

VISUALIZING THE GERMANTOWN YWCA

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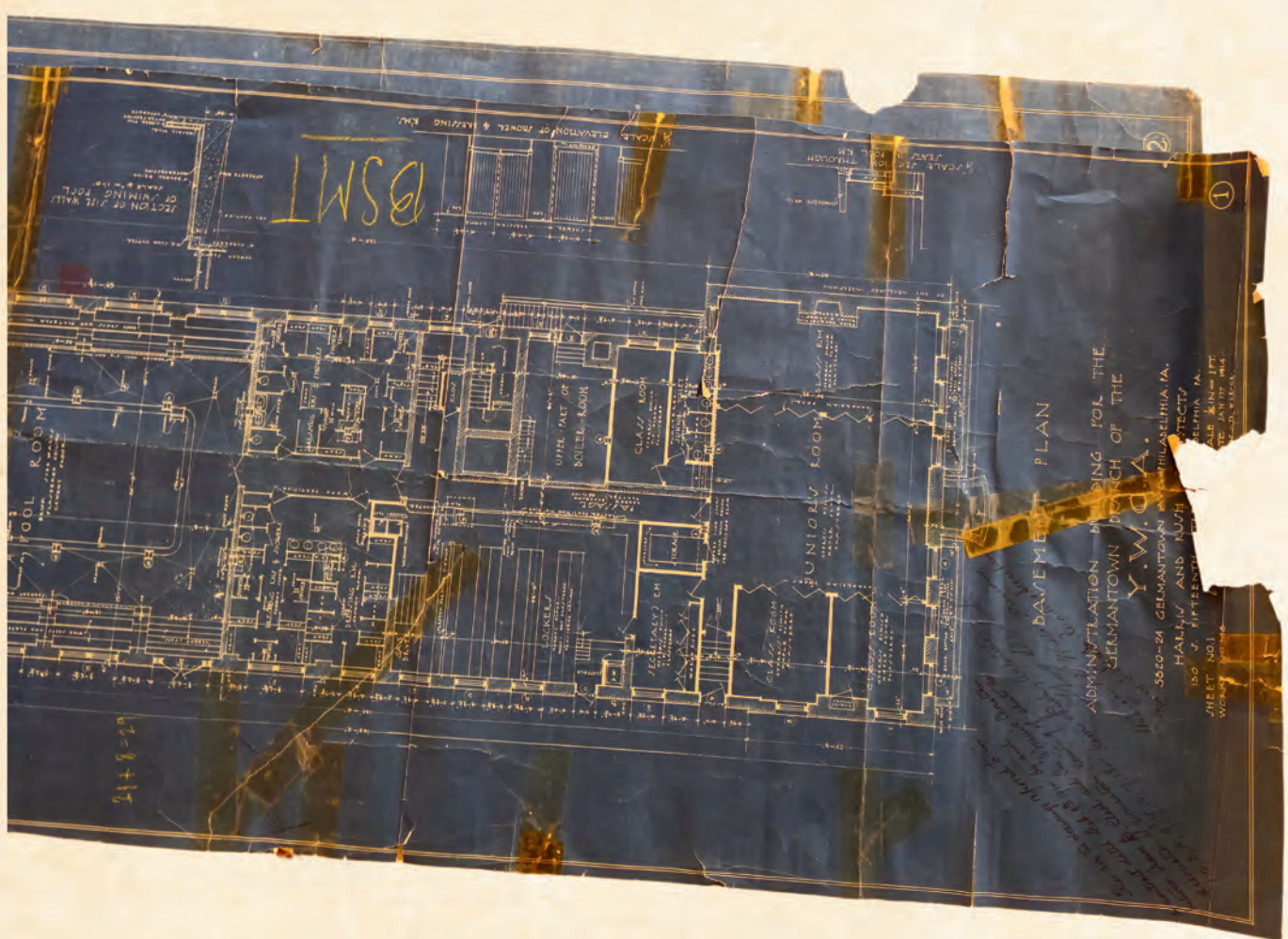
BACKGROUND

Built in 1915, the Germantown YWCA at 5820 Germantown Avenue became the primary building for the organization, which had been established in 1870. For almost a century, it was a vital community hub in Philadelphia, offering recreational, social, and religious services. Known for its progressive history, it was the first YWCA in Philadelphia to integrate. After struggling to stay open, the building was sold in 2006, but redevelopment plans stalled, leaving it vacant. Years of fires, vandalism, and neglect have rendered its interior inaccessible.

