

# The Westbury Community Archive: Claiming the Past, Defining the Present towards a Better Future

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## Abstract

This article looks at the process of compiling a community archive in Westbury, Johannesburg. The township is located alongside the better known Sophiatown. Its history provides an insight into the experiences of the working class in the city since the establishment of Johannesburg more than a 100 years ago. The motivation for this archive comes from the experiences of activists in dealing with social and economic challenges that this community continues to face, and the connection with past activism through the work of community activists like Florrie Daniels. Daniels kept meticulous records of community organisations she helped to establish around early childhood development, preventative healthcare, poverty alleviation, housing, sport, youth and women's organisations, as well as political and civic movements from the 1960s onwards. Much of what is contained in the Florrie Daniels collection is associated with cooperative grassroots activity. Her collection offers a perspective that includes records of working-class solidarity around regional and national social and political struggles. It forms the basis of further accumulation of materials to incorporate into a community archive. The idea of the archive has encouraged dialogue between veteran activists, organisations that operate in the area and education institutions that resulted in collaborative approaches in its construction.

**Keywords:** local history; activists; archives; grassroots narratives; community heritage; community archives

## Introduction

The history of Westbury cannot be separated from the development of the City of Johannesburg after the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886. The increasing urban population attracted by the mining and growing service, support and manufacturing industries required that housing be provided in proportion to the expanding urban population. As a result of

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overcrowding in the initially demarcated “locations” in the inner city, Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare were laid out in 1905 as areas for “Natives, Coloured and Asiatics” residing in peri-urban areas (Pirie and Hart 1985, 388). A section to the south of Sophiatown became a municipal shelter location known as Western Native Township to restrict African settlement in Johannesburg after 1924 when the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 was applied (Parnell and Pirie 1991). The area was named Western Coloured Township after the Group Areas Act of 1950 was promulgated, and then renamed Westbury in the 1960s.

There are many occurrences resulting from the spatial landscape that shaped the community of Westbury. Chapman (2013) describes five distinct morphological stages of the area as:

- the origins of Johannesburg;
- the 1904–1919 period characterised by the creation of a transport grid for the town;
- the period of high apartheid from 1948–1985;
- the dismantling of apartheid spatial policies in the post-1985 period;
- the most recent spatial policy and development in the Western Areas, branded in 2012 as the “Corridors of Freedom.”<sup>1</sup>

The rearrangement of the demographics during the “high apartheid” era culminated in Westbury becoming a working-class “coloured” group area in the 1960s. Racial classification ripped families apart and created a community identity of being more privileged than those who were removed. However, the challenges of the working class remained, and activism around them continued. Behind the much-publicised and recorded history of the removal are stories of resilience, endurance and activism that continued among those who were left behind.

Each period brought its own challenges and legacies for its inhabitants. There are different perspectives on the history of the area. Participatory interactions with people and organisations that function/ed in the community can capture accounts of lived experiences. They can unearth interesting material to compile a profile of how communities responded to conditions created by changing policy and how they experienced the resulting impact. This knowledge can change popular perceptions, misrepresentations and glaring omissions of the collective history. It can offer a fresh perspective on historical events and their bearing on local communities like

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<sup>1</sup> The City of Johannesburg in the past few years embarked on new spatial plans based on transport-orientated development. The “Corridors of Freedom” consists of transport arteries linked to interchanges where the focus will be on mixed-use development. It is aimed at transforming apartheid settlement patterns, which have shunted the majority of residents to the city’s outskirts, away from economic opportunities and access to jobs.

Westbury. There are also lessons to be learned from efforts to organise for a better quality of life.

Activists from Westbury have started building a community archive where experiences of past and present generations will be made available in the form of publications, recorded oral histories, artifacts, music and art forms. The archive will challenge the dominant chronicles and perceptions of the area and its people by the mainstream media and biased historical documentation that portrays it only as a violent community riddled with crime, illicit drug trading and substance abuse. The lived experiences of people from this community need to find expression in historical record so that it can provide a better understanding of the context of socio-economic challenges and how to deal with them communally. The value of such archives is summed up in the following (Motala 2015, 4) way:

Useful and systematic knowledge can be produced by engaging with and recognising the direct experience of individuals and their communities. There are many ways of ensuring that the knowledge that has been developed by communities over many generations can be understood and used. This knowledge can hugely enhance our understanding of the kinds of issues that affect communities.

Gathering histories and setting up community archives are “the grassroots activities of documenting, recording and exploring communal heritage in which public participation, control and ownership of the project is essential” (Flinn 2007, 153). The National Council on Archives in the United Kingdom defines community archives as “collections of material that encapsulate a particular community’s understanding of its history and identity” (NCA 2007, 3). Ander (2007, 3) defines community archives as “collections of primary source material about and generated by communities widely defined” (cited in Newman 2010, 7). This collection should include primary source material such as photos, documents and oral histories about the community concerned. It is a more democratic way of information gathering and storing if people are directly involved in the process and it makes the recording of events more representative, authentic and useful. The community archive thus becomes a repository for collective ownership of the community history and heritage.

