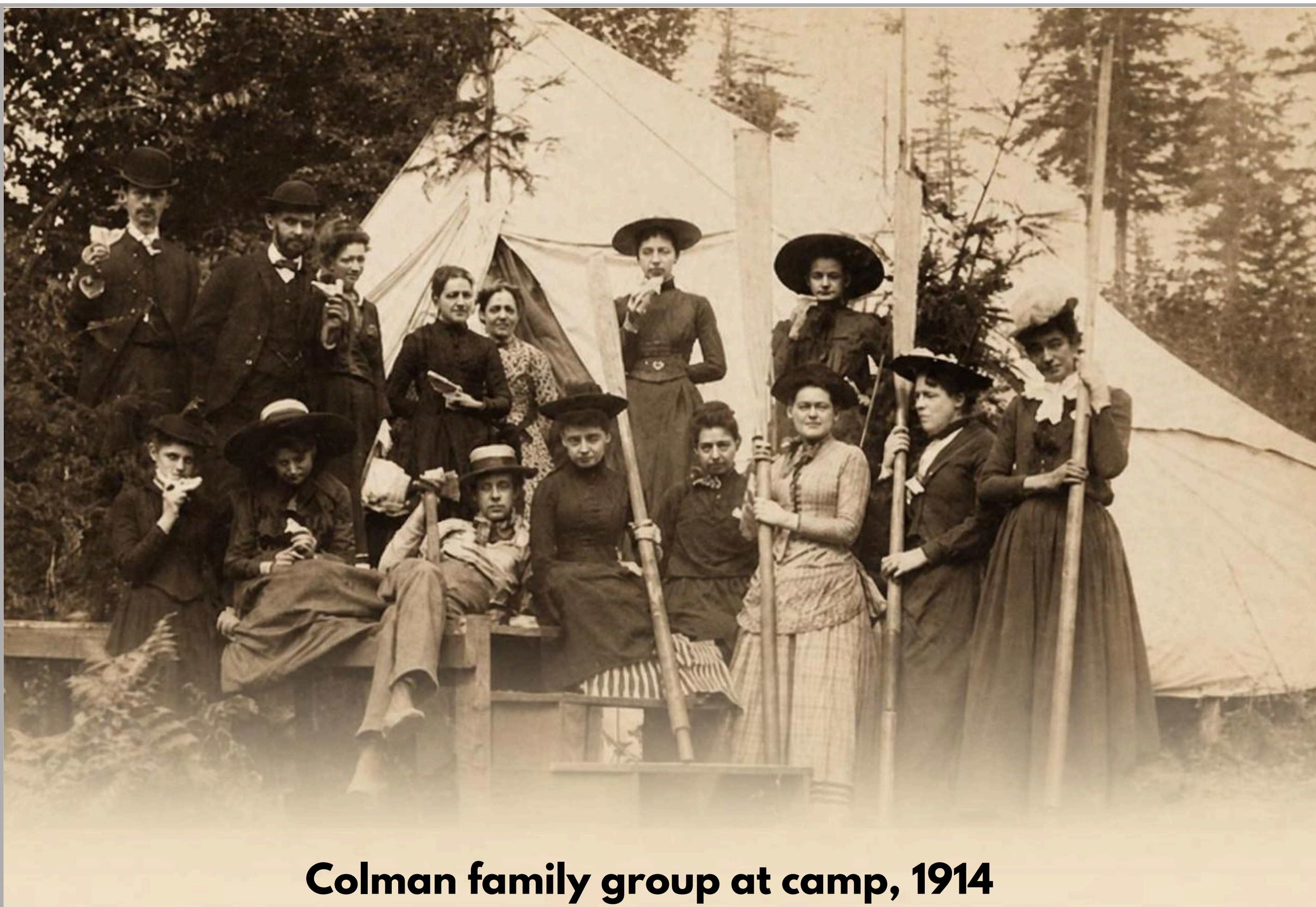


Preserving Camp Colman's History: A Participatory Archiving Thesis Project



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Colman family group at camp, 1914
Property of Museum of History & Industry, Seattle

Framing

Since 1912 Camp Colman has helped connect young people to nature and outdoor experiences, especially those who might face barriers to getting outdoors. Right now, the campus is going through eco-restoration and physical changes, and those changes have brought grief and loss for some alumni. At the same time, there is limited internal capacity for preserving camp history, even though there are meaningful materials and memories already there, including a small “History Box.”

