[title slide]

[slide 2] My overriding impression from the kayak outing is that many of the Lower Schuylkill River landscapes (and waterscapes) are not easily legible upon first encounter. Most of the spaces we move through during our everyday lives are legible without much effort on our part: a city park, a crowded sidewalk, a parking lot, a downtown skyscraper, a gas station, a farm, a strip mall, an airport, an abandoned factory, etc. We have an intuitive sense of what they are and what they mean, without needing to think about it or ask questions. Wild spaces are legible too, even though their legibility often involves major distortions of what those spaces are or have been. Some industrial sites are easily legible, and others less so. When I first laid eyes on the Lazaretto, the site was very difficult to read—even for me, a historian of public health. (What *is* a quarantine station, anyway? Why this huge stately old manor house? It looks like some kind of country estate! What exactly went on here day to day?)

The Lower Schuylkill River involves the juxtaposition and overlap of wild-seeming and industrial or post-industrial spaces. They don't advertise their own stories, or show us why they are where they are. Our challenge, it seems to me, is to make them all more legible, primarily by finding and telling stories. And by finding creative ways of embedding those stories in the riverscapes.

[slide 3] My research on the Lazaretto's history and my work with a group of volunteers attempting to preserve and restore the site has forced me to reflect on the challenges and possibilities presented by the physical features of historic sites in general. I would like to suggest that attention to emplacement—the contingent social meanings and experiences of place over time, as manifested in a site's physical features—can deepen the affective resonance of interpretation and enhance visitor interactions with historic sites.

Geographers use the term "place" to indicate the ways in which people imbue space with social meanings and resonances. Places require constant acts of interpretation by individuals who encounter

them. If we think of places as texts, then individuals encounter and interpret particular places, like texts, in different ways. At any given moment, people "read" their places and act within them according to (or in resistance to) the social norms and power structures expressed by those places.

[slide 4: "storyscapes"] I would also like us to pay special attention to narrative as an interpretive tool that is deeply embedded in place. Stories establish boundaries; they demarcate and organize spaces, and they order reality by imposing causality (and therefore morality) upon it. Preservation advocate Ned Kaufman argues that thinking of our communities as "storyscapes" comprised of "latent story sites" helps us see stories as inhering within landscapes and structures, waiting to be "activated." It also reminds us to see, hear, and tell our stories as rooted in specific places. "Historical story sites," Kaufman writes, "act both as mnemonic devices and as touchstones, provocations to tell history." They are "lighthouses of historical awareness."

By emphasizing emplacement and storyscapes, historical interpretation can showcase the contingency and the social dimension of the historical experience of particular sites. **[slide 5: footnote slide]** For example, relatively stable physical features of the Lazaretto site took on different meanings and carried different symbolic resonances through the site's long life—first as a quarantine station, then as a country club, and later as a seaplane base. Exploring a site through its historical layering can engage visitors by demonstrating socio-cultural change over time, and can stimulate dialogue about issues of contemporary relevance by revealing their roots and resonances in the site.

[slide 6] My current book project interprets the social functions of maritime quarantine in the nineteenth century through the lens of Philadelphia's Lazaretto quarantine station on the Delaware River (next to the airport). In the book, I use stories as portals to historical analysis. **[slide 7]** (Here are some examples of my arguments that take shape through storytelling. Don't want to go into detail here, but happy to discuss later.) I tell the story of Mary Ann Ganges, the nine-year-old girl who in 1800 was captured and

enslaved in West Africa, then freed as soon as she arrived in the U.S. and indentured as a domestic servant to the quarantine master. I tell the story of Tobias Smith, the mischievous eleven-year-old orphan who was accused in 1805 of starting an epidemic. I tell the story of Dr. Thomas Jefferson Perkins Stokes, the quarantine officer who was prosecuted in 1853 for dereliction of duty. And I tell the story of Mary Riddle, the middle-aged widow who in 1870 saved the Lazaretto from chaos and despair in its darkest hour. **[slide 8]** The place is positively saturated with stories. They are stories of pain and sickness, of fear and despair and death. They are stories of separation, of longing, of hope and healing and survival. And they have the power to animate otherwise illegible buildings and landscapes.

Now I'd like to move backward in time and about six miles upriver, or east-northeast from the Tinicum Lazaretto, to tell a story that I think challenges all of us to remember it in some way. **[slide 9]** Beginning in 1699 and continuing sporadically throughout the 18th century, yellow fever and other epidemic diseases made appearances in Philadelphia. Apparent connections between the disease outbreaks and arriving ships (especially from the tropics) caused colonial authorities to pass a quarantine law requiring Philadelphia-bound vessels to undergo inspection (and possible temporary detention) before arriving at the port. A small hospital and quarantine ground was built on Province Island at the mouth of the Schuylkill River in 1743. The facility was often referred to as the Marine Hospital, and occasionally as the Lazaretto. Four devastating yellow fever epidemics in the 1790s resulted in the establishment of Philadelphia's Board of Health, which began constructing the new Lazaretto on Tinicum Island after concluding that the existing quarantine ground was too close to the city and too accessible to its residents. This story takes place at the old Lazaretto, while the new station was under construction.