Last summer, I worked as a fellow with the Digital Scholarship Summer Fellowship (DSSF) team to create a website to digitally preserve the history of the Germantown YWCA Building. I was in charge of the architecture page, and so I created an interactive floor plan tool to visualize its spaces. Through this process, I faced the challenge of having very little architectural documentation on the building, particularly of the building's interior. This information is crucial to create tools that bring the building's story and design to life.



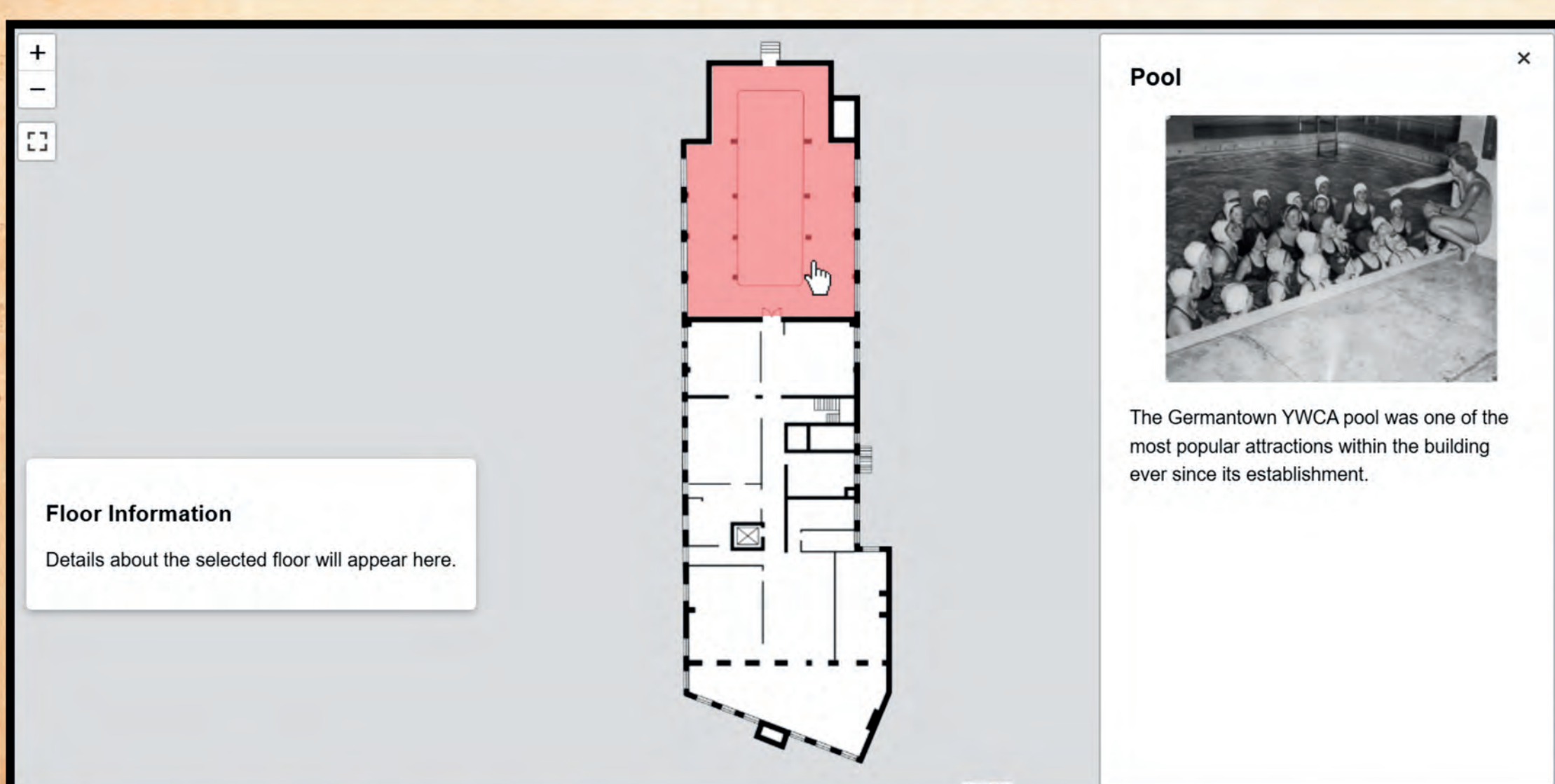
Digital scholarship fellows '24 in front of the Germantown YWCA



1912 blueprint of the Germantown YWCA, courtesy of The Athenaeum of Philadelphia. Used with permission