Process

This project combined background research, community-centered design, and event-based implementation. I researched Camp Colman's history and alumni needs, then designed a participatory archiving survey and event inviting people to share memories, reflections, and artifacts in an open, consent-based format. The project launched at the Goop Breakfast, where participants contributed on their own terms to help build a community-centered archive.

Purpose

This project developed a participatory archiving approach for Camp Colman that centers community voice, memory, and reflection. It was designed to gather stories, artifacts, and responses from alumni and other community members in a way that feels accessible, respectful, and collaborative.

Deliverables

The project included several ways for Camp Colman community members to participate and share their experiences:

- Interactive participatory timeline
- Wish wall
- Participatory survey
- Video/audio recording studio for stories, songs, and reflections



Memories from the participatory timeline

When being the questing gnome a teacher came up while kids were away, and told me she had not seen her students act like real kids in so long! I love letting kids just enjoy themselves. - Dani

“when being the questing gnome a teacher came up while kids were away and told me she had not seen her students act like real kids in so long! I love letting kids just enjoy themselves.” - Dani

2025, during a lantern circle my campers from past years shared about the impact I've had on them - they want to be counselors because of me. Full circle moment because that's exactly what my counselors did for me in 2011. - Ivy

“2025 during a lantern circle my campers from past years shared about the impact I've had on them - they want to be counselors because of me. Full circle moment because that's exactly what my counselors did for me in 2011.” - Ivy

Impact

This project preserves Camp Colman's history during a time of ecological restoration and physical change. It addresses alumni grief by creating space for people to share what camp has meant to them. Staff have expressed interest in continuing participatory elements at future events, including the Salmon Bake and alumni camp weekend.

Conclusions

Participatory archiving can support both preservation and connection during times of change. By inviting contributions on community members' own terms, the archive becomes more inclusive and responsive to lived experience. Future steps include collecting stories at upcoming events and expanding participation as the camp evolves.

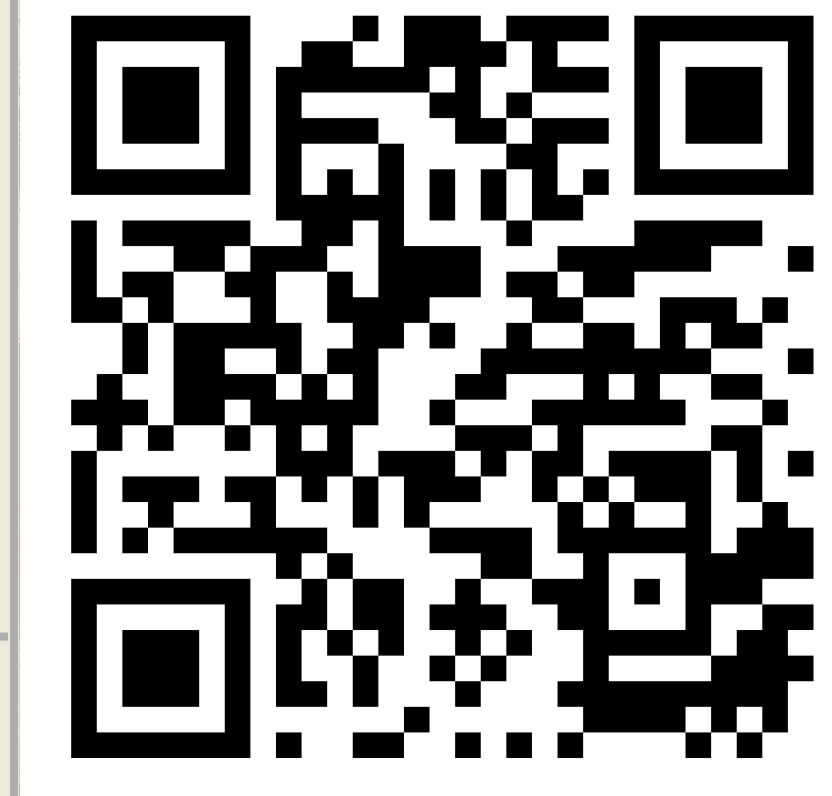


2026 Goop Breakfast Participatory Archiving Event



2026 Goop Breakfast Participatory Archiving Event

References



Thesis Advisory Committee Members

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