The compilation of past and current events, and the effect of policy formulations on Westbury over the years, can form the basis for strengthening efforts to mobilise and organise this community. Present-day change agents can extract and compile representative and useful accounts of its past to plan and implement more informative and structured interventions to restore integrity, community cohesion and justice.

A community archive where such activities about communities are recorded and stored can be made available to residents of Westbury, local authorities, schools, organisations and institutions. It can become a space for further historical inquiry and knowledge production—an instrument of democratic civic participation, learning and liberation.

### **The Way We Remember and Record History Has a Bearing on the Society We Envision**

South Africa's national archival system has its origins in the legislative and administrative mechanisms that regulated colonial rule. Colonial officials, missionaries, travellers, public figures and scholars generated information for record-keeping. Indigenous people and those who were brought to South African shores as slaves and immigrants "entered the archive in commissioned ethnological and other surveys that were instrumental in establishing authority over the land and its people, entrenching difference, maintaining control and reinforcing a particular hierarchy of knowledge" (The Archival Platform 2015, 20). Historically, the official documenting of events and archiving of heritage was seen as the responsibility and domain of the state. In South Africa, such archives mainly served to reflect an incomplete, and sometimes distorted picture of past realities that was only from the perspective and prejudices of the archivists in the interest of the political authorities of the time. They were used to record in order to maintain control over people and resources. Most archivists were trained to align their functions with policy requirements of colonial and apartheid (state) domination. As Flinn (2007, 152) puts it,

In reality the mainstream or formal archive sector does not contain or represent the voices of the ordinary people, the grassroots and the marginalised. Or at least if it does, the archive rarely allows them to speak with their voice and through their own records.

In the post-apartheid era, the National Archives of South Africa Act No 43 of 1996 came into effect on 1 January 1997, marking the start of a new phase of public archive management and administration under a new political dispensation (The Archival Platform 2015, 37–8):

The Act mandated the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (NARSSA) to play a proactive role in shaping public memory by filling gaps resulting from past imbalances in the acquisition of non-public records and actively documenting the experiences of those either excluded from or marginalised in the colonial and apartheid archives.

The Act opens the possibility of the state committing resources to bring sidelined collections by anti-colonial and anti-apartheid organisations into focus. The Act does not explicitly refer to or mention community archives, but clearly suggests participatory grassroots activity with communities to influence democratic participation in rectifying the disparities caused by

selective archiving of South Africa's colonial and apartheid past. It is therefore expected that innovative local community history and heritage programmes will be encouraged, supported and funded by state agencies.

By implication, the Act acknowledges that archives must serve a different purpose to that served in the past. It creates space for heritage activists to contest, create and build public memory in a constructive manner to help bring about fundamental social change. There is also opportunity for national archiving to be influenced by local initiatives to be more representative and useful in addressing the consequences of discriminatory and oppressive policy formulations.

Opposing forces in society will remember, record and refer to events in line with the values they want to preserve and outcomes they desire. A case in point is the different perceptions of the 1976 student uprising. There is consensus that the June 16, 1976 Uprising that began in Soweto, Johannesburg, and spread countrywide profoundly changed the socio-political landscape in South Africa. South African History Online (2013) suggests events that triggered the uprising can be traced back to policies of the apartheid government that resulted in the introduction of the Bantu Education Act in 1953. The rise of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and the formation of the South African Students Organisation (SASO) raised the political consciousness of many students. Black students mobilised against the Afrikaans language being made compulsory as a medium of instruction in schools in 1974. On 16 June 1976, between 3000 and 10 000 students marched peacefully to demonstrate and protest against the government's directive. The march was meant to culminate in a rally at Orlando Stadium. Police fired tear gas and live ammunition that resulted in a widespread revolt against the government. While the uprising began in Soweto, it spread across the country and carried on until the following year, 1977. But as Nieftagodien (2014, 20) writes,

Two dominant narratives emerged about the (June 1976) uprising, the one on the part of the then government, to portray the youth as unruly and undisciplined, backed up by the Cillie Commission of Inquiry, established by the government to investigate the "disturbances" of 1976. Unsurprisingly the report absolved the state, especially the police, of responsibility for the violence and accused students of instigating attacks on the police, whites and government property without good cause. A second narrative, produced by the African National Congress (ANC), has attempted to claim ownership of and appropriating the uprising. Constructing this dominant narrative of liberation history has involved the marginalisation of others, including other national liberation movements (for example, the Pan Africanist Congress and the Black Consciousness Movement), many local organisations and independent trade unions.

The 1976 uprising transcended classroom issues. It was inspired by the BCM-initiated Black Community Projects (BCP), which made the connection between the struggles in education to

those of structural inequality and oppression. The uprising motivated activists to intensify efforts to organise workers on the factory floor and in communities where they live, thus extending the need and role of education beyond formal institutions. As Heffernan (2016) notes:

They [the students] were inspired and encouraged to connect these issues to the broader political system by a range of influences in their homes, communities, and classrooms. Among these were university students who had been conscientised through the Black Consciousness Movement and expelled from rural “bush” universities during waves of protest in 1972 and 1974.