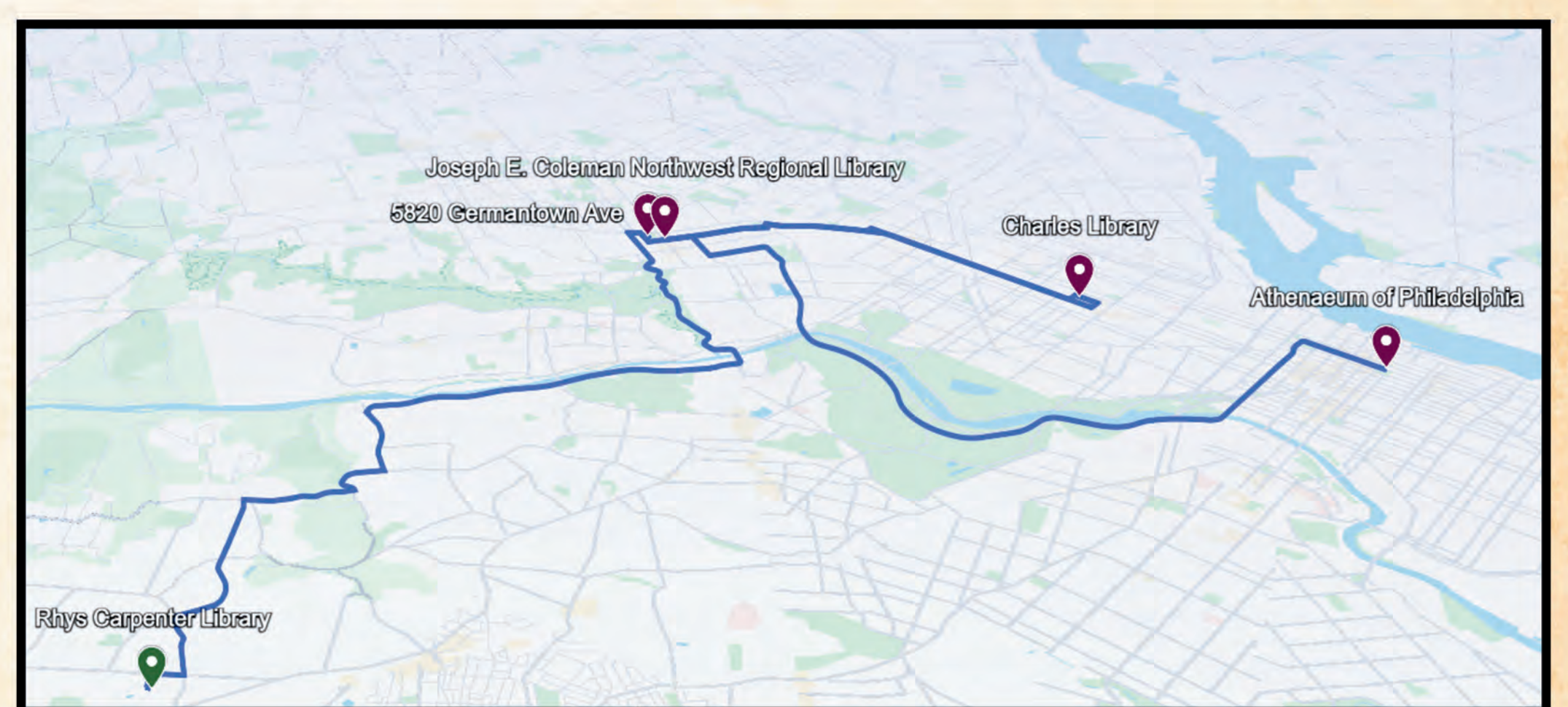
PRAXIS FOCUS

This independent study builds on my summer work by addressing the lack of documentation on the Germantown YWCA's architecture, particularly its interior. I focused on gathering archival materials, such as blueprints and photographs, to better understand the building's design. Using these resources, I refined the interactive floor plan tool I created during the summer, replacing static images with vectorized plans and improving the content and code. The final part of the study involves developing a digital visualization project to reimagine key interior spaces and make the building's history more accessible.



Interactive floor plan map after embedding the vectors

SITES AND FINDINGS



- **Athenaeum of Philadelphia:** Located 12 blueprints of the Germantown YWCA dating back to 1912.
- **Carpenter Digital Media Lab:** Worked on vectors and digital visualizations using Illustrator, SketchUp, and coding languages; HTML, CSS, and JavaScript.
- **Germantown YWCA Building:** Captured recent photos and observed the building's exterior and scale to understand its real-life dimensions.
- **Joseph E. Coleman Library:** Discovered a collection of local Germantown newspaper issues on old film from the 20th century and found the book "The First Hundred Years of the Germantown YWCA."
- **Temple Special Collections:** Reviewed several boxes of materials related to Germantown, focusing on the building's history from the 1930s to the 1960s.