Viewpoints

Marketing the Preservation Message

Preserving Resources from the Recent Past

Understanding Gentrification

Prairie Churches of North Dakota

Partnering with Federal Agencies
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Photo courtesy of the Washington D.C. Convention and Tourism Corporation (WCTC).
Top Right: The John Marshall House
Photo courtesy of the Richmond Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau.
Bottom Left: The Bethesda Church north of Williston, N.D.
Photo by Dale Bentley.
Photo by Adrian Scott Fine.
Marketing the Preservation Message

When I was asked to speak before the Preservation Alliance of Virginia, I discussed with a friend what I might say. She asked: “Why is there even a need for a speech on promoting historic preservation in a place like Virginia? After all, with all we have here, if Virginia is not interested in historic preservation, who would be?”

Her response told me several things. It suggested that there is a perception at least among some of the general public that Virginia’s historic resources are viewed as an integral part of what Virginia is, that there is a sense that Virginia is, and should be, in the forefront of preservation.

Further, her observation implied that even those citizens who are well-disposed toward preservation may take for granted that the issue is settled, that Virginia has historic properties and communities, and will always have them.

I suspect that my friend’s comments may represent the feelings of many of our fellow citizens outside of the historic preservation movement in Virginia.

I have been around politics and public life a long time. I know how difficult it is to make an issue a part of the conventional wisdom, and the dangers of it being taken for granted. It is a tough trick, winning the public’s heart and then keeping your issue in the forefront of peoples’ minds. It is a never-ending process, one requiring constant vigilance.

So, I want to focus on “message and markets” and why inattention to those two things could have a dramatic impact on preservation efforts in Virginia in the months and years ahead. Much is at stake and some things could be at risk.

Competing for Attention

We are personally familiar with historic preservation; we know it; we value it; and too often we take it for granted. We assume that others understand it, so we do not have to explain it too much or defend it. But because we understand it, we also assume that no one else can possibly understand it the way we do. And that’s undoubtedly the case. But the fact is, sometimes those closest to preservation may not comprehend the scope of its challenges. They see the trees, but not always the forest.

And when one thinks further about it, there are many people outside of the preservation community who do not understand it. They are busy with their own lives— their work, their families, soccer games, bowling leagues, and church work. There are many things competing for their attention.

It is important to remember that for many people there is a “Niagara Falls” of information, events, activities, requirements, and responsibilities impinging upon their daily calendars. They may appreciate historic preservation; they may even think it is important. But too often their impressions of preservation efforts are formed by the media stories, some good, some questionable.

So, in this climate it is not difficult to understand why preservation is rarely placed in perspective; why its value is not often placed into context.

This state of affairs is not good—not good for preservation efforts or for our society. It means, quite simply, that the future of historic preservation efforts could be at risk. For what the public at large does not understand and value, the public will not long support and sustain.

So, where are we? And where does preservation go from here? These questions are important in light of the dramatic funding cuts to state and local budgets in recent years, to mention just one concern.

Virginia’s numerous historic neighborhoods, protected by local ordinances, contribute to the state’s “quality of life” advantage. Richmond’s Fan District is the largest intact Victorian community in the United States, featuring gracious homes in an abundance of architectural styles. Photo courtesy of the Richmond Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau.
Making the Case for Support

In my opinion, the case for historic preservation in this country is not well stated. Context is too often ignored. Connections between education, work, preservation, and economic growth are not made. The links are not stressed. In short, the message of preservation’s value too often is not coherent, not contextual, and not communicated.

I believe that should be changed. The questions for us should be: How? When? By whom? The answers will not be found quickly or easily, and better public understanding and support will not be forthcoming immediately. And yet preservation does not have the luxury of time.

So what about the future? Can preservation count on public support? In my judgment, that will not happen unless the preservation community learns to market the message that preservation is important and that it is at risk.