One of the consequences of the events of 16 June 1976 was increased state repression against individuals and organisations. By 1977, the South African security police shut down organisations it deemed to be a threat to the state. These bodies were declared illegal and many of their members received banning orders. On Wednesday 19 October 1977, barely a month after the death of Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko in police detention, Jimmy Kruger, then South Africa’s Minister of Justice, banned 17 Black Consciousness organisations. Among them were the Black People’s Convention (BPC), the South African Students Organisation (SASO), the South African Students’ Movement (SASM), the National Association of Youth Organisations and all its affiliates, the Black Community Programmes, the Medupe Writers’ Association, the Zimele Trust Fund, the Black Women’s Federation, the Union of Black Journalists, the Association for the Educational and Cultural Advancement of the African People of South Africa (ASSECA) and some publications, notably *The World* (AZAPO 2017).

On the one hand, the framing of the 1976 uprising by the state tried to justify repressive action in order to maintain control, while the most vocal liberation movement, the ANC, appropriated the uprising to further its mission of liberating the country from white minority rule. The contributions of other liberation organisations and movements such as the PAC, AZAPO, the National Forum (NF) and a number of independent left groups continue to be sidelined.

Many of the struggles within communities were not very prominently, if at all, covered by the mainstream media, while the popular “liberation” narrative followed the actions of and against prominent individuals who went into exile or were killed as a result, and selectively promoted organisations that were active at the time. The contributions of many activists on the ground are also largely ignored. As a result, much of the grassroots activities inspired by the uprising, of mobilising and organising communities, has not been adequately preserved, recorded and shared. Just like many townships around the country, the community of Westbury too was impacted by the uprising. Formally documenting those experiences will complement existing

initiatives to present our collective history as lessons for building organisation towards a society free of racism, sexism, exploitation and inequality.

### **Recollections and Collections for Building a Community Archive**

Events that followed the 1976 uprising encouraged many people to become politically active. Exiled organisations had their military wing swelled by those who chose to leave the country to join movements in exile, such as the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), Azanian National Liberation Army (AZANLA) and Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK). After 1976 many students who attended the so-called "bush universities" returned to Johannesburg townships. The bush universities were the extension of the apartheid strategy of providing separate tertiary education for those defined "African," "Coloured" and "Indian." In Westbury and surrounding areas, they were mainly from the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the University of Durban Westville (UDW). These "bush" students were politicised by the unfolding events and activity on university campuses and brought a new energy to communities they returned to.

The "bush" scholars brought with them an assortment of political ideas and ideologies. Student debates were influenced by the writings of Steve Biko, Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, and the practical activities of SASO that encouraged students to join or initiate community programmes under the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). There were articles by famous academics in exile such as Harold Wolpe, Baruch Hirson, and Martin Legassick, as well as those embedded in the mass democratic movement, such as Richard Turner, Neil Aggett and Eddie Webster (Reddy 2004). They were also exposed to Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, to literature produced by the Unity Movement and Neville Alexander who wrote under the pseudonym "No Sizwe." Those who returned to Westbury and its surrounds were adherents of the BCM, the New Unity Movement (NUM), the ANC (and the Congress Movement), the Marxist Workers' Tendency (MWT) of the ANC, the PAC, the Labour Party (LP) and some were very active in the South African Council on Sport (SACOS). This blend served to encourage political debate and activism around community projects, student groups and political formations. Those who returned to Westbury and surrounding areas promoted the formation of reading groups, civic organisations and student formations at schools. Students from the Wits Black Student Society (BSS) and some from the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) also joined these efforts. Community organisations like the Westbury Residents Action Committee (WRAC), the Co-ordinating Residents' Action Committee (CRAC), and publications like *WRAC News* and *Speak Community News* sprouted from those deliberations. *WRAC News* and the *Speak*

*Community News* were produced by students and community activists to cover issues faced by township communities, and played a role in uniting people around struggles in working-class communities in the then Transvaal.

The “bush” students helped communities to link struggles across the provinces. Activists from Westbury participated in support work around workers’ struggles like the 1979 Fatti’s and Moni’s strike and the Wilson Rowntree boycott in 1982. The interaction of student and community activists made WRAC one of the biggest and most organised civic associations in the then Transvaal. It led CRAC to become a civic component of the United Democratic Front (UDF). CRAC was represented as part of the civic component of the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) at the Conference for a Democratic Future (CDF), held at the University of the Witwatersrand on 8 December 1989. Similar work resulted in formations like the Durban Housing Action Committee (DHAC), the Cape Areas Housing Action Committee (CAHAC) and the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (PEBCO). Discussions were underway between these groups for a national civic movement to be formed in the early 1980s. These movements were the precursor to the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) that was formed in 1992.

The banning of the Black Consciousness organisations, and the exile of many young students after the 1976 uprising strengthened the ranks of the ANC, whose internal operatives started to build organisation around what later became the UDF, while adherents of the BCM joined other left groupings to form the National Forum (NF).

