



Register of Very Special Places

A PROJECT OF TRADITIONAL ARTS IN UPSTATE NEW YORK

TAUNY TIPS FOR DOCUMENTATION

A Placed-Based Questionnaire

By Jennifer Scott. Courtesy of Place Matters, a project of City Lore and the Municipal Art Society

To help you get started documenting the places you care about, we've provided this list of possible questions.

About the Narrator

(to understand the narrator's relationship to the place)

Where were you born?

When did you first begin working/living/spending time in this place?

What is your association with the place?

About the Traditions

(to understand how the place has been used over time and if any special activities occur there)

What special events or activities happen here? Have they evolved over time?

About the History

(to understand the meaning of the place through stories and memories about its evolution and uses over time)

Can you tell me some of your favorite stories about this place – either your own, or that you've heard from others?

What is your most vivid/happy memory of the place?

Do you have any sad memories?

What happened there that was unusual or meaningful? (Maybe the place recalls an event, a time period, a way life from the past?)

In what way does the place help us better understand the way things have changed over time?

About the Place as a Public Space

(to understand how the place has served as a meaningful space for the public)

Is this a place where people congregate?

What ethnic, gender, or age breakdowns exist around the people who gather here?

What attracts people to this place? Why and how often do they come together?

How does this place enliven public life?

To what extent do the users of this place share it comfortably? When and where are there / have there been conflicts?

How does the place contribute to the neighborhood's character? Is it considered a local landmark?

If it is not currently in use, when and why did it close down? Are there plans to reopen it?

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About the Physical Features

(to understand what kinds of stories the physical features can tell us about a place)

Can you identify any of its architectural features that help to convey the story or stories about the place that make it important? Or, what are the physical features that make it comfortable or useful to the people who use it?

In what ways does its design represent the values of those who built it or now use it?

What furnishings or other artifacts suggest how the place is/was used over time?

About the Surrounding Neighborhood

(to tell us more about how the place may fit in with the surrounding residents, nearby places, and any larger changes in the area)

Who lives near whom here? What is / was the ethnic composition of the neighborhood?

Who owns/owned the stores and businesses?

In what ways has the neighborhood changed?

How do and did new and old communities interact?

Which streets, street corners, shops, restaurants, bars, cafeterias, churches, union halls, theaters, etc are / were favorite gathering places?

How do people identify themselves here? By street, neighborhood, ethnicity, race?

Questions to ask at Every Interview

What, if anything, currently threatens the site?

If this place were to disappear, what would be lost? What would you miss the most about it?

Are there other people in the area who can give testimony to or tell stories about this site?

Can you direct me to any photos or archives of the site?