Let’s look for a moment at the value of historic preservation in today’s society. We know what it is. We believe that the important images, words, voices, buildings, and places of the past should be preserved. Such things speak to us of times past. They can tell us for years to come who we are, where we came from, how we got here.

There is more.

Preservation is vision and can help us see where we are going, although it will not tell us precisely how we will get there.

Preservation is tapestry. The lives and experiences of those who have preceded us weave visible threads in the fabric of our society and in the patterns of our lives.

Preservation is experience. It permits us to look at those who lived before us—people who struggled, loved, suffered, triumphed, and reflected on their condition. It was Virginia’s first governor, Patrick Henry, who said it best when he referred to such history as the lamp of experience guiding his steps.

As I prepared for this event, I re-read the report of the Commission to Study Historic Preservation, which was established during my term as governor. The report by David Brown, A Future for Virginia’s Past, came out in 1988. As with so many of Virginia’s historic treasures, the report seems timeless, and by any measure, holds up well today. The recommendations, as good as they were then, are just as applicable in today’s political and economic environment.

The report identified several overriding themes. One, that Virginia’s historic resources are among the most important in the nation and their protection both deserves and requires a strong commitment on the part of the commonwealth. Second, that the issues facing preservation are complex and their solution relies on the establishment of a productive partnership between the commonwealth, localities, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and individuals.

The report called for strengthened reviews of governmental actions, better enabling legislation for local preservation programs, and stronger state funding support. It also discussed the use of zoning to protect historic resources, the need for comprehensive planning, aesthetic zoning, regulation of demolitions—all at the local level.

There was an impressive review of the impact of state actions on historic properties; and the recommendations regarding the review of state permits and licenses, transportation projects, and the maintenance and restoration of state-owned historic properties were all quite commendable. There also was an excellent section dealing with financial support and incentives for preservation, including basic operating services, state grants, easement donations, the Main Street program, and innovative financial techniques for preservation, among other things.

Now, think about all this for a moment.

How much of this do you think the public knows? They may be aware of—and enthusiastic about—the preservation of Mount Vernon, Monticello, the Pulaski Courthouse, the Adam Thoroughgood House, Old Town Portsmouth,
and Alexandria, and many other wonderful places including important battlefields, that tell us so much about the past—especially if such places are in their backyards. But my guess is, the public is generally not aware of the challenges confronting preservation efforts and the need for greater public understanding and support of preservation programs.

In my judgment, the preservation community is not doing enough to draw public attention to these activities and accomplishments, and that is so important to building a firmer foundation of public support for the future.

Marketing to Target Audiences

So why not just do it? Why not tell the world how important, how vital, how necessary preservation efforts are?

I am confident that all of you do it in your own way, but in today's world, once is not enough. Simply put, repetition is the name of the game. The message must be told and told often. It is human nature to think that the value and accomplishments of preservation are self-evident, that a well-reasoned, well-delivered, and well-received speech on the subject should be sufficient. But remember my remarks a few moments ago about how busy people are, how many things are competing for their attention, how overwhelmed they are with information.

Indeed, it is a paradox that the more information-oriented our lives become, the more frequently we have to have the message repeated. Remember that Proctor & Gamble spends hundreds of millions of dollars a year reminding people to buy soap—a product so basic that one would think we would not need reminding. Remember, too, that car salesmen and political candidates do the same thing for the same reason. Why should the preservation community be exempt from this fundamental operating principle?

I believe that preservation is too important to be left behind in the world of multiple messages. Its message of value in a world of change must be marketed and repeated—over and over and over again.

So, who does that? That is a decision that you have to make within the preservation community, but it is a decision that you cannot make alone. In marketing your message, it is important to get the governor's support, and to keep the legislators apprised and involved. In your communities, appoint "ambassadors for preservation"—those business, civic, and educational leaders who are articulate, knowledgeable, and persuasive, and who will stand up and speak out for the importance of preservation efforts.

