

Abstract

In 1924–25, three teenage farmers’ sons set off to see the United States, hopping freight trains from Maryland to San Francisco and back. In 2018, the 40-something granddaughter of one of the men recreated their journey, taking her mobility-impaired, homebody septuagenarian mother along for the 7,000-mile ride. *Throw Momma on the Train* tells the stories of both adventures, examining changes and continuities in women’s and men’s geographic mobility and the stories family members tell about travel and about one another. This online exhibit, a companion website for the creator’s book-in-progress, uses the digital multimedia platform ArcGIS StoryMaps. Interactive maps feature each stop on the two journeys, showcasing excerpts from the travelers’ diaries, “then” and “now” photographs, city histories, short sociological essays, videos, music, interviews, and links to external resources.



Interactive Story Map BLUE = 2018; RED = 1924-25

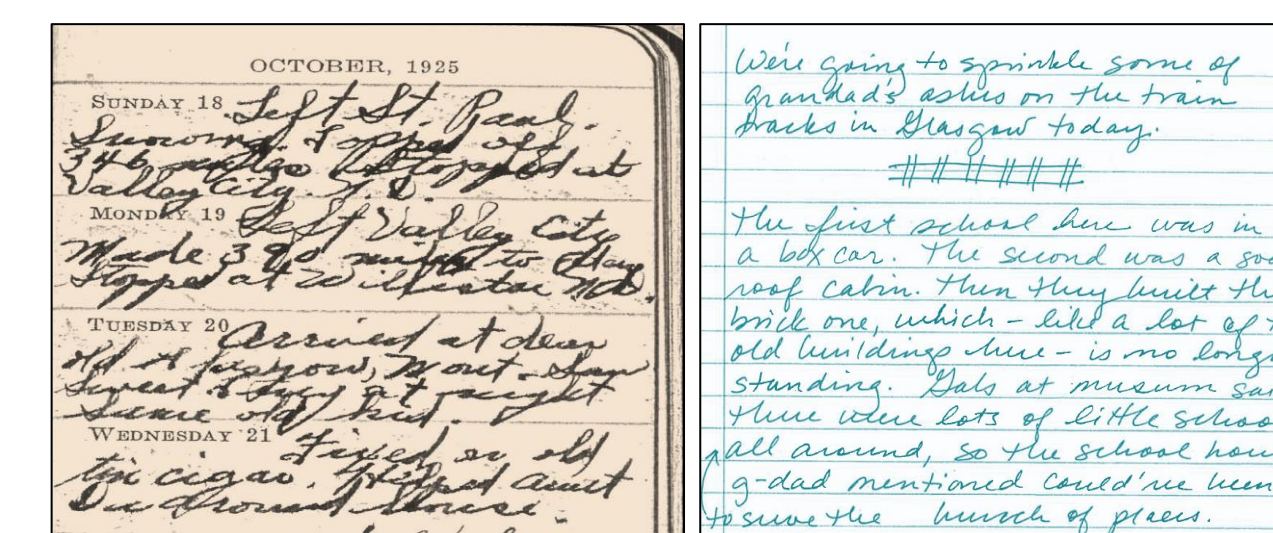
Project Overview

Throw Momma on the Train investigates key themes of gender, generation, travel, mobility, and family stories and speaks to multiple questions at the heart of sociology. How are personal biographies shaped by social and historical context? How do “linked lives” within and across generations enhance and constrain people’s life chances? How do the stories people tell bring meaning to their lives and help them make sense of social change? The website is designed to make the research accessible and engaging to people outside the academy.

Data & Materials

Throw Momma draws on diverse data, including:

- travel diaries (1925 and 2018)
- photographs (1925 and 2018)
- historic newspapers
- ephemera and souvenirs
- oral history interviews
- social histories and biographies



Journal excerpts, 1925 & 2018

Project Workflow

Throw Momma features multiple interactive maps created using the digital multimedia platform ArcGIS StoryMaps. One map provides an overview of both journeys. Others delve into specific places the travelers stopped along their way, most notably San Francisco, California, and Glasgow, Montana.

Creating each interactive map involved multiple steps:

- Transcribing diaries (1925 & 2018) from handwritten to electronic text
- Converting diary texts to tabular form (spreadsheets organized by date)

DATE	JOURNAL ENTRY	ADDRESS	CITY	STATE	ENTITIES: PEOPLE	ENTITIES: PLACES	ENTITIES: ARTS	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
Wednesday, March 4, 1925	Burnt out 2 con rods about 11:00. Put an oil feed. Left Sulphur Ariz 5:00 Arrived Deming New Mex.		Deming	NM		Deming, NM		32°15'40"N	107°45'21"W
Thursday, March 5, 1925	Arrived El Paso Texas 1:30 p.m. Went in Mexico. Wind down. Drove straight had blow out.		El Paso	TX		El Paso, Tx, Mexico			
Friday, March 6, 1925	Drove all morning arrived at Sweet Water Texas. Had another blow out.		Sweet Water	TX		Sweet Water			
Saturday, March 7, 1925	Came through oil fields. Arrived at Wichita [sic] Falls Texas at 8:00.		Wichita Falls	TX		Wichita Falls			

- Searching diary texts for proper nouns (this process was semi-automated using the displaCy Named Entity Visualizer, but still required data cleaning)

The initial idea was to go “jazzing” in the boys’ honor— the American Jazz Museum ORG has live music on Thurs GPE . (and other nights) at its Blue Room FAC —but it was pretty clear we couldn’t spend enough time at Crystal Bridges LOC and get here and get there, especially since Blue Room ORG doesn’t serve food. As it was, with the short detour to Peculiar, MO (how could we not?) and a bathroom/SW check-in pit stop in . . . I forget, we got to KC ORG around the 7 pm TIME music starting time, hungry and

