

Pieces of Lakeland: Using Augmented-Reality Technology to Share History



LAKELAND COMMUNITY HERITAGE PROJECT

Fiona Dolan, University of Maryland

Advisor: Katrina Fenlon, University of Maryland, College Park

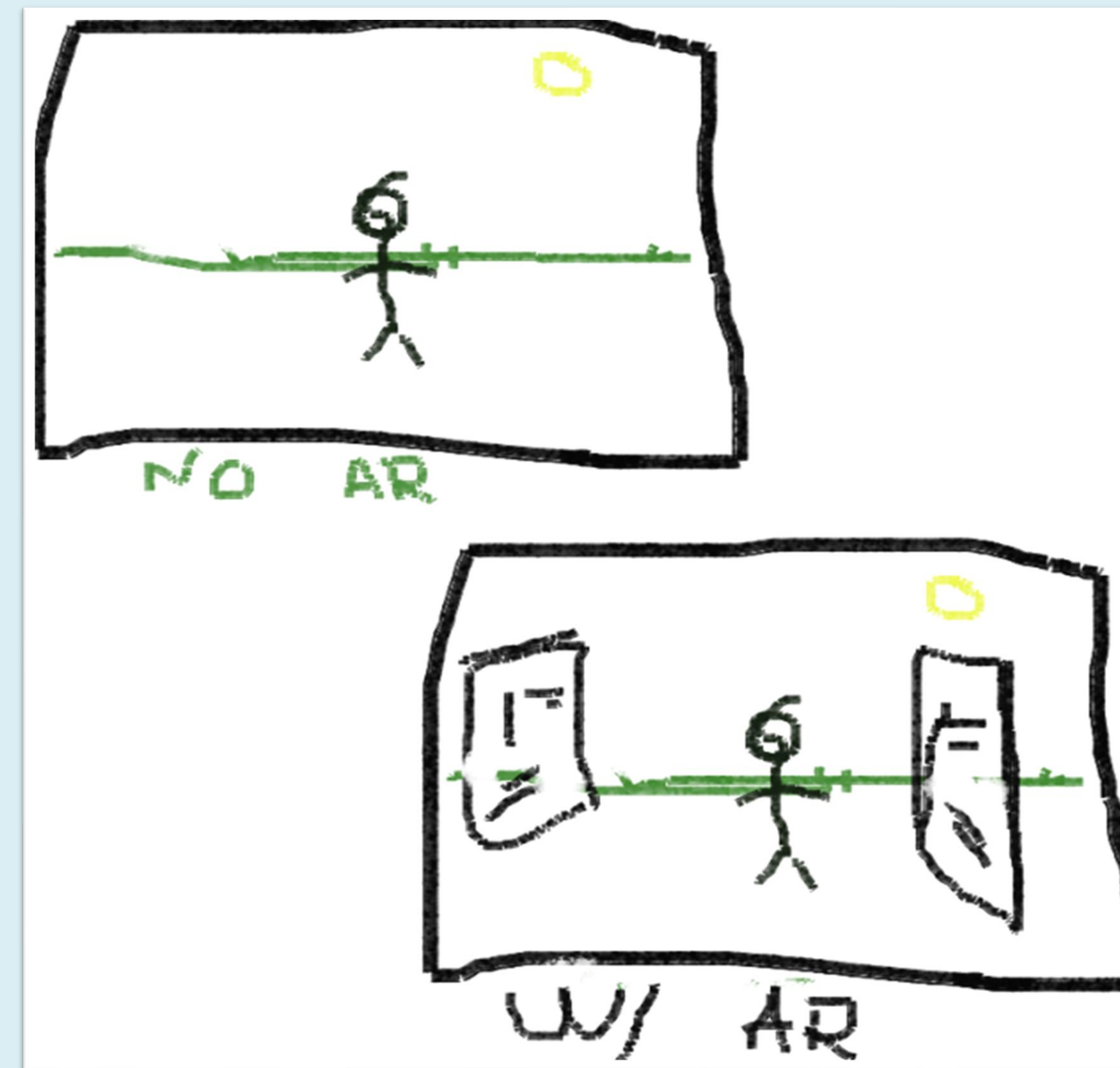
Background

Lakeland is a historically black neighborhood located in College Park, with a rich history that few of its current residents are aware of. Built in 1890, it was initially a primarily white area, until three African-American families moved in. More followed, and by the beginning of the 20th century Lakeland was a rapidly growing community, with strong connections that ensured its growth over the decades. However, facing accumulating damage from yearly flooding, the community reached out for help to the city of College Park in the 1960s. In 1970, a plan for ‘Urban Renewal’ was enacted, one which ultimately displaced over two thirds of the families that had lived there for decades. Today, there now stand