



Castle Street Collective

A registered 501(c)(3) organization

Tax ID: 93-4317054

P.O. Box 386, Wilmington, NC 28402

# ENTERPRISE ON CASTLE: BLACK BUSINESS HERITAGE ON CASTLE STREET

PROJECT NARRATIVE



The history of castle street's black home-enterprise corridor is missing today not because it was insignificant, but because it was **systematically erased.**

After the 1898 coup, Wilmington's white leadership reshaped the city's public memory, legal systems, and built environment in ways that obscured or eliminated black presence involvement

# WHO WE ARE

## Castle Street Collective



## History of Castle Street Collective

Prior to COVID, CSC was an ad hoc group of Castle Street District (“District”) business owners and residents who irregularly met and hosted a few events .

After a COVID hiatus, John Wilsey of Wilmington Wine “rebooted” the organization.

Residents and business owners meet monthly and discussed District issues and debated organization purpose. By fall of that year it became clear that business owners and residents wanted the same thing – ***more feet on the Street and a thriving business community.***

CSC incorporated and was granted Sec. 501(c)(3) non-profit status by the IRS.

We began fundraising activities to raise funds beyond membership dues. Funds are coupled with neighborhood volunteers to hold events (i.e. outdoor movie nights and holiday events) and execute beautification projects (i.e. landscaping corners and tree wells, District clean-ups, murals).

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## Mission

...to foster the growth and prosperity of  
Castle Street businesses  
through dedicated initiatives in  
beautification, safety, and events.

## Castle Street Collective Board



Bobby Croghan  
President



Alain Norman  
Vice-President



Lizzie Hourigan  
Secretary



David Mendel  
Treasurer



Erin Jones  
Social Media



Bob Elkins  
Volunteer

[www.castlestreet.org](http://www.castlestreet.org)  
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Facebook (castlestreetcollective)  
Instagram (#ilmcastlestreetcollective)



# PURPOSE

## Enterprise on Castle: Black Business Heritage on Castle Street

This community-led public history project is to bring back the stories of the black families who built a thriving home-based economy on castle street after emancipation — before their legacy was pushed out of view because of the Wilmington coup of 1898.

We're restoring visibility through a heritage trail, interpretive signage and markers, a digital archive, and descendant-centered programming that anchors equitable redevelopment in truth-telling.

We're combining archival and parcel-level research with descendant/community oral histories, then translate the findings into collaboratively designed interpretive signage, a heritage trail, and a digital archive that launches through public programming and walking tours.

With the help of the community and grants, the Collective hopes to bring this endeavor to life!



# 1898 COUP INCIDENT MAP

# WHY IS THIS HISTORY MISSING?



1

## Suppression of Black Narratives

After 1898, white officials and newspaper editors rewrote Wilmington’s history to portray the coup as a “race riot” and to minimize Black achievement. Black businesses, neighborhoods, and leaders were intentionally omitted from: city directories | newspapers | redevelopment plans | official histories

*This created a public record that reflected white supremacy, not historical truth.*

2

## Loss of Black Property Owners

When Black families lost their homes and businesses, the physical evidence of their presence disappeared.

*As white owners replaced Black ones, the narrative shifted to match the new demographics.*

3

## Lack of Photographs and Documentation

Black neighborhoods were rarely photographed before Jim Crow.

White photographers focused on: downtown | white homes | commercial districts

As a result, Castle Street’s Black households left behind few visual records.

4

## Generational Displacement

When families fled or were pushed out, their descendants often lacked:

deeds | photographs | letters | business records

*This made it harder for later generations to preserve or reclaim their stories.*

5

## Urban Change and Redevelopment

Mid-century redevelopment removed older structures and replaced them with new buildings, parking lots, or commercial spaces.

*Without markers or interpretation, the memory of what once stood there faded.*

# HOW WAS CASTLE STREET AFFECTED?



## 1 **Forced Displacement and Flight**

Black men fled to avoid violence; household economies that depended on laundresses, carpenters, and porters collapsed overnight.