In your communities, appoint "ambassadors for preservation"—those business, civic, and educational leaders who are articulate, knowledgeable, and persuasive, and who will stand up and speak out for the importance of preservation efforts.

I cannot over-emphasize the value of the strategic approach, for a plan that is tactical rather than strategic is simply motion without direction. Your goal and strategy must be one of reaching the minds of many citizens with the message of the value of preservation, and that it should not be placed in jeopardy. The tactics simply involve the means by which you convey that message to your audience.

It is vital that the specific audience for your message be identified. Whether the message is targeted to a broad, general audience or a more select one, it is necessary to connect with those who influence or respond to that particular message.

I view audiences in a 3-P dimension: the press, the public, and the politicians. They are separate yet related audiences—all interconnected. They listen at different levels, though, and respond to different stimuli. That is where the tactics become so critical once a strategy has been developed.

Remember that many in the "3-P audience" may not see historic preservation as a priority. Not that they oppose it, because they generally don't. Not because they think it is unimportant; they probably think it is. But, in my judgment, many do not appreciate the necessity of a societal commitment to preservation, and that is unlikely to change anytime soon. Simply put, historic preservation is not on their radar screen.

There are some exceptions, of course, especially if the issue is unusual or involves high profile participants. The fight over the Manassas Battlefield several years ago fits this mold. The evolving dispute over development in Warford, Va., could be another.

But those are exceptions that prove the rule. And those exceptions sometimes create their own set of problems, as I will discuss shortly.

On a day-to-day basis, however, I do not believe that the press, the public, and the politicians see clearly enough the role of historic preservation in ensuring that Virginia continues to be a place where people want to live, work, and raise their families. They do not see clearly enough that there is economic value in historic preservation. They do not see clearly enough what could result if our commitment to preservation is reduced. They do not see clearly enough the importance of historic preservation in managing changes in Virginia's future.
Putting Preservation in Context

Let me respectfully observe that, while conferences such as this are critically important for sharing information and developing strategies, many in historic preservation spend a great deal of time talking to one another. The fact is that we need to better market the message outside of rooms like this one. More time is needed talking to the 3 Ps on a regular basis, so that the press, the public, and the politicians can begin to see historic preservation in context. So they won’t take preservation for granted. So they won’t see preservation as always opposed to growth. So they won’t see preservation as an attempt to simply cling to a past they don’t recognize or appreciate.

Sometimes it helps to see something more clearly if life without it can be imagined. Imagine Virginia without Mount Vernon or Monticello. Without Waterford and the Blue Ridge. Without Old Town Alexandria and Poplar Forest. The list could go on.

Imagine the commonwealth without the Revolutionary War and Civil War battlefields, the Barter Theatre, the covered bridges of Patrick County. Where would Virginia be without the Lawn and Rotunda at the University of Virginia? Without the state capitol building, Oaklands, the John Marshall House, the Jamestown Church, and the Cape Henry Lighthouse—to mention a few others.

Virginia has been a growing and prosperous state through time for many reasons. But, I believe that without our commitment to preservation, Virginia would be a place far fewer people would want to be.

So, the next time you encounter someone who is tempted to take historic preservation for granted, or who disregards its importance entirely, challenge them to imagine a Virginia without any of these historic treasures.

Tell them the story about how Mount Vernon and Monticello were saved—and how easily those stories could have had different endings. Tell them about efforts to restore James Madison’s Montpelier. Tell them about the vitality of Staunton, Bedford, Winchester, and Fredericksburg, and how so many other cities in this country have not been so fortunate. Tell them that these things have not been preserved solely by divine providence, but by the hard work and commitment of many who believe in the value of historic preservation.

Don’t let anyone take for granted the effort that has gone into making things as they are, and don’t let anyone take for granted the idea that these things will always remain.

When you want to understand the context in which we should think about the issue of historic preservation, this is a good place to start.

