Hi, we're Understory

and we illuminate lesser-known aspects of history and the natural world through storytelling and works of art.

We're a burgeoning woman-owned company with a love for localized stories from smaller communities and sites.

We specialize in interpretive planning and exhibit creation, with services including custom illustration, visitor evaluation, and label writing. Our network of talented designers, fabricators, and other folks helps bring our interpretive experiences to life.

Understory co-founders, Laura Frick and Angela Mele
studiounderstory.com

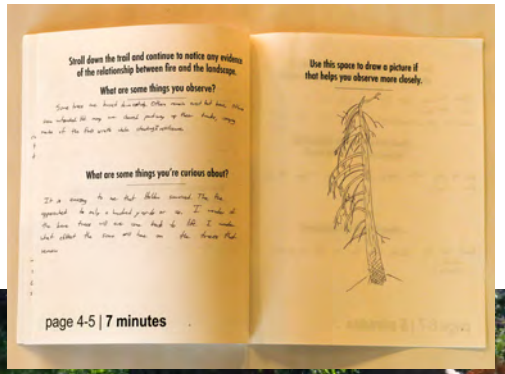
INTERPRETING FIRE AT HOLDEN VILLAGE

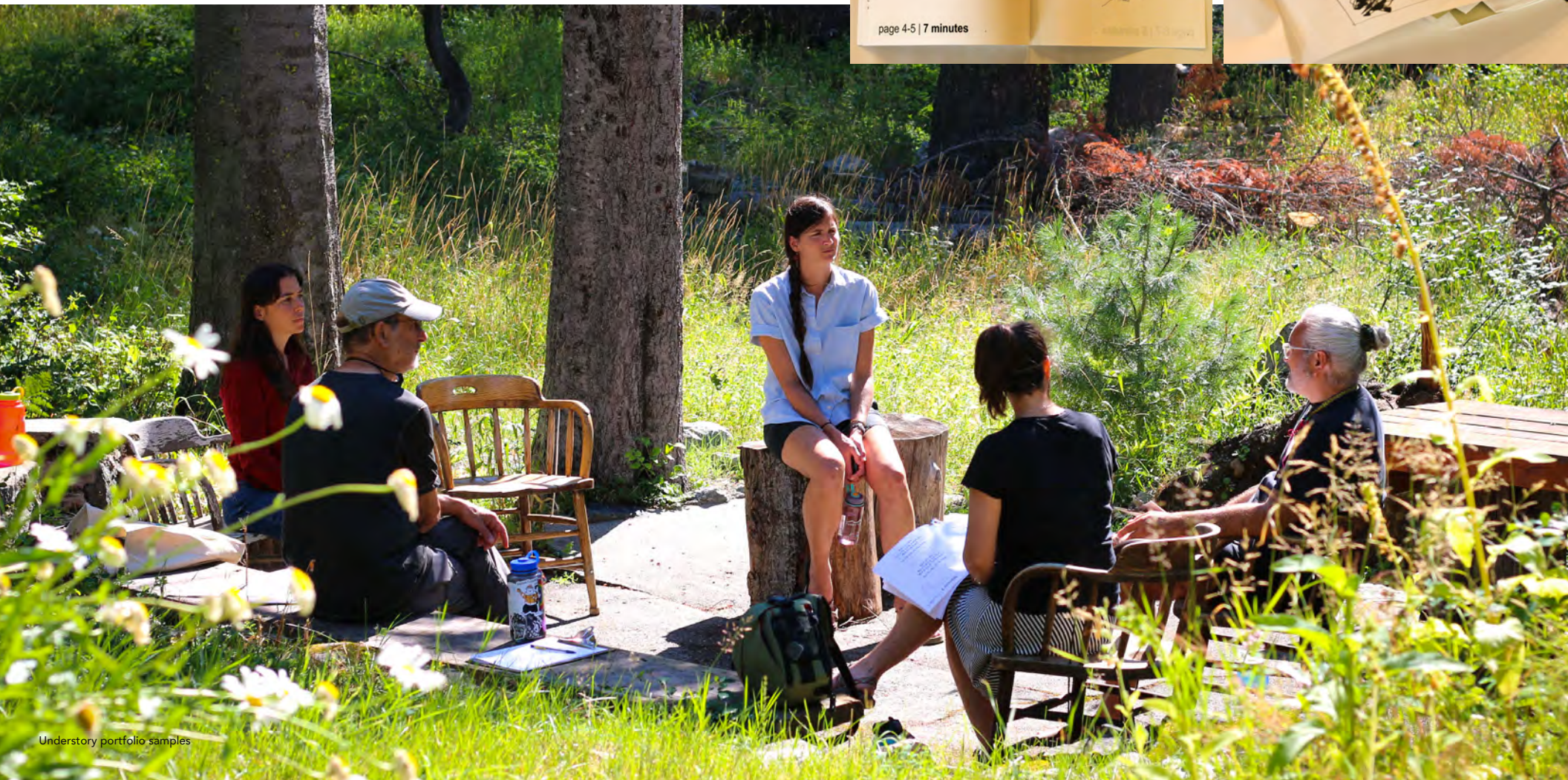
Holden Village, Washington

Holden Village, a remote wilderness community, was nearly ravaged by fire in 2015. Evidence of the burn surrounds the village today, leaving visitors wondering about fire in the area. In 2022, Angela and Laura came to Holden to lead a series of workshops on interpretive planning, resulting in stories and concepts for a fire-themed interpretive trail.

SERVICES

- Interpretive planning workshop facilitation
- Visitor evaluation