After 1976, the ANC intensified its information campaign through a radio station, Radio Freedom, which broadcast from Lusaka, Zambia. The trademark AK47 gunfire introduced the fiery speeches and messages from leaders in exile about waging warfare against the oppressive apartheid government. It was during one of these broadcasts that Florrie Daniels, an activist from Westbury, commented to a bunch of young impressionable teenagers huddled around a transistor radio in her dining room, absorbing the emancipation rhetoric with intermittent shouts of “*Amandla, Awhethu*” (“power to the people”). She advised “*Daai is ook deel van die struggle, maar ons het baie werk hier wat net so belangrik is*” (“[the armed struggle] is part of the struggle, but we have work here of equal importance”) (Interviews: E. Daniels 2001; F. Daniels 2013). And that will remain her legacy: her commitment to organise people to change their world themselves by being well informed in order to consolidate and to act collectively and decisively. Many of the organisations she helped establish were built on this philosophy.



Florrie Daniels was born in Randfontein in the West Rand on 24 June 1925. Her family moved to Price Street in Newclare, Johannesburg. When she got married, she moved to 1680 Moguerane Street, Western Native Township. She led the campaign for better housing, healthcare and living conditions in Western Township and relocated to 2011 Roberts Circle (Interview: F. Daniels 2013). She lived there until her death on 30 August 2015.

It was while living in Moguerane Street in the 1950s that Daniels first became involved with community work, driven by her deep concern for families that did not have the means to combat the cold winters or access to nutritious food. Her activism progressed to organising youth into the Girls' Brigade, starting two crèches for preschool children, bringing an eye clinic to Westbury and starting an anti-substance abuse support group, and in the late 1970s her work was influenced by political events. She helped build the civic movement in the (then) Transvaal province, mobilised around housing and healthcare and became a member of the ANC.

One of the first projects she started in 1958 was Operation Winter Warm. She arranged donations of wool and knitting needles for unemployed women to knit caps and scarves. There were also donations of blankets and clothing that she organised women members of her church to distribute. Her youngest daughter, Sharon, remembers that this project was still in operation when she, as a little girl in the early 1970s, was tasked to assist with surveys in Western to establish needs and numbers of people who required help with clothes, blankets, fuel and food in the cold winter season. At this stage already, Ma Florrie started documenting, cataloguing and reporting methodically on how many items were received and the families in need.

Ma Florrie's eldest son, Andy, joined the Boys' Brigade in the early 1960s. The Boys' Brigade has its origins in Glasgow, Scotland. It was formed by a Sunday school teacher, William Alexander Smith, as a means of instilling "discipline" into adolescent boys and to try to develop their character in an orderly, Christian manner. The discovery of gold in Johannesburg resulted in flows of immigrants to South Africa (also) from the British Isles who first brought the idea of the Brigade to the Reef, for European youth (Adonis 1975, 78–9). The concept was introduced to Western Township by members of the Anglican Church in the 1950s, and followed the same militaristic style of discipline, rank and uniform, offering young boys an alternative to joining gangs (Interview: F. Daniels 2001).

In 1965, Daniels helped establish a Girls' Brigade in Western, along the same lines as the Boys' Brigade. The two brigades had fully fledged brass bands and marched almost every week in their uniforms at weddings, funerals and various functions in Western and surrounding

townships. Florrie Daniels rose up in the ranks to become the president of the organisation, a position she held until she died, with the honour of being the oldest and longest serving member.

Her love for children and concern for their education and welfare saw her establish the Hamilton Memorial Crèche in 1972, and the Little Sunshine Nursery School in 1978, both in Westbury. Daniels enlisted the services of teachers and social workers for these projects. The committees of both institutions secured premises from the Johannesburg City Council, funding from Johannesburg Child Welfare, and later from the Department of Social Services. Both projects are still fully operational, the latter under the leadership of her granddaughter Venisha Sithole, who had to give detailed accounts of its affairs to Ma Daniels on a regular basis when she was alive.

Socio-economic conditions in the area dictate that not all can afford to pay the crèche fees. Ma Daniels got the Department of Social Welfare to assist the children and their families. In one case, she adopted two siblings when their own family unit disintegrated. On another occasion, Ma Daniels encouraged a young widowed mother to continue with her studies while she took care of her young children. There are many other such accounts of her generosity and humanity.

When she lost her sight, Daniels had to travel to St John's Eye Hospital located next to the Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto, about 30 km away. It took two bus rides to get there and long waits to get the treatment which she required, for two days a week for more than six months. Her blindness was not permanent, and when she regained her sight, she successfully campaigned for St John's to provide a mobile clinic initially, and to later open a branch in the Western Township, where she became a board member. "No-one should travel that far to get treatment" were her words after doing just that for six months for her own ailment. St John's Eye Care Centre is still operational and well resourced (Interviews: E. Daniels 2001; F. Daniels 2013; Sithole 2013).

