his diction was clear, and the sound levels were nice without having to be adjusted too much. The lighting in the library makes everything yellow, so color correction was necessary.

Kelly Hacker Jones’ interview also took place in the library. I love the shot set up, but the interview was not too informative and the sound bites didn’t move the story along very much, so not much of the interview ended up in the video. There was some color correction involved with this shot as well because of the yellow fluorescent light.

Maria’s interview was my favorite because it makes the project seem relatable to the average person. I used tons of sound bites from her because they were amazing, but the actual footage is horrible. The film was overexposed and there are mildly distracting background noises. I had to color correct like I’ve never color corrected before to make the footage look decent. It has a sort of plastic look to it now, but it is much better than

the overexposed image. Maria is the only interviewee who spoke in depth about some of the books that were discovered. Information about what Middletown actually read is very much lacking in this video. Unfortunately the sound bites about the books were rambling, and had to be significantly spliced. Therefore, I had to find images to go over them. I found some original drawings from a couple of the books mentioned and have them in the project right now. I have not checked to make sure they are copyright clear yet. This needs to be confirmed with the copyright expert in the library.

I used Dr. Felsenstein's interview to open the video because he is the driving force behind the *What Middletown Read* project itself. His discovery of the ledgers lead to the research that is going on now. I didn't end up using too much of the rest of his interview. The interview was our very first, and we weren't sure what we really needed. The interview was a little too short.

Dr. Geelhoed's interview was our longest to film, but it was virtually unusable. The audio was hard to understand and the picture was not that great. This interview was extremely important for establishing the time frame for the research, so I had to creatively splice it up and find images to lie over the top of it.

Ball State archival photos saved the visual aspect of the video. There were some old photographs of children reading in the library, of the library itself, and of industrialization in Muncie. Rachel introduced me to the archival photo system, and once a few pictures were chosen, I started creating AfterEffects projects with them. I didn't want the video to look like a slide show, so I imported the photos into AfterEffects and created camera movements and zooms into visually interesting parts of the image. I also added a film burn effect to make it look like the "camera" footage was old. I felt like this

was an appropriate visual addition that would add to the ambiance of the time period being discussed.

I used AfterEffects to create lower thirds to introduce each of the interviewees. The lower thirds have proven to be an enormous challenge for me. I found a really old fashioned looking font and an off yellow color that reminds me of olden times. When I created the lower thirds with just the text, they were hard to view on some of the interview shots. Dr. Connolly's was particularly difficult to see because it was over a shelf full of colorful books. To try to correct the problem, I added a navy blue background behind the text. It is more visible now, but I'm not sure if I'm completely satisfied with it.

I am really satisfied with the introduction to the video. It shows the ledgers with the title of the video on them. This was created in AfterEffects as well because I needed to adjust the text on a 3-D plane so that it appears to be on the book that is lying on a table. I was so pleased with the result that I exported the QuickTime movie of it and didn't bother to save the project file. This was of course a bad idea because when I showed Rachel she wanted to try out a different text color. I really need to learn not to take shortcuts. It would have been so simple to save the file, so that I could change things upon review. It was a bad idea not to save. Working with a partner who's not there when I'm editing is a new experience for me. It's hard for me to remember that Rachel needs to approve of fonts and colors too.

I've gone through and adjusted all the interview audio levels so that they are even, but I can't finish all of the audio work until the musical score is completed.

April 10, 2008

The video part of the thesis is done temporarily. It seems like there's always something left to correct, or something that could be ever so slightly better. I'm going to wait a week or so before touching the video anymore though. Other projects are due this next week, and I figure that taking a week's break from the project will allow me to come back with fresh eyes so that I can make the final corrections. I burned the QuickTime file onto a DVD tonight during my break from speech class to give to Trevor Frohberg, an Undergraduate Music Engineering student, so that he can compose the music.

April 28, 2008

Today we finished up the DVD aspect of the project. Label making for the DVDs has been problematic for me due to printer and software errors, so today Rachel and I combined forces and got all of the labels made. This was no small effort, but I'm really satisfied with the labels that we finally achieved. They show a page from a ledger lightened so that the text title can be easily read. Rachel designed a DVD cover insert, which looks like the outside of the ledgers. We felt the DVD label itself went along with this theme, so you open the ledger cover and see a page of the book. We got all of the labels and inserts printed and put into cases.

This is one of the most frustrating times in any project for me. Just when I think I'm finished there seems to be a never-ending stream of small problems with a video...the DVD isn't compressed right, something is misspelled, or a graphic is cut off. I've redone

the lower thirds on this video five or six times, and after the DVDs were burned, we saw that they ran off the screen. Also, Dr. Connolly's name was misspelled. For some reason, my brain cannot comprehend the proper spelling of Connolly. I've tried various versions the most recent being Connoly with an "l" missing.

The music that Trevor composed adds a lot to the video. Before the music was added, I could barely get through the entire eleven minutes without wanting to go to sleep, but the music creates a sense of excitement.

Rachel came into the lab with me today, which was nice. She was there at each of the final steps of revision so that she could see if she liked the finished product and make suggestions. Having someone in the editing lab with me also made the process a little less boring while QuickTime files were rendering and DVDs were burning.

#### PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS

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