Preservation and Economic Growth

But getting people to stop taking our historic treasures for granted is only part of the challenge. We must overcome the stereotype that historic preservation is an enemy of economic growth. It is even more important to the effort to build and maintain ongoing public support for historic preservation that it not be seen largely as an obstruction to economic growth. This is a direct outgrowth of the 3-Ps lack of understanding of historic preservation in a broader context. Having no broader context, they are more likely to pay attention to preservation in those instances in which there is great controversy.

Most of these controversies have something do with a fight against development encroaching upon a historic location. I am not suggesting that such fights should always be avoided. They are sometimes necessary. But because this is the only exposure to preservation for many people, they tend to think of it solely in these terms. And that is a problem.

It is critically important to the effort to build and maintain ongoing public support for historic preservation that it not be seen largely as an obstruction to economic growth. It is even more important to the effort to build political support that this impression not be ingrained in the thinking of the press, the public, and the politicians.

When I was governor of Virginia, one of the major themes of my administration is...
was targeted economic growth. Everything I did related back to the goal of creating selected opportunities for economic growth—including the support of historic preservation.

I used historic preservation as a tool to promote growth, and used the proceeds from our economic growth to help fund preservation efforts. I understood that no choice between the two needed to be made, but that preservation and growth could be mutually inclusive.

Too often, though, the issues are not well framed; this broader context is lost and decision-makers see the issues of preservation and economic growth as mutually exclusive. If given such a choice, many officials will put historic preservation on the back burner—especially in a tough budget climate. So, we must do a better job of demonstrating that this is a false choice, and we should work overtime to make sure it is a choice that is rarely, if ever, executed.

My advice is to work with public officials before contentious issues arise. Work with developers and others who might be seeking to build or expand their operations. Head off problems and controversies before they arise.

Just as importantly, don’t remain silent when you see economic growth opportunities that can proceed in a way that complements the historic character of Virginia. Be there to lend support to such proposals. Be there, especially, when projects will benefit lower-income populations.

Be there when it is not expected and prove that preservation can coexist with, and be an important part of, efforts to bring economic opportunity to areas that most need it.

And in the process, you might find it a good way to make new friends and allies, people who can help promote your goals; friends who might be more inclined to work with you to preserve a healthy balance between historic preservation and economic activity.

**Preservation and the “Quality of Life” Advantage**

If you can persuade people to see historic preservation as a tool to maintain a community’s essential character as well as a means to manage change in a dynamic and growing economy, what about those who choose to see historic preservation simply in the context of the past? This is particularly true of some of the younger generation. When asked about historic preservation, many younger people ask: “Why do you want to live in the past?” They see preservation simply as over-exuberant reverence for a time gone by, and believe that such attitudes distract them from moving into the future.

For some, they see it as a choice between a turntable and a CD player. Between a rotary phone and a cell phone. Between a black-and-white TV and color.

More of them must understand that preservation is more than reverence, though reverence is important. Preservation is the way we enhance the essential character of our state: it is the foundation upon which we will build the future.

Young people must be shown that historic preservation is in their own interest and that it can be an important component in seeing to it that Virginia remains a “Land of Opportunity” within which they can build their own future. If that is to happen, of course, Virginia must remain able to attract investment and promote growth.

And how do you do that? Let me again use my experience as governor to illustrate the point.

When one shops for a computer and has a choice between two models of comparable quality, the purchase is most likely to be made from the vendor or store that shows the most interest in one’s needs. The same is true in attracting investors. I wanted Virginia to show potential investors that the commonwealth was interested in them, and in their success. So, I pointed to tangible examples.

I showed them that by improving our infrastructure, Virginia was demonstrating to investors that we cared about their ability to reach markets, wherever in the world they might be.

By encouraging the study of languages and geography, and by investing in our colleges and universities, we showed investors that we were interested in creating the kind of climate in which they could feel comfortable, as well as the kind of schools they would want their children to attend.

By doing all we could to promote the skills and abilities of our workforce, we showed investors that we cared about the productivity of their operations.