Florrie Daniels was a founding member of the vibrant WRAC, which dealt with issues of housing and also operated an advice office where expert help from practising lawyers and students was available to people of Westbury (Interviews: E. Daniels 2001; F. Daniels 2013; Davids 2013). WRAC formed alliances with community groups including the Soweto Civic Association (SCA), the Eldorado Park Action Committee (EPAC), the Federation of Residents' Associations (FRA), the Benoni Student Movement (BSM), and the Reiger Park Action Committee (RPAC), who together established the Co-ordinating Residents' Action Committee

(CRAC). CRAC represented the civic movement in the (then) Transvaal, and a national organisation was to be formed with CAHAC, DHAC, PEBCO and other civic organisations around the country.

Florrie Daniels kept a well-organised record of events and happenings in her community and surrounds. Her collection includes articles about the gang violence in which many sons of Western killed others or lost their lives. There are also accounts of the student uprisings of the 1970s and 1980s. Recorded are accounts of the high school in neighbouring Coronationville where students pulled down the South African flag on Republic Day in 1973, and the school boycotts in the 1980s. She also kept a record of the academic, sporting and other achievements of local people and proudly paraded them as examples of what Westbury and surrounding areas have produced against the odds. Ma Daniels enrolled her two younger children at the St Barnabas College, a sought-after school for young achievers partly funded by the churches and corporations. The school was located in Westbury before relocating to neighbouring Bosmont. Many of its students joined the community activities, especially taking turns to help out at the local advice office. The advice offices that were established in communities around Johannesburg played a significant role beyond the para-legal services they offered. Advice offices have a long history of assisting and mobilising communities that dates back to the apartheid era. In addition to rights-based information, they help educate communities on how and where to access services offered by government departments and agencies (NGO Pulse 2018). Advice offices attracted activists who saw them as providing an opportunity to set up networks to share information and methods of organising communities.

In 1984, WRAC organised a health screening of all children living in Westbury and surrounding areas when teachers at the local school noticed that children were performing poorly due to ill health, problems with their hearing and eyesight. Medical doctors, social workers and students from the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), University of the Western Cape (UWC) and University of Durban Westville (UDW), spent four days in Westbury examining every child under 10 years old (More Health Less Rent 1984). The project themed “More Health Less Rent,” led to the local clinic being spruced up to respond better to the health needs of children in Westbury: “The More Health Less Rent campaign was able to show the relationship and impact of poor housing and unemployment on health and other social conditions in Westbury” (Interview: E. Daniels 2001). Florrie Daniels worked at the clinic as a volunteer administrator until the age of 87. The clinic has been rebuilt as part of the Corridors

of Freedom initiative of the Gauteng Provincial Government. Organisations have lobbied for the new clinic to be named the Florrie Daniels Clinic, but this has yet to happen.

Other achievements of the campaign included the mass action that led to WRAC challenging the construction of new houses in Westbury, as Lupton (1992) recalls:

The militant struggle of Westbury residents in 1985 over the redevelopment of the township was centred on [issues of size health and design] Action against the construction was swift, foundations dug during the day by the LTA construction workers were filled in at night by residents. When it became apparent that that construction would continue, building sites were entered during the day, walls knocked down, and building material damaged, WRAC mobilised tenants through public meetings which culminated in a march to the Department of Housing in the [Johannesburg] city centre. Police suppressed the march with force and leading WRAC activists were detained. After a bitter confrontation the city council finally agreed that WRAC would be allowed to present alternative plans. In cooperation with a progressive architects' consultancy [Planact], WRAC made new proposals which incorporated many of the demands of tenants.

Planact is an organisation established in 1985 as a voluntary association of professionals who came together to assist community organisations to propose and advocate for alternative development plans to those of the apartheid regime, and then to facilitate a civic voice in policy development processes during the transition to democracy.

In Westbury, Florrie Daniels kept records of the activity she was involved with. Her activism covered community organisations she helped to establish around poverty alleviation, housing, sport, early childhood development, preventative healthcare, youth and women's organisations, as well as political and civic movements. Part of the collection survived security police raids when she protected them in an underground chamber in her backyard (Interviews: E. Daniels 2001; F. Daniels 2013; Sithole 2013). Her actions ensured that the memory of community action embodied in her collection is preserved. Among her records are the following:

- Handwritten accounts of how community projects were started and some detail of organisational housekeeping since the 1950s.
- Meeting minutes, notes and reports compiled by the members of the organisations she started or was part of, including: Operation Winter Warm, Operation Self Help, Hamilton Memorial Crèche, Sunshine Nursery School, Western Sewing Co-operative, Anglican Church Women's Group, St John's Eye Care Centre, Westbury Geriatric Clinic, Westbury Girls' Brigade, Westbury Residents Action Committee, Westbury Advice Office, and the Co-ordinated Residents' Action Committee.