Understory portfolio samples

ROOT TOWERS

Saint Louis Science Center, Missouri

This outdoor exhibit shows how roots' "hidden powers" help life on Earth thrive. Visitors crawl through tunnels to observe growing roots, see microscopic imagery, and discover cutting edge research in root biology. Angela created these towers alongside many scientists and artists.

SERVICES

- Interpretive planning
- Content development
- Interpretive writing
- Coordination with scientists and artists
- Visitor evaluation
- Illustration

Bacteria by Cam Fuller

Angela Mele with the Saint Louis Science Center

JASON BEACH WAYSIDE SERIES

Trap Pond State Park, Delaware

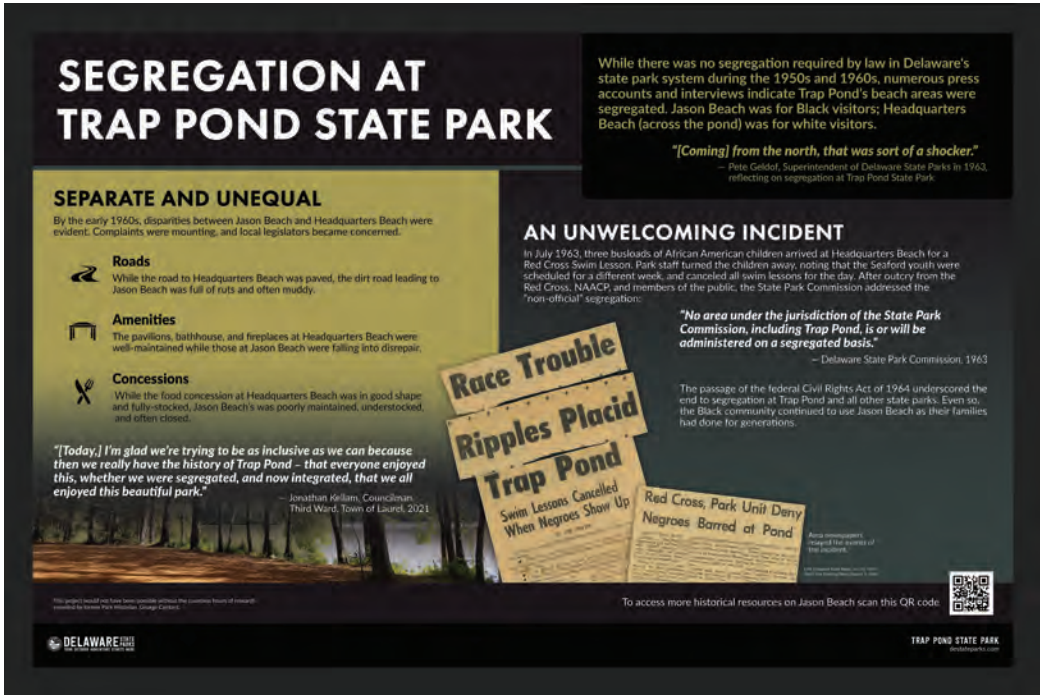
The local Black community's deep ties to a formerly-segregated beach in Trap Pond State Park lay quiet for generations. On Juneteenth 2022, Governor John Carney and Delaware State Parks unveiled a historic marker and three waysides commemorating the site's importance, and formally renaming the site to Jason Beach. Laura managed the production of the waysides — from interpretive planning to installation — working closely with community members and park staff.