And, yes, by preserving the best of Virginia’s historic and natural treasures, we showed investors that we cared about our quality of life, we cared about our history, and we cared about making Virginia a place people want to live and to visit. By making the most of our advantages, we showed investors that locating in this area was in their enlightened self-interest.

By framing preservation as a “Virginia Advantage,” we can persuade the 3-P audience, including young people, that historic preservation is to their advantage.

So, in addition to “working the crowd” of the 3-P types, also take every opportunity to go to events and clubs where students, young professionals, and other groups of young people gather. Make sure that they see the advantages of preservation. Get
Preservation is the way we enhance the essential character of our state: it is the foundation upon which we will build the future.

No Time to Lose

Edmund Burke once said that the essence of leadership was the ability to “...represent the future to the present.” If our people do not see the value in preservation, then preservation has no future.

The 3-P’s may think that we’ve already succeeded. The 3-P’s may believe that we’ve already made the investments. If that is the case, then the 3-P’s do not understand the context. But you do. And it is your job—our job—to make sure the 3-P’s do too. We have no time to lose.

I am reminded of the story of an old man who was planting trees on an Israeli kibbutz. A young man working at the kibbutz approached him and asked why he was making such an effort; after all it would take 50 years for the trees to grow and he wouldn’t be around to enjoy the shade. “Fifty years,” replied the old man. “I’d better hurry.”

Time goes by fast. I remember when we convened the Governor’s Commission to Study Historic Preservation. It was 1987, and it had been 20 years since the General Assembly created the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission. It was 20 years until Virginia would be celebrating the 400th anniversary of the landing at Jamestown.

It all seems like yesterday, to me anyway. But we have only four years left till 2007. It all happened in the blink of a historical eye.

The theme of your conference is “Making the Case: Preservation Solutions for Virginia’s Future!” All Virginians, indeed all Americans, are fortunate that the Preservation Alliance of Virginia is working to make the case, striving to shape a new preservation agenda for a new era. I commend you for your energy and thank you for your vision and commitment, and I leave here today hopeful of preservation’s future in Virginia.

Gerald L. Baliles is the former governor of Virginia and a partner in the law firm of Hunton and Williams. He spoke before the Preservation Alliance of Virginia in Norfolk, Va., on November 18, 2003.

Rallying Support for Resources from the Recent Past

Jeanne Lambin and Adrian Scott Fine

The “recent past” is a term commonly used to discuss historic and architectural resources younger than 50 years old. It is estimated that they make up approximately 70 percent of our built environment. The importance of mid-century, post-war, or “underage resources” has been the subject of numerous books and articles and has even reared its head in the mainstream media. Despite increasing interest and enthusiasm for the preservation of the recent past, the preservation of these resources poses significant challenges, ranging from a general lack of appreciation to unsympathetic alterations to demolition.

The decades following WWII witnessed an explosion of architectural innovation, much of it taking place here in the United States. The diverse inventory includes iconic buildings of international architectural significance such as Mies van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House as well as the ubiquitous architecture of the ordinary ranch house. The recent past story is certainly about the icons but also needs to be told through the less prominent places that are equally important to a local community and its sense of place. From early fast food restaurants to drive-through branch banks to post-war suburbia, these places have much to tell us about who we are today, who we were, and the ways we lived during the past half-century.

The National Park Service’s Recent Past Initiative website (www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/recentpast) describes the great variety of 20th-century resources, and their cultural importance, this way: “From futuristic coffee shops and soaring airport terminals to the homes of the postwar suburbs, 20th century architecture embodies the aspirations, priorities, challenges and successes of our recent history. They include the libraries and community centers constructed by New Deal agencies to contend with the Great Depression, factories where the World War II generation
assessed tanks and planes, schools built for the postwar baby boom and glass-walled office parks that symbolized American business. Such properties reflect the varied lives that unfolded within them, and contribute to a diverse and dynamic 20th century landscape ranging from bridges to public buildings."