- As noted earlier, she was a founding member of WRAC, an organisation that mobilised around inadequate housing, health and general civic matters. WRAC produced numerous pamphlets around specific issues and struggles as well as a monthly newsletter from 1979 to 1985 that was used as an organising tool. Her collection includes all pamphlets and copies of *WRAC News*.
- Advice office records. WRAC ran an advice office staffed by law students from Wits together with volunteers from the community and supported by lawyers from the Legal Resources Centre (LRC), an organisation that played a crucial role in providing legal services to the poor. These records include documents and details about the Westbury struggle for decent housing, giving an insight into the strategy of community action and legal processes that led to community input in infrastructure development.
- Details of the community consultation process and action that led to the Planact plans submitted to the Johannesburg Department of Housing.
- Details of processes associated with the health screening that WRAC undertook in 1984, including reports and a documentary film titled *More Health Less Rent*.

Her collection captures other voices in a range of publications that were used to help build organisation and create awareness through the interaction of WRAC with other civic groups, NGOs and political groups. Among them are the following:

- All of the issues of *Speak Community News* produced by the Co-ordinating Residents' Action Committee (CRAC). CRAC was a federal structure for community organisations in the (then) Transvaal formed in 1983. *Speak Community News* was conceived when community organisations met at Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre, a sanctuary run by progressive theologians and educationists, and resolved to start a newspaper that would speak directly to the challenges facing poor communities with a view that collective strategies could be formulated to deal with common challenges. The South African Council of Churches (SACC), and particularly Dr Byers Naude, provided the initial funding. WRAC members were key in the production of *Speak Community News*. Florrie Daniels kept records of the newspaper, including editorial and production meeting minutes, and unpublished material from townships across the province.

- *Learn and Teach* magazines that addressed issues faced by workers on the factory floor and in communities. Westbury activists contributed to and featured in some issues.
- *Upbeat* magazines aimed at youth, and other education material produced by the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED). Staff from the Labour and Community Project (LACOM), a project of the SACHED Trust, occasionally held workshops in Westbury.
- *Arise! Vukani*, produced by a left youth organisation, Action Youth.
- Publications by the Legal Resource Centre (LRC), the Human Awareness Programme (HAP), faith based organisations and the trade unions.
- There are also cuttings from the mainstream press pertaining to Westbury and other communities—themed and catalogued.

Upon viewing the collection of Florrie Daniels, librarian Riette Zaaïman from the University of Johannesburg (UJ) Library identified it as worthy of a UJ Library Special Collection. She claims that the Westbury collection will be the ideal way to balance the Witwatersrand Afrikaner Collection inherited from the Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit (RAU), as this collection also describes the history of this “Western Coloured Township” from a different perspective. The photographs and recorded struggles around housing fit perfectly with a collection like the GM van der Waal Collection, which describes the growth of Johannesburg’s different suburbs and types of housing during the earlier years. Zaaïman (2016) further describes the collection as a well-organised record of events and happenings in Florrie Daniels’s community.

The collection consists of different media. Envelopes, containers and photographs are well marked and in relatively good condition. There are videos, a documentary film, visual and sound recordings that will need digitisation. There are also some objects like a typewriter, a Roneo duplicating machine used for producing pamphlets and newsletters, and the plaque of the WRAC advice centre with the wording: “For housing, job creation and many other projects. Open Mon–Thurs. 10am–1pm.” These objects typically belong in a community archive.

It is the collection kept by Florrie Daniels that inspired discussion about establishing a community archive. Her collection is the perfect basis for establishing a platform to expand and include information held by others in the form of artifacts, documents and oral histories that will uncover valuable lessons from lived experiences. Community memory embodied in

an archive has the potential to turn those experiences and knowledge from below into useful structured educational and socio-economic interventions to break down the hegemony of official classification.

The collection has since been lifted by the UJ Library Special Collections, where the professional services of archivists are engaged to preserve, sort, and index it for optimal retrieval of information and for usage by researchers and activists. To establish and sustain the community archive, a number of concerns must be addressed. It is not sufficient to have a space and to gather community resources. On this issue, Flinn (2007, 168) contends that “[t]here are questions of custody and care for collections, experienced archivists must support the creators and custodians in the stewardship and preservation of the collections.”

Flinn calls it a post-custodial model where custody and care do not occur in a formal archive itself but happen in a distributed manner within the creating organisation where the records remain. In this case, UJ Library Services has agreed to assist with preserving the integrity of the collection together with activists from the community, and to a “joint custodial” model, with dual archives at UJ and in Westbury. The advantage of this model is that Library Services at UJ are breaking with tradition by helping to curate a collection within a community for broader benefit, beyond only academic research, as a site for community learning and organising. Activists are also acquiring invaluable skills in the process, and finding new ways of making local history accessible and relevant.

### **Building the Archive: Participatory and Collaborative Practice**

The Westbury Community Archive created opportunity for participatory approaches with former and present activists and collaborative practice between activists, organisations and education institutions. It has inspired activists in other areas like Kliptown and Alexander Township to consider establishing community archives.

