

AWARD

John L. Cotter Award in Historical Archaeology: Krysta Ryzewski

Mary C. Beaudry

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Dr. Krysta Ryzewski is the 2017 recipient of the Society for Historical Archaeology's (SHA) John L. Cotter Award, recognizing her talent for teamwork and collaboration exemplified by the Unearthing Detroit Project, which she developed in 2013 with faculty and students at Wayne State University. The award was presented to Dr. Ryzewski at the 50th Annual Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology in Fort Worth, Texas.

Ryzewski received her bachelor's degree with honors in archaeology from Boston University in 2001, an M.Phil. in archaeology, heritage, and museum studies from Cambridge University in 2003, and a Ph.D. in anthropology from Brown University in 2008. In 2011, she accepted a position at Wayne State University (WSU) to co-lead the Anthropology of the City initiative. Unearthing Detroit is an element of WSU's Anthropology of the City initiative and, in addition to WSU faculty and students, operates with a host of local volunteers. The city of Detroit presents unique challenges and countless opportunities for Ryzewski's archaeological research interests in (de)industrialization, disaster management, diaspora, and associated social conditions, as well as for her commitment to public outreach and community involvement.

Since the 1960s, Wayne State has been ground zero for urban archaeological research in Detroit. For over two decades, until the early 1980s, Ryzewski's predecessors conducted salvage excavations on dozens of development sites in the city (Pilling 1967), housing many of the resulting finds in the university's Gordon L. Grosscup Museum of Anthropology. When

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Ryzewski arrived at Wayne State in 2011, she initiated a program of collections-based research focused on the 19th-century material recovered from the nine city blocks that stood in the footprint of the Renaissance Center building (current world headquarters of General Motors). She created the Unearting Detroit Project with generous funding from the Wayne State Research Enhancement Program, hiring student researchers and enlisting numerous student volunteers to inventory the collection of 30,000 objects, addressing curatorial issues, and developing a dissemination program anchored in community-based archaeology. This dissemination program shares results via an “Unearting Detroit” blog, various social-media platforms, and community open houses, as well as through the development of the “Time Jumpers” classroom archaeology module, which is geared toward students in junior high school and features Detroit archaeology in sessions that introduce archaeological principles. During the summer of 2016, student members of the Unearting Detroit Project were hired by and volunteered for the National Park Service Urban Fellowship Program to adapt “Time Jumpers” for use in a nationwide urban cultural resource educational program.

The archaeological components of Unearting Detroit are wide in scope. The Roosevelt Park Project focuses on the historic neighborhood of Corktown, from which over 300 working-class families were displaced to make way for the construction of Michigan Central Train Station, now one of Detroit’s most iconic ruins (Swaminathan 2011; Ryzewski 2014). The archaeological research at Roosevelt Park examines the circumstances of working-class life in Detroit during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period when the multi-ethnic Corktown neighborhood was populated by a mixture of immigrant, second-generation, long-term, and itinerant residents (Ryzewski 2015). One of the most intriguing chapters in Corktown’s history was the violent process of community disruption and upheaval that spanned a decade during the construction of the Michigan Central Station and Roosevelt Park (1911–1918). Details of this displacement struggle are detectable in the historical and archaeological data recovered from Roosevelt Park (Howard et al. 2015; *Science* 2015). The ways that this removal process fits within a longer-term history of controversial urban-planning strategies in

Detroit are an important focus of Ryzewski’s continuing research (Ryzewski 2016). The archaeology of Roosevelt Park contributes significant information about a forgotten community in Detroit, as well as to historical understandings of the urban Midwest during a critical period of urbanization and industrial transformation. In 2015, the journal *Science* featured Ryzewski’s research at Roosevelt Park as one of eight faculty research programs selected for their “Women in Science” series (*Science* 2015).

The Unearting Detroit Project has conducted archaeology at venues associated with Detroit’s music-making history at sites such as the Blue Bird Inn jazz club and the Grande Ballroom (Brace and Ellens 2015; Ryzewski [2017]). The Speakeasy Project began when property owners and preservationists who learned of the Roosevelt Park Project approached Ryzewski about using archaeological techniques to learn whether or not illegal clubs operated on their premises during Prohibition—sites of former speakeasies have become something of a point of pride for their owners (Digging Detroit 2014). The Unearting Detroit Project team and its work reached a national audience when Ryzewski’s crew’s archaeological investigations of the original Pewabic Pottery site at the Ransom Gillis House were featured in November 2015 on HGTV’s popular program *Rehab Addict*.

In 2014, with funding from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Ryzewski co-organized with Dr. Laura McAtackney (Aarhus University, Denmark) an international workshop, “Archaeologies of the Present: Critical Engagements with Post-Industrial Urban Transformations,” held at WSU. The workshop focused on ways in which research in urban spaces worldwide intersects with themes of creativity, ruination, and sociopolitical movements. The result is a coedited volume, *Contemporary Archaeology and the City: Creativity, Ruination, and Political Action*, published by Oxford University Press (McAtackney and Ryzewski [2017]).

Ryzewski received the SHA’s John L. Cotter Award for her work in Detroit as the most prominent aspect of her multifaceted talents and research interests. Dr. Krysta Ryzewski’s Unearting Detroit Project provides a potent critique of shallow analyses of Detroit’s urban decline, while at the same time empowering Detroit residents by involving them in the recovery of their own histories.

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