

Clinton Roberts  
HST580, JOTPY Internship  
August 13, 2020  
Submitted to: Dr. Kole de Peralta

Module 13: Blog Post 3rd Draft

# “Rural Voices” Pandemic Collection Shares Quiet Stories of Loss and Hope During COVID-19

By Clinton P. Roberts

As the nightly news rattled-off statistical numbers, my grandmother sat quietly in her house, mourning a loss, unable to see her husband’s grave. Her daily visits to the cemetery marked an otherwise unbroken routine for over five years; my grandmother felt solace in the routine. As COVID-19 constrained daily life, rural lives were affected in *quiet* ways. [The Journal of the Plague Year](#) captures those stories in the [“Rural Voices”](#) collection, inspired by the local community of Blanchard, Oklahoma. This collection counterbalances the otherwise dominate role of metropolitan areas in national media. These rural stories offer a glimpse of the uniquely rural experiences of loss and hope during the pandemic. After three months working on the “Rural Voices” collection I’ve learned that rural areas like Blanchard are experiencing the pandemic through three distinct viewpoints of adaptation, *quiet* voices, and common good.



Grandmother. Credit: The Author

## Adaptation

These *quiet* stories may never make the national news, but their value remains. They cover the local community of Blanchard and capture dozens of events. These events range from a church's first virtual service[1] to an encouraging graffiti message,[2] but all were centered in rural experience. The community of Blanchard expressed, among its greatest strengths, adaptation and determination in providing a drive-thru graduation and outdoor prom for the high school seniors.



Blanchard Outdoor Prom. Credit: The Author

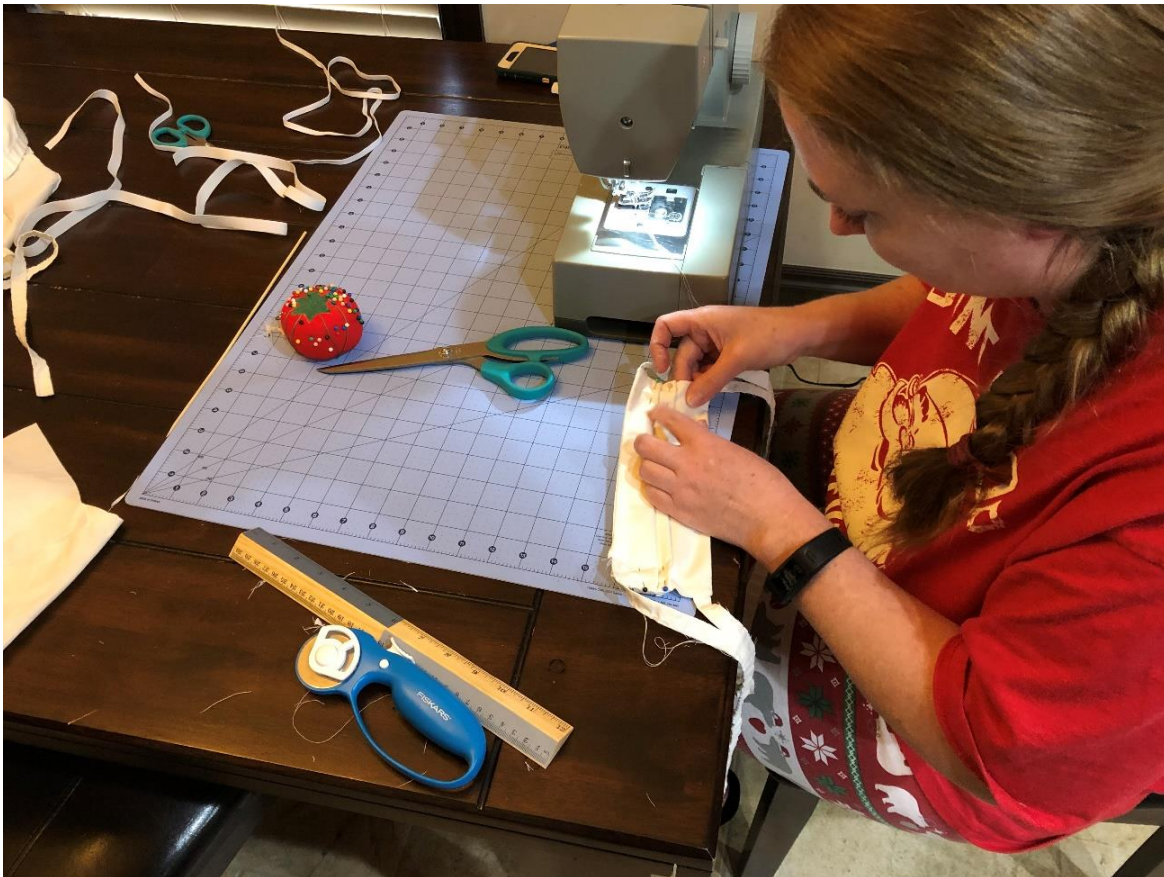
In a collection [interview, high school senior Kris McDaniel](#) offered his thoughts on having an alternate graduation and prom. In a message to his grandchildren about his experience, Kris poignantly responds, “value your time... I took it all for granted.”[3] At only eighteen years, his wisdom weighs the value of loss, even as he thanked his community’s generosity. The historic value lies in the effect of breaking tradition within rural communities. The abrupt, disproportionate way a pandemic disrupts, causes a ripple across all facets of daily life.