Building the archive is in itself a learning process. Staff members from the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT) at UJ are helping to set up the archive with community organisations based at the Westbury Youth Centre. CERT evokes a range of participatory educational approaches, including popular education (Amsler et al. 2010; Torres 1992), action research and integrated people-centred development (Davids, Theron, and Maphunye 2009), and is using them to assist in the construction of the archive.

In establishing the Westbury Archive, many conversations about how it should be done gave rise to three focused discussion groups: one with former WRAC members who still reside in

Westbury, and a second with veteran activists who were part of WRAC who have relocated and former members of CRAC. The third group is with members of organisations and projects that are currently active in the area. At first, a community history project was envisaged to be housed at the old Westbury library premises, with the collection made by Florrie Daniels as the foundation.

Former WRAC members who constituted the first group were concerned that the contribution they have made to organise the Westbury community would only be a vague memory in the minds of a few older people. They wanted a project to help younger people understand that many battles were fought with authorities to change the conditions in Westbury to be more conducive to promoting values that will build a strong community. They were also adamant that the community should take stock of the root causes of the challenges endured to encourage more people to be involved in building organisations.

The second group of veteran activists thought it important to revisit some of the techniques and methods of organising. There was a strong motivation for the reintroduction of *Speak Community News* to serve as an information source, a tool for networking and organising. Based on its strong reputation of covering working-class issues in township communities in the 1980s, the group felt that present-day struggles of service delivery, substance abuse and other challenges faced by communities could be shared across geographic areas while also creating awareness of past activism as lessons. Four members from this group volunteered to serve on an editorial committee which has produced two issues of the revived *Speak* thus far.

Discussions about the community archive prompted the above two groups to start a secondary project. The Legacy Project was established to recognise many who have made valuable contributions to the people of Westbury and broader society. They felt it important to showcase the history of Westbury through the activism of a range of people from differing political persuasions. The Legacy Project (The Legacy Project 2015) preamble reads:

The Legacy Project will honour our elders who have sacrificed so that we may be free. They interpreted the conditions of inequality, racism, exploitation and oppression; and devised responses in defiance of unjust laws and state repression. They persevere against all odds and give us courage to remain committed to total liberation of ourselves and our communities. Their words and their collective actions continue to inspire us to take forward the initiatives that are changing our lives and restoring our dignity.



There were also people from this community who chose to collaborate with the then authorities in the Tricameral Parliament and local councils, established by the apartheid government to allow for parliamentary and regional representation for “Coloureds” and “Indians.” It was felt that an objective description of their involvement should be included to form part of a holistic historical account. Until now, the Legacy Project has honoured the contributions of Florrie Daniels, Gerald Braam (former rector of the Rand College of Education) and Mike Fetani (social rights and anti-substance abuse activist). All material generated by the activities of the Legacy Project will be incorporated into the Westbury Community Archive.

The third group, representing organisations that are active in Westbury, expressed concerns that despite efforts in the past by very committed people, the situation in Westbury continues to be challenging. One of the reasons cited is the lack of interest or active participation by more people. The projects they run offer vital services, but they are seen as a reliable presence for when they are needed. They felt that their work will have much more of an impact if the root causes of the issues that they deal with on a daily basis such as drug and substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, basic healthcare, trauma counselling, and even services like eye health, and mental health, could be located in the holistic picture of historical influences. Activists who staff these organisations were astonished to learn from more experienced members that so much has happened in the past that they were not aware of. Most of them make the connection as a means to better understand their role and the mission of their respective projects. They are keen to continue to promote the idea of community documentation of history from intergenerational dialogues.

The Westbury Community Archive project has attracted the attention of academics within UJ who are contributing to the archive. Professor Gert van der Westhuizen from the Department of Educational Psychology and his team conducted two intergenerational conversations in Westbury under a project called “Learning from Community Knowledge Holders.” The focus of this project is on how children can learn from those who hold knowledge outside of the formal school system: “The purpose is to collect and study examples in order to make recommendations to teachers in schools about how children learn from knowledge holders” (Van der Westhuizen 2016). Audio and visual recordings and reports have been made available to the archive.

A master’s student who lives in Westbury and who was part of this initiative is following up with the idea of intergenerational dialogues. This student has since taken up a teaching post at

a primary school in the area, and has introduced her learners to local history as an auxiliary activity, using material from the archive.

Another group active in the area, “Readers are Leaders,” that has a presence at all primary schools, has been inspired by the dialogues to consult the works of local authors like Don Mattera and Chris van Wyk, as well as others who have not been published. It has also started a programme of regular interactions between parents, knowledge holders and children. The process has unearthed some very good storytellers among retired community members, including an ex-teacher who has been inspired to make written submissions to the archive.