On August 4, 1800, the schooner *Phoebe* came to at State Island for inspection. When resident physician James Hall and quarantine master Thomas Egger boarded the vessel for inspection, they found it controlled not by its own sailors but by a prize crew from the United States naval warship *Ganges*. The

cargo consisted of thirty casks of water, two and a half barrels of bread, a half barrel of beef, a half barrel of port, and one hundred eighteen human beings from Africa, naked and "in a very wretched condition." The *Ganges* had been patrolling off the coast of Cuba to protect American merchant vessels against the depredations of French privateers, but it was also on alert for violations of the 1794 Slave Trade Act, which prohibited U.S.-outfitted ships from participating in the slave trade. After capturing the *Phoebe* on July 21 near Havana, Captain John Mullowny of the *Ganges* decided to send the slaving schooner (with his own prize crew at the helm) to abolition-friendly Philadelphia rather than to one of the closer southern U.S. ports, where the prize crew might have shared in the proceeds after the cargo's sale. As soon as they saw the *Phoebe*'s cargo, Hall and Egger set about to "land and encamp" the Africans, many of whom were seriously ill.

Philadelphians learned about the strange arrival the next morning in the newspapers. The Board of Health had published a notice pleading for immediate clothing donations:

> H U M A N I T Y.
> Arrived at the Lazaretto yesterday, one hundred and eighteen Black People, without the least cloathing, being taken on board the schr. Phoebe, prize to the United States ship Ganges—the humane citizens are requested to send to the Health Office at the State House, any kind of linen cloaths for their accommodation, as well as to prevent the shock their decency will be exposed to by so many of both sexes being thus exposed naked.

To right-minded Philadelphians, the horror of slavery and the brutal reality of the middle passage were bad enough. But the added indignity of boys and girls, men and women being "thus exposed naked" compounded the horror. It all would have been too terrible to contemplate had there not been an immediate and practical action to be taken. The machinery of Philadelphia's collective charity quickly sprang into action. "I look'd upon this as a call on humanity indeed," boasted Elizabeth Drinker in her diary, "and set about making up a bundle … of good and suitable things for the poor naked creatures." A pair of Drinker's

women friends called on her that same day to ask for clothing donations, and were pleased to find that the deed had already been done. Like horror, pity—and public piety—moved fast.

On August 6, another American schooner, the *Prudent*, arrived at State Island with a prize crew from the *Ganges* and sixteen more Africans aboard. According to the newspapers, a husband and pregnant wife had been forcibly separated by the slavers in West Africa, with one placed aboard the *Phoebe* and the other on the *Prudent*. When the sixteen Africans from the *Prudent* were landed at the Lazaretto, the couple was suddenly and unexpectedly reunited. "Lost for a moment in an ecstasy of surprise," the Gazette of the United States reported, "they exhibited a scene of tenderness which would have softened even the savage hearts of those who had occasioned their separation." So overpowering was the emotional reunion that the woman spontaneously miscarried on the spot.

The day after the *Prudent*'s arrival, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society called an emergency meeting to discuss the news. Officially named the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, and the Improvement of the African Race, the group counted many prominent Philadelphians among its members, including Benjamin Rush (who served as its president for the last ten years of his life). The society appointed a committee to look out for the welfare of the newly arrived Africans, and to advocate on their behalf before the state and federal governments.

U.S. District Court Judge Richard Peters, himself a member of the Abolition Society, declared the 134 Africans from the two schooners free, and the society assumed custody of them while they recovered at the Lazaretto. Either the judge or the society determined that all of the Africans would be given the surname Ganges. As many as forty-eight of those originally captured may have died aboard the *Phoebe* and the *Prudent* during the trans-Atlantic passage; six more died while under care at the hospital on Province Island.

[slide 11] The 128 survivors were gradually indentured to employers and families (many of them Quakers) in Philadelphia and the surrounding area. The Abolition Society attempted to preserve family connections and to place the Ganges Africans in clusters where they could provide a semblance of community for one another. The indentures provided for a kind of involuntary apprenticeship; girls were bound until age 18, boys until age 21, and adults for four years. Strict terms prescribed rules of conduct for the apprentices and enjoined masters to provide shelter, food and drink, clothing, washing, and education. The employers appear to have chosen first names for their charges; they ranged from conventional English names like John, Peter, and Sarah to whimsical or exotic names like Furry, Abana, and Tamby. Girls and women were to learn "the Art and Mystery of Housewifery," while boys and men were to be taught their master's trade—in most cases farming. Captain John Mullowny of the *Ganges* even took on Thomas Ganges as an apprentice sailor.

And one nine-year-old girl, given the name Mary Ann, was destined to stay in quarantine for nine years. She was indentured to former sea captain Thomas Egger, the last quarantine master at the Province Island Lazaretto and the first quarantine master at the new Lazaretto on Tinicum Island beginning in 1801. Like her shipmates, she arrived in a strange new world as it entered into a new century.