townhouses and apartments in the place of local businesses and family homes. Many of the current residents have no idea of the ground they stand on. The Lakeland Community Heritage Project began building an archive to preserve its history. Until now, it was difficult for the public to access the images and knowledge encased in the archive. This project exists as a prototype to explore ways to preserve Lakeland’s history via sharing it.

Objective

To use augmented-reality technology to build three site-based tours, accessible via smart devices, in order to more readily share Lakeland’s history with the public.

Early Concept & Planning



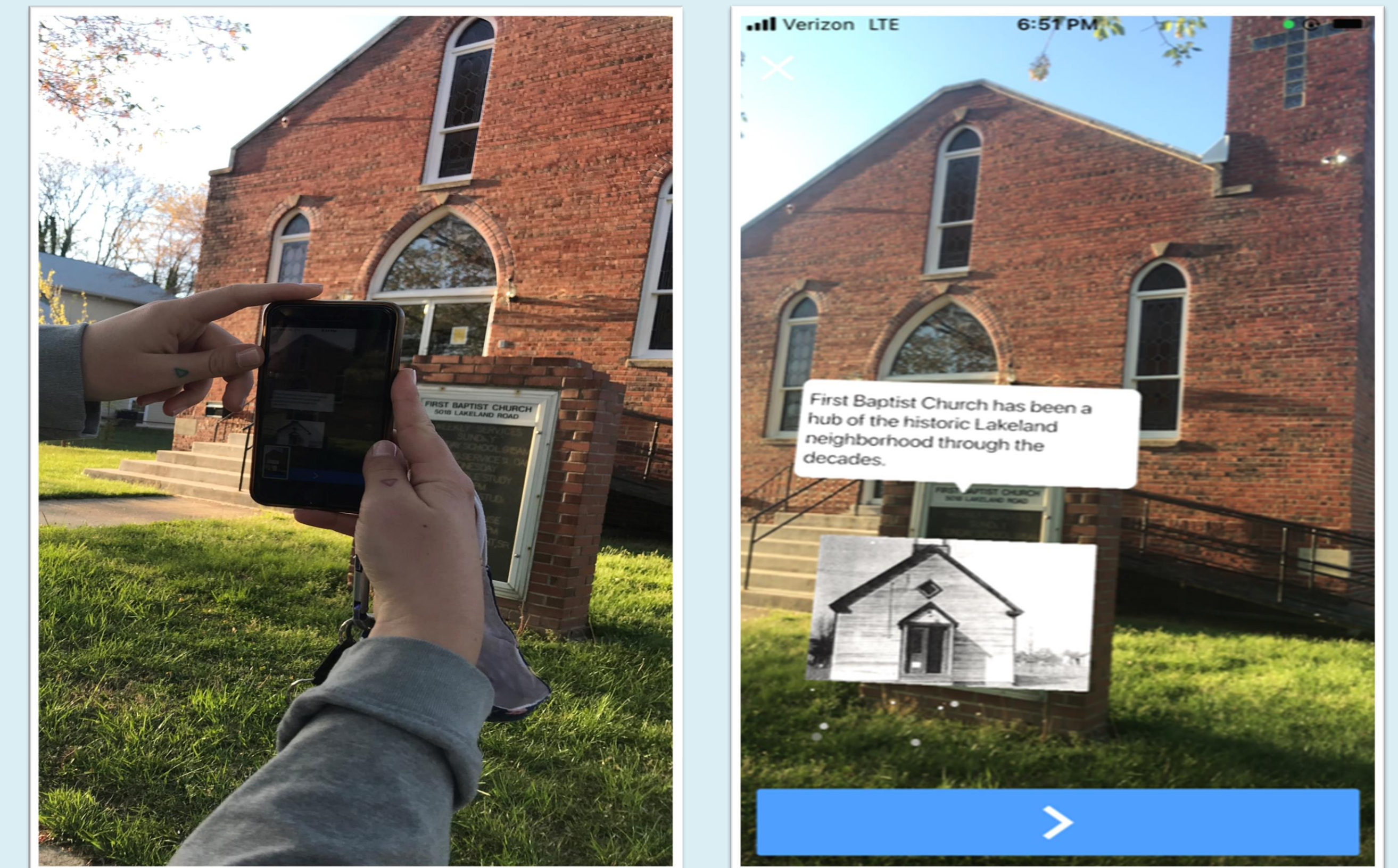
- Early sketch here shows one concept of a ‘gallery-style’ augmented reality tour
- Project initially to be hardcoded in the platform Unity
- Scrapped due to system constraints & the labor-intensive approach
- Switched to Metaverse, platform specifically built for augmented reality experiences