The archive will also benefit from research initiated by the Faculty of Arts Design and Architecture (FADA) at UJ. Staff members Brenden Grey and Terence Fenn initiated a project called “Design for and with Local Communities.” This project investigates how improvement in the quality of lives can be made to both UJ and the surrounding communities by adopting democratic and participatory approaches to community-based research and design. It looks at how design practice can contribute to social justice, human rights and environmental issues (for example unemployment, poverty, literacy, environmental problems, health, service delivery, education, community organising and developing local economies) and similarly to the value community experience and knowledge bring to design. It is guided by six questions which centre around the value design brings to pressing contemporary social problems (Grey 2016):

1. What kinds of processes and solutions emerge when long-term relationships are established between design departments and nearby community activists, organisers, leaders and community members?
2. What power differentials emerge in community design projects and what is the basis for these? How are identified power differentials negotiated in the design and communication process?
3. What research approaches and design research methods are best suited to working with communities in solving social problems collaboratively and democratically?
4. When communities are provided access to design processes, what community practices emerge? Similarly, when designers are made aware of community knowledge, histories, experiences, struggles and broader national socio-economic frameworks, what design practices emerge?

5. What interactional dynamics emerge when social actors from different lifeworlds (students, lecturers, activists and community members) work together in an open-ended and sustained way with the causes of social and environmental issues?

FADA students have exhibited their work, which includes laminated illustrations of possible design interventions to improve the quality of life in Westbury and the efficiency of organisations. Currently an honours student is doing her dissertation on the design for a community archive, and an illustrated history of Florrie Daniels is the subject of a master's thesis.

## **Conclusion**

The people of Westbury were, and still are, involved in political battles, social challenges and survival struggles. Campaigns that emerge around basic issues faced by working-class people as a result of deprivation and inequality are often the platforms for refining strategies to build organisation. There is great value in including people in projects that create awareness, and in making the links within the wider historical context through the basic issue being addressed. The Westbury Community Archive has created the space to revisit the past to inform current practice, and to document experiences in such a way that they provide lessons, ideas and guidance for future solidarity actions.

Over the past few years, Westbury has experienced intermittent violence, killings, rape and teenage suicides. According to most residents, recent levels of violence and killings in the area are fuelled by nefarious activities linked to destructive illegal drug trading, substance abuse, theft and related economies that have their roots in the spatial, political and economic legacy of oppression, deprivation and inequality. Presently, many organisations are actively pursuing solutions to these challenges. Among them are an organisation of former gangsters, Together Action Group (TAG), local radio station Kofifi FM, the Westbury Local Drug Action Committee (WLDAC), and a consortium of religious groups. They, together with organisations with a long-standing record of dealing with specific challenges, have been included in activity around establishing the archive. The co-creation of the archive with activists from Westbury and UJ, who are committed to participatory approaches, is leading to critical discussion, reflection and examination of current strategies to strengthen action to build emancipatory organisation.

The Westbury Community Archive has inspired veteran activists to revisit past struggles. It has developed a sense of collective ownership of the history as expressed through the Florrie

Daniels Collection. It has stimulated initiatives like the Legacy Project to extract memories embodied in individuals and organisations. Community dialogues between older knowledge holders and younger people are augmenting an understanding and appreciation of historical factors that impact on current circumstances. Some of those who are active in community projects have a renewed appreciation for past activism and its impact on the work that they do. It has inspired young activists to take a deeper interest in social issues in Westbury. Existing organisations that were consulted find value in talking about their own expertise and areas of activity in the broader historical context of Westbury and surrounding communities to make the work that they do more significant.

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## **List of Acronyms**

ANC—African National Congress

APLA—Azanian People's Liberation Army

ASSECA—Association for the Educational and Cultural Advancement of the African People of South Africa

AZANLA—Azania National Liberation Army

AZAPO—Azanian People's Organisation

AZASM—Azanian Students' Movement

AZASO—Azanian Students' Organisation

BCM—Black Consciousness Movement

BCP—Black Community Projects

BSM—Benoni Student Movement

BSS—Black Student Society (Wits)

CAHAC—Cape Areas Housing Action Committee

CDF—Conference for a Democratic Future

CRAC—Coordinating Residents' Action Committee

DHAC—Durban Housing Action Committee

EPAC—Eldorado Park Action Committee

FADA—Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, UJ

FRA—Federation of Residents' Associations (Lenasia)

HAP—Human Awareness Programme

LACOM—The Labour and Community Project  
LP—Labour Party  
LRC—Legal Resource Centre  
MDM—Mass Democratic Movement  
MK—Umkhonto We Sizwe  
NARSSA—National Archives and Records Service of South Africa  
NF—National Forum  
NGO—Non-government organisation  
NUSAS—National Union of South African Students  
PEBCO—Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation  
RAU—Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit  
RPAC—Reiger Park Action Committee  
SABC—South African Broadcast Corporation  
SACC—South African Council of Churches  
SACHED—South African Committee for Higher Education  
SACOS—South African Council on Sport  
SAHO—South African History Online  
SASM—South African Students' Movement  
SASO—South African Students Organisation  
SCA—Soweto Civic Association  
TAG—Together Action Group  
UDF—United Democratic Front  
UDW—University of Durban Westville  
UJ—University of Johannesburg  
UWC—University of the Western Cape  
Wits—University of the Witwatersrand  
WLDAC—Westbury Local Drug Action Committee  
WRAC—Westbury Residents Action Committee