*Women lost income, families lost stability, and home-based businesses shut down.*

## 2 **Loss of Political Protection**

The coup eliminated Black officeholders and police, handing courts, policing, and property systems entirely to white officials.

*Black property owners were left without legal recourse.*

## 3 **Property Loss Through Legal Pressure**

Trustee sales, tax foreclosures, nominal-value transfers, and building & loan takeovers stripped Black families of land.

*The coup did not burn Castle Street — it enabled long-term dispossession.*

## 4 **Collapse of the Home-Enterprise Economy**

The corridor's stable households, labor networks, and intergenerational continuity were shattered.

*By the 1910s–1920s, most original Black families were gone.*

## 5 **Erasure from Public Memory**

Castle Street's Black businesses and families were omitted from city directories, redevelopment plans, and public narratives.

*This erasure is part of the harm — and part of what your project seeks to repair.*

# PROJECT GOALS

Enterprise on Castle: Black Business Heritage on Castle Street

- 1 Engage descendants and community members.
- 2 Document pre-1898 Black households and home-based businesses.
- 3 Create a public heritage trail with interpretive signage.
- 4 Install “ghost footprints” or art marking former wash houses, sheds, and porches.
- 5 Build a digital map and research archive.



# WHY THIS PROJECT NOW?

Enterprise on Castle: Black Business Heritage on Castle Street

To restore visibility to erased black entrepreneurship

Repair gaps in public memory

Ensure redevelopment is grounded in truth, dignity, and community history  
rather than omission

# PROJECT RATIONALE

Enterprise on Castle: Black Business Heritage on Castle Street

## 1 Historical Need

Castle Street's black history is undocumented and at risk of permanent loss.

## 2 COMMUNITY NEED

Descendants and residents deserve recognition and truth-telling.

## 3 CULTURAL NEED

Wilmington's public history is incomplete without Castle Street.

## 4 REDEVELOPMENT NEED

As Castle Street redevelops, its future must be grounded in its authentic past.

# PROJECT VISION

Enterprise on Castle: Black Business Heritage on Castle Street

Castle Street will become a visible, community-rooted public history corridor that restores Wilmington's erased Black home-enterprise legacy and uses truth-telling to shape a more equitable future.

- **Restore visibility**  
to the Black families, households, and home-based businesses that defined Castle Street after Emancipation.
- **Transform research into public experience**  
through a multi-stop heritage trail, interpretive signage, metal markers, and digital storytelling.
- **Center descendants and community voices**  
in how the history is documented, interpreted, and shared.
- **Create a lasting educational and cultural asset**  
for residents, schools, visitors, and future generations.
- **Anchor redevelopment in historical truth**  
so Castle Street's future reflects the people and stories that built it.

# PROJECT SUCCESS

Enterprise on Castle: Black Business Heritage on Castle Street

- 1 Number of parcels researched
- 2 Number of physical story signs installed
- 3 Number of oral histories collected
- 4 Physical and Online traffic
- 5 Community feedback
- 6 Descendant engagement

# PROJECT ACTIVITY – LOCAL COLLABORATION

Enterprise on Castle: Black Business Heritage on Castle Street

## 1 City/County Cooperation

Permitting  
Right-of-Way

## 2 Local Partner Collaboration

Historians  
Black History Non-profits  
Local Tourism Companies

## 3 Local Economy

Fabricators  
Digital Media  
Local Tourism Companies

## 4 Community Members

Community Input Sessions x 10  
Oral History Collaborations

# PROJECT ACTIVITY - RESEARCH

Enterprise on Castle: Black Business Heritage on Castle Street

- 1 Deed Tracing
- 2 Census and Directory Review
- 3 Parcel-by-Parcel Reconstruction
- 4 Sanborn Map Analysis
- 5 Oral history

