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Documentary Treatment

14 April 2014

Stories of the Susquehanna Documentary Film Treatment

Title: *"Utopia on the Susquehanna: The Visions of Joseph Priestly's Pantisocracy and French Azilum"*

Format: ~20 minute documentary

Audience: **Pennsylvania/SSV locals (including younger audience)**, public television audience, students (environmental residential college, film classes) and faculty

Equipment: Vixia HF G20, GoPro, "Drone" Camera, LED lights, lab mic and directional mic

Lighting: Natural lighting outdoors and basic 3-point lighting setup indoors

Text: Basic font, such as Aerial, Helvetica, Copperplate, etc.

Audio: Folk music, bluegrass, local instrumental music, local musician? (Ask Katie Faull about musician who has written songs about Susquehanna)

Objective of Film

To show the rich historical heritage and the natural beauty of the Susquehanna Valley landscape by introducing a particular point in history that led Priestley and French aristocrats to envision and attempt to create utopian societies in this region. Ultimately, the film should not only provide a historical portrait of this region, but also draw connections to the legacies left by this period in history. Perhaps this film could have some sort of environmentalism tone by contrasting (or comparing) these visions with current fracking endeavors, or a meditation on the importance of conserving our natural spaces.

Style

The documentary will incorporate interviews with local experts, images of historical texts and locations (images of Priestley house, original copies of poems or letters we will use, old photographs of Priestley's house and French Azilum, if they exist), and videos of the locations now.

Interviews will be shot in locations relating to the person's expertise: curator of Priestley house museum Tom Bresnahan outside of or in the house, Dave Buck outside near the river, etc.

Maybe use Priestley actor in his lab.

The videos of the areas now will be shot with a variety of cameras, including GoPros on the river (kayak trip) and aerial shots and panoramas acquired with the drone camera. Try to represent the mixing/contrast between natural and industrial features.

Synopsis

In the late nineteenth century, the volatile political climate in Europe and the exploration or imperial expansion into other parts of the world inspired two groups taking opposite stances on the same conflict—the French Revolution—to relocate here in the Susquehanna Valley. While their visions of utopia and new beginnings ultimately failed, the legacy of those visions has impacted the communities and landscape.

Main Characters

Tom Bresenhan, Dave Buck, kayakers, local residents, representative from French Azilum Inc. (who are planning to buy the land, if state doesn't sell it)

*Duane? Members of conservancy groups? Expert on local Native American groups and their removal (maybe Katie Faull, **Native American leader**)? Someone from Elk Land Township Camp (group involved with land lawsuit)?*

Story Structure

The film opens with aerial images of Susquehanna River, people kayaking, etc. while a voice reads a short poem by Coleridge about “pantisocracy” – *should the poem be shown in text over the images?*

****** Create association with current place...well-known landmark? Standing stone? Video montage or sequence through neighborhoods, a person walking through a neighborhood, fracking activity, community event/farmer's market/fair, kayak “sojourn”

Introduction to the main topic of the film: the idea of “pantisocracy” Coleridge mentions in this poem was inspired by a utopian vision expressed by Joseph Priestley in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, which he attempted to realize here on the banks of the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. Priestley wasn't the only one to have this vision for the Susquehanna Valley, as French aristocrats fleeing the French Revolution settled here as well *only ** miles up the river*. As mention each place, show video filmed at Priestley House and French Azilum.

But the implementation of these visions came at a price: Native American Removal. *Interview with expert on Native Americans in this region? Katie Faull?*

Writings about nature and living off of the land – de Creveceour, etc. Both inspired in part by French writers in the 1700s such as Crèvecoeur and the movement of French Physiocrats with their advocacy of living close to the land.

Provide context of the two groups in terms of the French Revolution. Joseph Priestley pro-revolution, and French Azilum formed by aristocrats fleeing persecution and loss of their way of life during the revolution.

Background for Joseph Priestley– a very successful chemist, known for the “discovery” of oxygen – why did he relocate to the U.S.? His persecution as Dissident, supporter of revolution. Perhaps including image of his rival who was beheaded at the guillotine (to give an idea of violence of the revolution). House burned down in 1791 riot.

Interview with *curator of Priestley House museum*.

On the other side of the revolution were those who arrived at the Susquehanna and formed the French Azilum -- French aristocrats fleeing the french revolution and plantation owners from San Domingo fleeing slave revolts in Haiti.

Interview with David Buck, shots of the river and area of French Azilum. *This is where we could use GoPro/kayak footage?*

Descriptions of the expectations and realities of life in French Azilum. E.g. Anecdote about first project when they settled was building a dance hall.

Legacies of these societies. Both failed, but Priestley house has become a museum, *French Azilum evolved into current community?*

Closing – interviews with locals, historians, environmentalists, etc. to give different perspectives on the ongoing complicated relationships between nature, progress, idealization of nature, tradition/history.