## Quiet Voices

The “Rural Voices” collection serves to preserve memories like Kris McDaniel’s high school story, providing a lasting voice to an otherwise silenced perspective. Historians such as Michel-Rolph Touillot have addressed the idea of historical silences with heralded success, questioning the “uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production.”[4] The “Rural Voices” collection provides a record of rural perspectives in a national historical archive, thereby offering contribution and access, as well as the opportunity of continued future reference. Historian Marisa J. Fuentes has also intensely addressed “erasures and silences.”[5] The “Rural Voices” collection, inspired by Trouillot and Fuentes, responds to rural silences. The individual voices, though, are still left unknown in their potential, left *quiet* until they are heard.

## The Common Good

The value of “Rural Voices” archive submissions are of a qualitative nature, not quantitative. They recreate unique, and often individual, rural experiences, not derivative from national narratives or statistical data. The importance of these qualitative experiences began to emerge in questions of past and future, pondering the value of a community’s legacy and continuance.



Sewing Masks. Credit: The Author

Rural values are often deceptively nuanced and this is perhaps best represented in responses to mask mandates. One example is shared in an oral history [interview with Phillip Hoile](#). Discussing protective masks, Hoile states, “I don’t need a mandate,”[6] but then later reiterates that he does wear a mask because, “it’s common courtesy and you know let’s, let’s do what’s better for everybody until this thing blows over.”[7] His opinion could otherwise be construed as skepticism, but is actually an often-observed rural perspective - local community opinion and self-determination are valued above outside influences. Masks have value, because they protect the community, an attribute of the common good.

When my grandmother finally visited my grandfather’s grave in May of 2020, her first thought was gratitude; the next was hope. She explained her optimism as “looking forward to this pandemic ending so she could resume her normal visits.”[8] This desire displays the rural

optimism of hope and the value of familiarity. Phillip Hoile expressed resilience and optimistic fatalism by explaining, “It’s probably not different from a lot of things we’ve lived through. Growing up, I remember the, for example, as small kid the Cuban Missile Crisis. We didn’t know from day to day whether we were going to be involved in nuclear war.”[9] Hoile confidently adds, “It’s something that’s gonna pass.”[10] From these great losses hope continues to resonate, much like the message stenciled near a stoplight in Blanchard, Oklahoma, “We will get by.”[11]



Graffiti. Credit: The Author

[1] Clinton P. Roberts. “Rural Oklahoma Church Members Attend Online Services During COVID-19.” *Journal of the Plague Year, Rural Voices Collection*, May 28, 2020. Accessed August 2, 2020. <https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/item/18378>

[2] Clinton P. Roberts. “Message of Hope Left on Control Box Near a Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient Memorial.” *Journal of the Plague Year, Rural Voices Collection*, June 14, 2020. Accessed August 2, 2020. <https://covid-19archive.org/admin/item/20634>

[3] Clinton P. Roberts, "Interview with Kris about Being a Senior in High School and Experiencing Distance Graduation During COVID-19": *Journal of the Plague Year*, Rural Voices Collection. Audio. May 27, 2020, <https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/item/18366> (accessed August 2, 2020).

[4] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), xix.

[5] Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 4.

[6] Clinton P. Roberts, "Phillip Hoile Oral History, 2020/07/25": *Journal of the Plague Year*, Rural Voices Collection. Audio. July 25, 2020, <https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/item/25029> (accessed August 2, 2020).

[7] Ibid.

[8] Clinton P. Roberts. "Grandmother Grateful for Opportunity to Visit Husband's Grave for Memorial Day During COVID-19." *Journal of the Plague Year*, Rural Voices Collection, May 28, 2020. Accessed August 2, 2020. <https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/item/18389>

[9] Clinton P. Roberts, "Phillip Hoile Oral History, 2020/07/25"

[10] Ibid.

[11] Clinton P. Roberts. "Message of Hope Left on Control Box..."