# PROJECT ACTIVITY – INTERPRETATION & DESIGN

Enterprise on Castle: Black Business Heritage on Castle Street

- 1 Developing the Story Framework
- 2 Signage Language
- 3 Parcel-by-Parcel Reconstruction
- 4 Branding
- 5 Map Experience
- 6 Digital Content
- 7 Engage Partners

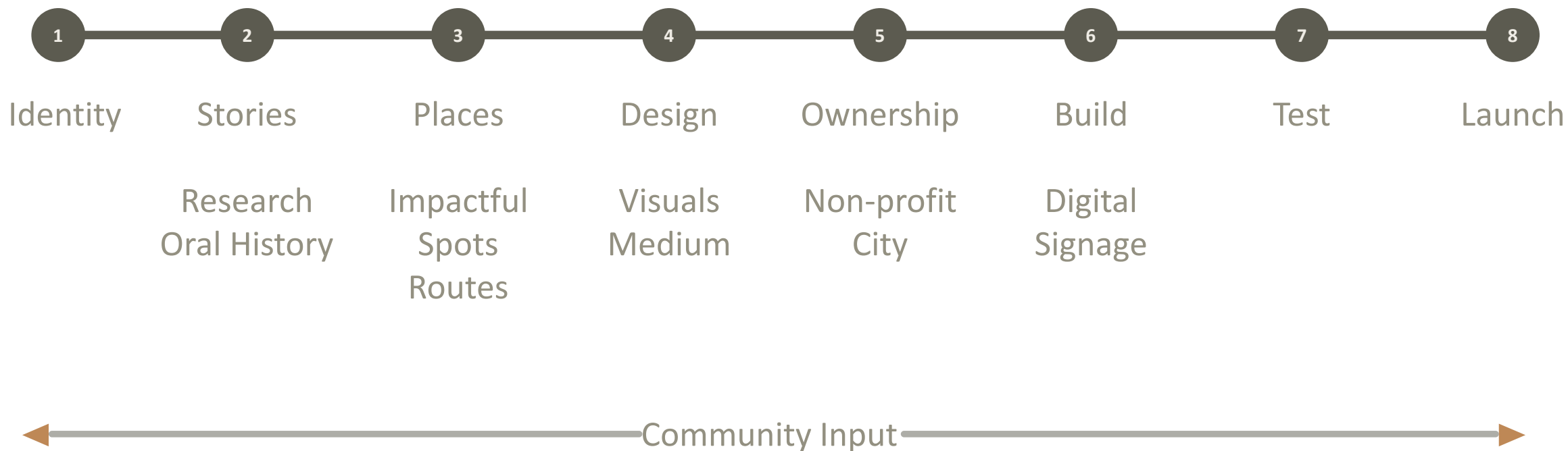
# PROJECT ACTIVITY – FABRICATE, INSTALL, LAUNCH

Enterprise on Castle: Black Business Heritage on Castle Street

- 1 Obtain necessary permits
- 2 Production of Exterior Elements
- 3 Install Trail Elements
- 4 Launch Digital Archive
- 5 Engage Partners

# PATH

Enterprise on Castle: Black Business Heritage on Castle Street



# PROJECT ACTIVITY – KEY RISKS & MITIGATION

Enterprise on Castle: Black Business Heritage on Castle Street

## 1 Archival gaps

Seek multiple research firms early

## 2 Stakeholder alignment

Community – Provide plenty of listening sessions

City – Provide timely updates

## 3 Permitting

Engage with the city early

Seek those organizations with similar installs

## 4 Funding needs

Provide a phased approach per implement with insufficient grant funds

Seek private donors



# EXPECTED IMPACT

Enterprise on Castle: Black Business Heritage on Castle Street

The completed project will strengthen the residential community by restoring visibility to the families and cultural traditions that shaped Castle Street, deepening residents' sense of identity, belonging, and connection to place.

It will also benefit the business community by creating a distinctive heritage destination that increases foot traffic, supports cultural tourism, and grounds future economic activity in an authentic story of black entrepreneurship and equitable redevelopment.



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# QUESTIONS

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