This project won a 2023 Interpretive Media Award from the National Association for Interpretation.

INTERPRETIVE MEDIA AWARDS WINNER 2023

SERVICES

- Interpretive planning
- Consultation with community members and content experts
- Content development
- Interpretive writing
- Design direction
- Fabrication coordination
- Coordination of online component featuring oral histories



ALMA CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, California

Midpen saved a culturally-significant landscape from development, then rehabilitated historic architecture and native ecosystems. Angela built upon Midpen's existing interpretive plan to convey the beauty and meaning of site features like mansion relics and new colonies of bats.

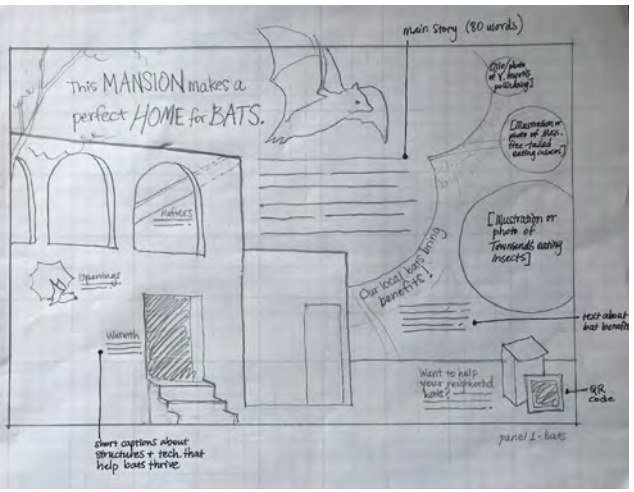
SERVICES

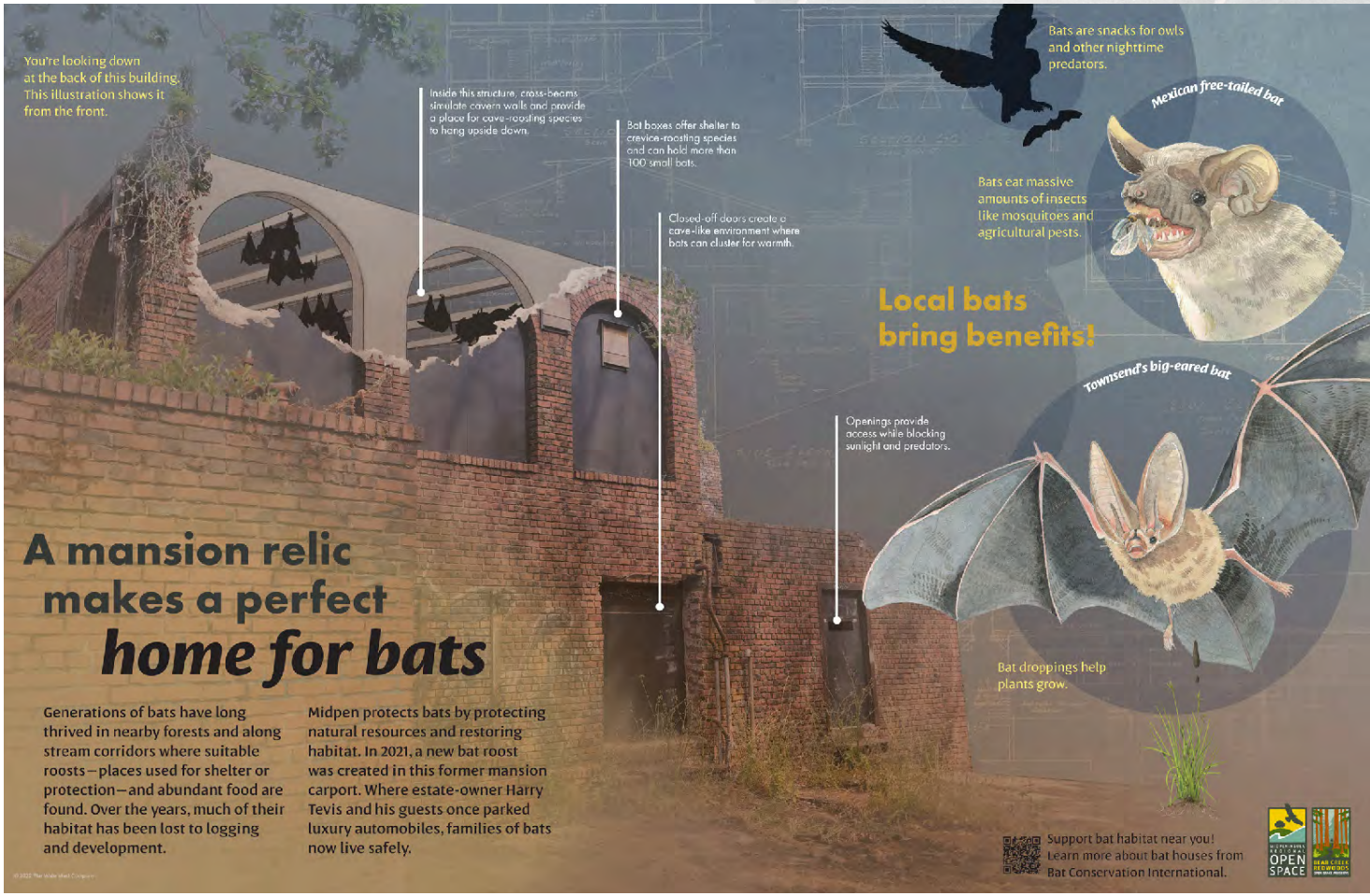
- Visitor evaluation