Today African-American families named Ganges are scattered around the Philadelphia area and the rest of the U.S., along with many other descendants of the original 137. The Tinicum Lazaretto survives—the Main Building, the remaining outbuildings, the landscape, the river itself—all suffused with stories. Many of the stories emerge from abundant documentation—on behalf of all historians, THANK YOU, long-dead white men of the past, for being self-important enough to record and save so many details of your lives and work and thoughts for posterity!—while others survive only in scattered remnants. Still others, like that of Mary Ann Ganges, lie buried in near-total silence.

We know from her indenture form that she was believed to be about nine years old when she arrived and was placed with quarantine master Egger. We know that she had at least some schooling—an 1806 entry in the Board of Health minutes grants permission to the "bound girl of the quarantine master" to "attend the school in the vicinity of the Lazaretto." **[slide 12]** We know she got married before her indenture was to expire in 1809, because an entry in the Abolition Society's ledger book notes that Egger released her from his service after her husband paid "a small compensation." There the trail runs cold. In the records of the Philadelphia Almshouse (essentially a city-wide homeless shelter with an infirmary), there are death notices for a 45-year-old Mary Ganges who died of typhus in 1821, a 35-year-old Mary Ganges who died that same year of "puerperal mania" (likely an infectious fever contracted during childbirth), and a 35-year-old Mary Ganges who died in 1822 of a form of pneumonia. If one of these women was the Lazaretto's Mary Ann, she died in young adulthood without enough resources to be treated by a doctor in her home (if she had one).

[slide 13] Mary Ann Ganges left only a single direct physical trace in this world that survives. At the bottom of her indenture form, now yellowed with age, are the signatures of the four witnesses, including Philadelphia Mayor John Inskeep. Thomas Egger did not sign. But there on the right, just under the date, in faded brown ink, is a small crooked "X." Around it someone has written, "Mary Ann Ganges, her mark." What was she feeling when she marked that "X" on her indenture form? What sense could she have made of the events of the past months that had turned her young life upside down and deposited her in this strange place with these strange people?

I have become fixated on this one nine-year-old girl because she is a direct link between the Ganges Africans and the Tinicum Lazaretto. But the story of the *Ganges* stands as a challenge to public memory. Here is the site of the old Province Island Lazaretto, where the 137 Africans landed and lived until their indentures. **[slide 14] [slide 15] [slide 16]** How might we commemorate them and their stories? I welcome your thoughts!

On a September Saturday in 2010, Kelly Ganges took his fifteen-year-old son Brian on a tour of the Lazaretto grounds, telling him what the place meant to their family. It was not Kelly's first visit to the site. Four years earlier, he had visited with his brothers Tendaji and Larry, to lay eyes on the place where their family's American saga had begun. "We found where we hit shore," Tendaji said at the time. "It is a human story. It's not just our family's story."

Not long after that first visit, my preliminary research on the Lazaretto's history revealed that the schooners *Phoebe* and *Prudent*, which carried the Ganges Africans to Philadelphia after having been captured off the coast of Cuba, actually arrived at the old Lazaretto on Province Island rather than the new station on Tinicum Island, which was still under construction in August 1800 and would not be finished until the following spring. References to "the Lazaretto" in the newspapers and archival documents from 1800 had led historians to assume that the Africans were housed and cared for at the Tinicum Lazaretto, on which construction had begun in 1799. This explains why journalists had told the Ganges brothers that their ancestor had landed on Tinicum Island, and why the brothers visited the site. When I first met them in 2010, I shared with them my findings about the actual location, as well as about Mary Ann Ganges having been indentured to the quarantine master, and therefore having lived and worked at both the old and the new Lazarettoes.

But the attachment between the Ganges family and the "new" Lazaretto had already been cemented, and my findings did nothing to alter it. No physical trace remains of the State Island Lazaretto, and the Tinicum site fit the role perfectly: it was very old, mostly intact but empty, decaying, and a little bit spooky. This was the symbolically true spot "where we hit shore." (And even though Mary Ann Ganges cannot have been their direct ancestor unless she married one of the other Ganges Africans, she did provide a "family" connection of sorts with the Tinicum Lazaretto.) After Kelly showed his son around in 2010, he re-read the original 1800 newspaper plea for donations of clothing for the naked Africans. The two schooners' arrival, he said, "was my family's link of Africa to America, and this is where it began, and I had

the opportunity to share that today with my only son." He contemplated for a few minutes how frightened his ancestors must have been when they first set foot on shore. "How intimidating that must have been, but how courageous they were because … my ancestors, when they got off the boat, and were ultimately healed, moved into the American way of life, and began to work and be productive, which is the dream for all Americans." When he visits the Lazaretto, Kelly Ganges feels patriotic. The place reminds him of "how families that come to this nation become a part of it and flourish and make this nation the great nation that it has become, and continues to be."