Cincinnati Sites and Stories - Contributor Guidelines

Thank you for your interest in contributing to Cincinnati Sites and Stories

This is a set of guidelines and resources for contributors to the project. Useful if you are writing a single story on a topic that interests you or if you are an educator working with a group to develop an entire tour. This document includes an overview of the component parts of stories and tours, guidelines for composing and formatting stories and suggestions for how best to submit stories for publication.

Overview:

What is a Cincinnati Sites and Stories story?

Every Cincinnati Site and Stories story is made of a number of components, including:

- Title and subtitle
- Description (summary/lede and story)
- Related Sources
- Creator
- Location
- Tags & Subjects
- Images
- Image Captions/Credits
- Any additional video/audio content/website

Cincinnati Sites and Stories is *not…*

- Encyclopedia entries: Cincinnati Sites and Stories is more than a series of dates and names, they engage readers by giving readers a sense of place through narrative, images, video and oral histories..

- Magazine articles or editorials: Avoid editorial writing or lengthy analysis on cultural trends/issues. While cultural issues are tied to history and should be included in Cincinnati Sites and Stories when necessary, these issues shouldn't overshadow the history of what you are writing about. Be wary of analysis and only use it when it's appropriate to the article. You have about 400 words. An article that tries to tell a story about history and give a deep cultural analysis would take at least 1000 words.

What is a Cincinnati Sites and Stories tour?

Cincinnati Sites and Stories stories can be organized into "Tours" - ordered lists of related stories that have their own description and creator information. Individual stories can be included into multiple tours.

Writing Guidelines:

What resources are available to help research a story or tour?

See our Cincinnati Public Library and Cincinnati History Library and Archives for more information on local archives and materials for including in Cincinnati Sites and Stories.

Title

Titles should be short, clearly descriptive and place-based

- Stories about **places best known by their historic name** should use the historic name as a title, e.g. Ingalls Building instead of the Courtyard by Marriott Cincinnati Downtown
- Stories about **places best known by their contemporary name** should use the contemporary name as a title, e.g. Rhinegiest Brewery instead of the Christian Moerlein Brewery Bottling Plant
- **Biographical stories** about individuals connected to a specific place like a residence should include the individual name and a place name in the title, e.g. Moore-Knight House

Subtitle

The subtitle field is typically used to add detail and/or specificity to the title. It can also be used for other purposes that might be useful for your specific project (e.g. for a street address, an established date, etc.). You should aim for 10 or less words and the goal of the subtitle is to summarize the story into a sentence.

Lede

The lede field is typically used to introduce readers to the arc of your story and should be viewed as an abstracts/longer summary. It provides a useful introduction for readers who want to know a bit more before reading the full story. You should aim for no more than 50 words. This is where an address for a building or important dates can be located.

The first one or two sentences of the Lede are a good place to try to grab attention with a compelling claim to fame (e.g. tallest, oldest, most expensive), an interesting association, or an engaging quote. Beginning with a strong, specific detail is a good way to suck your reader in. Start your story on a pinpoint and spread out.

- Example: Chris Hanlin's piece on Mary Norris gives a good background but focuses on her time in Cincinnati as a newspaper woman: "Around 1939, Mary Norris Andrews became the first Black woman in Cincinnati to own, edit, and publish a newspaper, called The Cincinnati Independent."

Description Composition

History isn't about dates and names, it's about people and their stories. Stories should be engaging and give readers a sense of place and time. Great specific details can be hard to find, but they do bring stories to life and transform them from a simple timeline of events to an actual story.

Keep it clear and concise!

- Use the first few sentences to highlight any themes, particular areas of significance or important events addressed in the story.
- Most descriptions should be between 300 and 600 words in length. If stories are getting longer 600 words, evaluate if the story should be narrowed in scope and potentially another story created from the additional content.
- Avoid quoting historic sources when the content is more appropriately paraphrased.
- When quoting historic sources is appropriate, try to include a reference in the narrative, e.g. In 1914, the Cincinnati Post reported, "...."
- Do not use footnotes or endnotes. References should be integrated into the narrative or included as related sources.
- Avoid the passive voice and use "to be" verbs sparingly: am, are, is was, were, be, become, became.
- Remember that conciseness is not mere brevity: detail and originality should still remain intact. Singling out empty words helps enhance the clarity of writing. What are empty words? Consult this quick guide on writing concisely.

Make it special!

- Before writing, ask yourself this question: *What is my story about?* Great stories go beyond the surface details. Many historical topics are full of interesting stories and it's up to you to decide which one to bring to life. An article that tells a specific story is far more interesting than an encyclopedic summary.
- Opening the story with a "hook" - a compelling quote, surprising fact or any element that can grab the reader's attention and encourage them to continue deeper into the piece.
- Try to show rather than just say. Use examples that illustrate the importance or significance of a story, rather than simply stating "this is an important building"
- When writing a biographical story about a person, try to keep the narrative focused on the title location and its importance to the individual. For instance, John Hauck lived an extraordinary life living in many different places but the story on 812 Dayton Street highlights the townhouse as a setting of his time as a Beer Baron in Cincinnati.

Provide context but keep the story focused.