- Content development
- Writing/editing
- Historic photo acquisition
- Illustration
- Graphic design
- Fabrication coordination

"The panels are amazing! I particularly love the "home for bats" design where all of the illustrations are exquisite."

Jane Mark, Planning Manager

Below: concept sketch
Right: final design





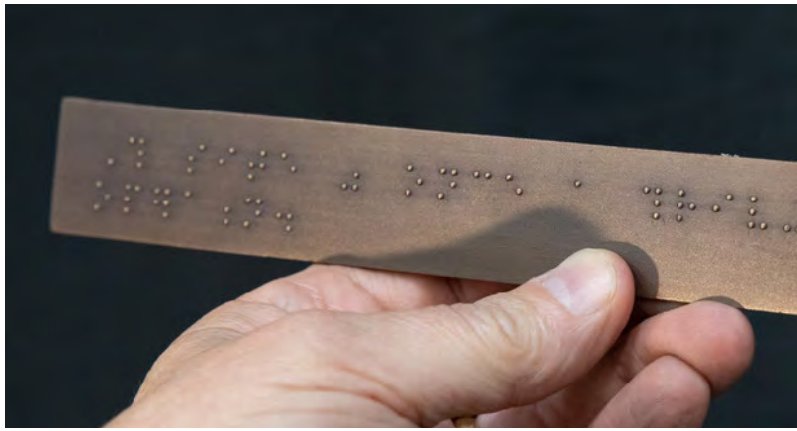
TACTILE WAYSIDE SERIES

Holts Landing State Park and White Clay Creek State Park, Delaware

New ADA-compliant trails at two state parks were an opportunity to incorporate highly accessible interpretation. Bronze-casted braille, tactile imagery, and QR codes linking to Section 508-conformant pdfs provide robust interpretation for all audiences. Laura managed the production of the six waysides, working with parks' staff, accessibility consultants, and outside contractors.