- Obtaining street addresses for relevant sites (e.g., homes, hotels, train stations, eateries)
- Obtaining historic images and selecting contemporary images from the creator’s archive
- Scanning diaries and ephemera to create uploadable images
- Uploading images to accessible hosting site
- Locating information about locations and entities visited
- Mapping the data points:
 - Entering locations in StoryMaps
 - Linking images, URLs, etc., to location pins
 - Connecting the dots (literally!)
- Adding introductory texts and formatting the website

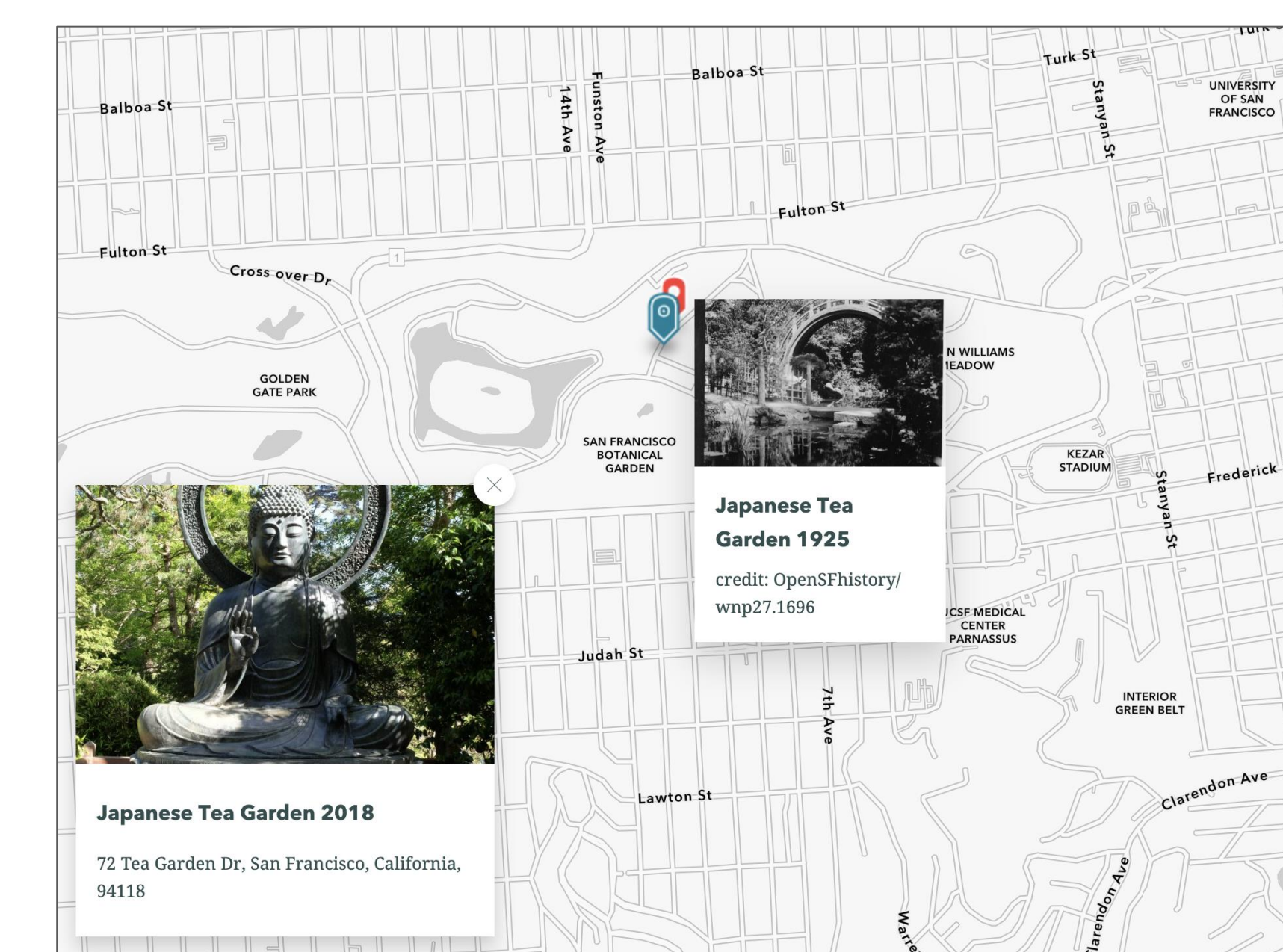
Future Plans & Suggested Reading

Next steps for this project include: (1) Using the known points on the 1924-25 overview map, combined with data on railroad timetables, historic roads, and automobile speeds, to predict unknown points on the map—that is, unnamed places where the travelers stopped.

(2) Identifying others who have retraced family trips and inviting them to attend public workshops, be interviewed about their experiences, and/or contribute their own stories to an expanded online exhibit, *Following in Family Footsteps*. This expanded exhibit will showcase the social diversity of U.S. families on the move, in terms of factors such as racial/ethnic background, social class, region, and reason for travel.

Selected Works about People Recreating Family Journeys

- Morgan Jerkins (2020) *Wandering in Strange Lands: A Daughter of the Great Migration Reclaims Her Roots*
- Daniel Mendelsohn (2017) *An Odyssey: A Father, a Son, and an Epic*
- Jana Richman (2005) *Riding in the Shadows of Saints: A Woman’s Story of Motorcycling the Mormon Trail*
- John Newkirk (2008) *The Old Man and the Harley: A Last Ride Through Our Fathers’ America*
- Mary Ann Hooper (2018) *Across America and Back: Retracing My Great-Grandparents’ Remarkable Journey*



Detail: San Francisco Story Map

Acknowledgements

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