As graduate students in history at UL Lafayette, Maegan Smith, '16, and Victoria Throop, '16, created an online, interactive reconstruction of the Irish Channel in 1880. It marries technology and old-fashioned historical detective work to examine one of the evergreen questions about the storied New Orleans neighborhood – just how Irish was it?

They found the Irish Channel embraced a diverse population. In 1880, there were not just Irish residents, but French, English, German, African-Americans, Italians, Scots, Dutch and native-born Louisianians of varying ancestry.

Throop acknowledges that other scholars also have concluded that the Channel was "probably not that Irish." But the Irish Channel Project does something previous published studies could not. It tills well-worn historical ground with a technological edge.

It uses GIS – which stands for geographical (or geospatial) information system – to resurrect the residents who called the working class, multiethnic neighborhood home nearly 140 years ago.

"It really is a great tool for historians. So much of history is spatial. There is so much data in location," Throop explained.

Mary Churay was another history graduate student and Smith and Throop's classmate.

Churay's family had ties to the Irish Channel. As the trio discussed potential class projects, they realized the neighborhood was a crossroads for each of their individual interests. Churay studied

spatial history. A previous job working with the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development had exposed Smith to GIS.