SERVICES

- Interpretive planning
- Content research and development
- Consultation with accessibility groups
- Interpretive writing
- Design direction
- Fabrication and installation direction



Left: Graphic for panel design, prior to tactile production.
Below: Final bronze tactiles.

WETLANDS AT PUESTA DEL SOL

Sierra-Martin Architects for the Bellevue School District, Washington

A new Spanish immersion elementary school was built on a site containing wetlands near Seattle. The Bellevue School District incorporated the wetland and buffer areas into the new campus design to foster stewardship among students through the curriculum and outdoor learning opportunities. Angela created storybook-like signage to help kids recognize hidden water systems and native plants and animals.

SERVICES

- Interpretive planning
- Content research & development
- Interpretive writing
- Illustration
- Graphic design

PARK OFFICE EXHIBIT

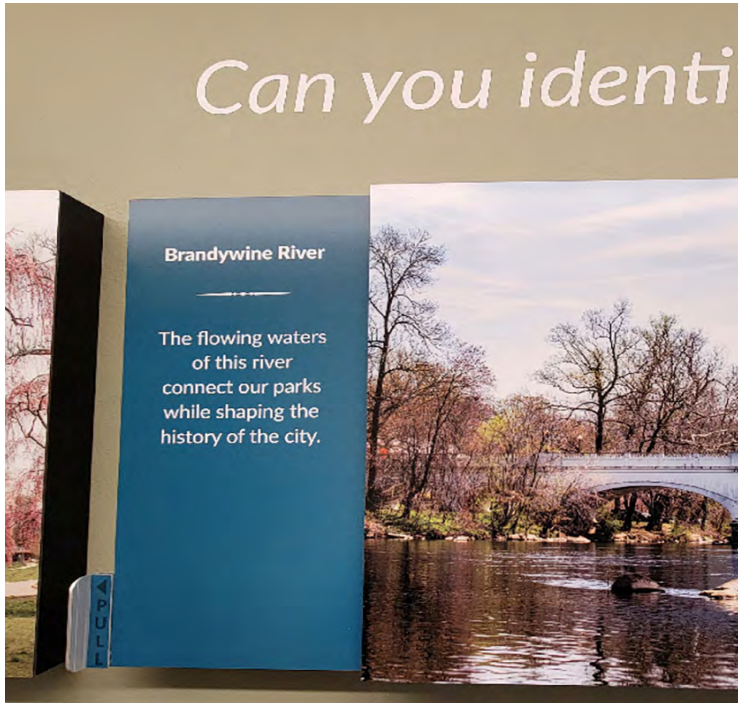
Wilmington State Parks, Delaware

Wilmington State Parks is a series of historic city parks nestled along the Brandywine River. This new park office exhibit brings together the many tracts of the park, sharing cross-generational stories of community connections, and highlighting the park's treasured flora and fauna. Laura managed this entire project — from interpretive planning to installation — working closely with park staff and outside contractors.

SERVICES

- Interpretive planning
- Content research and development
- Interpretive writing
- Image sourcing
- Design direction
- Fabrication and installation direction

Below: Introductory park map exhibit
Right: Accessible pull tabs reveal the park's natural features



LEONARD ILLUSTRATIONS FOR TITANOBOA EXHIBIT

Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, Washington

When the Burke Museum hosted the Smithsonian traveling exhibit, *Titanoboa: Monster Snake*, part of the gallery focused on snake research done by the University of Washington. Laura traveled with graduate student, Leonard to the San Juan Islands and Burke Museum research lab to document his research. Her resulting illustrations were featured in the exhibit.

Laura Frick for the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture

AUSTRALIAN SLIME MOLD MONOGRAPH

"Secretive Slime Molds: Myxomycetes of Australia" (CSIRO Publishing, 2021)

Working for ecologist Dr. Steve Stephenson, Angela created several dozen illustrations of slime molds (myxomycetes) that are commonly found around the world. The illustrations were published in Stephenson's monograph and used for many public engagement efforts by Angela and others.

Concept sketch for an exhibit about slime molds

Collaria arcyrionema

Metatrichia floriformis

Trichia varia

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