Process



- Workbench view of the First Baptist Church Tour in Metaverse
- Switching platforms allowed for more focus on accuracy and user experience
- Each tour went through series of revisions with Lakelanders
- This approach ensured their voices remained central in the sharing of their history

Final Iteration



- On left, a user accesses the First Baptist Church Tour, and on right is the display on the user’s device
- Tours function as images with accompanying text that are grounded in the real world
- Historic images of the site over the decades directly overlay the site as it stands today
- Shows the present in the context of the past, and vice versa

Selecting the Locations

Each tour is based in a particular area or hub of Lakeland:

- First Baptist Church
- The Eastern Side of Lakeland
- The Rosenwald Schools

Each site has about fifteen to twenty images, every one with accompanying text that shares a timeline both of that particular site and of Lakeland as a whole. These images were selected from the Lakeland Archive, a collaborative project between the Maryland Institute of Technology in the Humanities and the Lakeland Community Heritage Project. Each site’s images are specific to the site where their tour is located.

Scan any of the QR codes with the Metaverse app (available for iOS and Android devices) to access the tours!

First Baptist Church

- Lakeland’s oldest congregation
- Previously, had less documentation than other prominent Lakeland Church Embry A.M.E.
- Remains active over a century after its formation



Eastern Side of Lakeland

- Lake Artemesia Natural Area stands in its place today
- Large wealth of images and oral interviews from which to draw from in Lakeland Archive
- Valuable site of which little remains in the present



Rosenwald Schools

- The Rosenwald Fund provided teaching plans, money for construction of schools, and teacher housing to provide quality education to black communities
- Students of one such school formed Lakeland Community Heritage Project



Future Work

This project functions as a prototype for the Lakeland Community Heritage Project to explore further ways to share their history with the public, and further applications of this concept are already being pursued. Ways to access the tours are planned to be placed at their respective sites locations in the coming weeks.

To Learn More About Lakeland

Visit their website, <https://lakelandchp.com>, to read more in depth about their history and their projects. Consider reading their book – *Lakeland: African Americans in College Park* – to learn even more.

Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the help of my mentor, Katrina Fenlon. I also thank Maxine Gross, Trevor Muñoz, Quint Gregory, and the Lakeland Community Heritage Project for making this project possible.