Extensive background on the history of a neighborhood, architect or developer may be interested but don't forget to ask yourself: how does this help me tell the story I'm trying to

write? Some of this information may be better suited to a tour or collection description. If there are multiple sites that are associated with a specific “theme” that will have many stories, ask if the background you are including would be better included as a description of a collection or a tour.

Revise, Revise, Revise!

- Never submit a first draft. Ninety-nine percent of first drafts can be improved. A good approach is to let your draft sit overnight and return to it the next day with fresh, critical eyes.
- Make your story concise. Eliminate extra words and ask yourself what’s important to the story. Every word should be important.
- Proofread. If you’re unsure about the structure of a sentence, rewrite it, or if you’re really stuck, consult a grammar resource such as the Purdue Online Writing Lab.
- Read the story out loud to yourself. Does it have a nice flow? Do the sentences make sense?

Description Formatting

- Plain text, not HTML is required. If you are composing the description in Microsoft Word or a similar application, you can copy and paste your story into Notepad or another plain text editor to clear formatting.
    - Italics, bold and other text decoration will not display.
    - Insert a hard return between paragraphs.
- The following text and "smart" punctuation characters cause errors, particularly in the file captions, and should be avoided:
    - curly (or "smart") quotes
    - curly (or "smart") apostrophes
    - em dashes
    - en dashes
    - square brackets
- Do not indent paragraphs.
- Provide a single space between sentences.

References and Citations

While we can't provide footnotes for the stories, specific references and citations are helpful to confirm the details of a story before it is posted and we can link to anything interesting that might be available online from the website.

- Format references following the Chicago style for citations
- Organize references in the form of a bulleted list
- Use major sources, not incidental sources. If a source was only consulted to confirm a single date, do not include it in the list of related sources.
- Sources that are available online should include links to those materials embedded

within the title of the resource to avoid long, unattractive URLs.

Tags

Tags provide a useful alternative to Subjects for users interested in browsing through the Cincinnati Sites and Stories website. Appropriate tags include:

- neighborhood name
- street name
- architect or builder name
- other proper names for related organizations, businesses, etc. e.g. Independent Order of Odd Fellows
- a building or landscape type, e.g. Rowhouses, Churches, cemeteries
- related themes, e.g. Literary heritage, War of 1812, Civil War

See these Omeka resources on managing tags - http://omeka.org/codex/Managing_Tags

Subject Headings

Each story should have at least 1 but not more than 3 subjects. Subjects should reflect the most significant aspect of the story and place it within a category focused on a similar themes, e.g. the Basilica of the Assumption has “Architecture, Religion” as subjects.

Location

Every story must have a location (e.g., an address or lat.-long. coordinates). It is important to note that some stories may lend themselves to being “pinned” in more than one location, but Cincinnati Sites and Stories is not equipped to allow more than one location. Therefore, you will need to carefully consider where to place the story and try to construct the narrative in such a way that makes clear why a particular location was selected.

Images

A minimum of 1 image is required for stories and we encourage using 3-4 (or more) images if possible. A story will not be accepted without a minimum of 1 image. Images are such an essential part of a site that your first order of business when selecting any site should be to determine if sufficient images are available. Images can also include newspaper advertisements, brochures, or other ephemera that is related to the site. Images should also include captions to describe the image for the reader. Images should be in jpeg format images are ideally sized around 1000 pixels on the longer side and in the neighborhood of 100-200KB, but it is always better to submit a larger file when in doubt; we can size down images but cannot enlarge them with losing quality.

Submission Process:

How do I submit a Cincinnati Sites and Stories story?

A completed story includes at a minimum a title, a description, a location, and 1 image with a caption and credit Stories may be submitted using one of the following ways:

1) A Word Document with the following
    a) the title, subtitle (if any), author, main text
    b) title, caption, and credit for all images (please also indicate the image file name in brackets for ease of reference)
    c) suggested tags and subjects (see explanations under “Tags” and “Subjects”)
    d) suggested location (see explanation under “Location”)
    e) list of references (see explanation under “References”)
    f) separate JPEG files for each image
2) An email to stories@cincinnatipreservation.org with a title, description, caption and credits in the body of the email and a collection of JPEG files as attachments.
3) A shared folder or link to download a ZIP file with similar materials as described above and emailed to stories@cincinnatipreservation.org
4) Please *do not* embed images with Word Documents!

What happens after I submit a story?

All submitted stories are reviewed by Cincinnati Preservation staff and volunteers. Work that does not meet our editorial standards will require additional revisions before publication. Stories requiring major revisions may be sent back to the original writer with revision suggestions, or they may be revised internally. Stories that are incomplete, have factual errors, and/or don’t meet our guidelines may be refused publication and shelved indefinitely.

By submitting a story, you give us permission to publish your writing under a Creative Commons Attribution Share-Alike License. This open license helps to encourage reuse of the site materials for educational, research and interpretation. It maintains the requirement that a credit to you as the contributor remains with the story whenever it is reused.

How will I be credited?

Stories will be credited with the name of the author and if applicable, the name of their affiliated institution. Author credit on individual stories are visible online, but are not currently available on the app. If a story requires substantial revisions, the writing credit may be assigned jointly to Cincinnati Preservation staff or a volunteer working on revisions.