Preserving and appreciating what remains of the recent past will be extremely important for telling the story of America after WWII. Unfortunately, many of these places are now seen as dated or unfashionable—and rarely valued as “historic.” Far too often, structures from the recent past, whether simple or sublime, are perceived as expendable, unattractive, or unworthy of preservation. But these resources cannot be overlooked, dismissed, or de-valued simply because of how they look or because they no longer meet today’s tastes or preferences.

**Threats to Recent Past Resources**

It was the great wave of suburbanization and urban renewal that helped bring about the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Vast swaths of farmland disappeared beneath suburban-style ranch houses, new roads, and shopping malls. From the rubble of urban centers devastated by the Great Depression rose glass-and-steel skyscrapers, housing projects, and modern municipal buildings. “Progress” was often synonymous with destruction of historic architecture, which fell to make way for new schools, homes, strip malls, and factories. Ironically, over four decades later, once again in the name of “progress” we are now confronted with the preservation of those once “new” buildings.

These “replacement” structures are now facing many of the same problems that condemned the buildings that came before—lack of public appreciation, perceived obsolescence, development pressures, and insensitive alterations and additions. They also face threats that their pre-war counterparts did not face. Many were constructed with fragile, experimental, or short-lived materials. In addition, because they are not yet 50 years old, many of the buildings constructed during this post-war period are often mistakenly not yet considered eligible for historic designation which would give them more credibility in the eyes of the preservation movement and public.

**Lack of Appreciation**

Every generation has a style of architecture that it considers expendable. Today many consider the architecture of the recent past to be as expendable as its Victorian counterparts once were. Although “famous maker homes,” such as those designed by noted architect Joe Eichler or by Charles and Ray Eames, may be featured in glossy architecture magazines and in the New York Times and Newsweek, appreciation does not always translate to preservation. The 1962 Maslon House (aka Rancho Mirage) by Richard Neutra, considered one of the world’s most influential architects, was recently auctioned by Sotheby’s and acquired for $2.45 million. Unfortunately the house was not protected by any local landmark programs (the city of Rancho Mirage has no historic preservation ordinance), and despite the efforts of local advocates to save the house, the new owners demolished it.

Preservationists aren’t necessarily immune to a bite by the style bug either. Within the preservation ranks, considerable debate exists on the preservation worthiness of the recent past. Some preservationists don’t consider the resources of the recent past to merit much concern, while others question the need for a new approach to encourage preservation.

It is easy enough to understand why preservationists would be ambivalent about preserving the architecture of the recent past, for it was the construction of many of these buildings that caused them to stand in front of the wrecking ball in the first place. One example is Pittsburgh’s space-age-style Civic Arena which bisected a historic neighborhood and left part of it cut off from downtown. The Arena, the largest retractable dome- roofed structure in the world, is threatened with demolition and private development. These resources bear the stigma of an era that wiped out thousands and thousands of historic buildings. Yet the unwillingness to acknowledge the potential significance of these sites conflicts with one of the major goals of the preservation movement—to preserve our built heritage.
exceptions. Thus, a public to understand makes it hard for the many post-war architecture to appreciate, and the simplicity of much post-war architecture can make it hard to distinguish as "good" or "bad" example of a building. This can make the critical process of survey, documentation, and evaluation subjective and challenging.

Alteration and Development Pressure
The United States is experiencing a building boom which rivals that of the years following WWII. Just as homes, apartment blocks, factories, and office buildings that had weathered the Great Depression and World War II faced obsolescence after the war, so too do an increasing number of resources built in the post-war period. It seems that the faster the rate of development increases, the faster the expected life span of a building decreases. Traditionally, it was believed that the useful life span was 30 years for a house and 25 years for commercial property. Many properties are now reaching or have already reached the age when they will be candidates for cosmetic changes, substantial alterations, or even demolition.

The resources that do escape demolition often can’t avoid alteration. As architecture critic David Dunlap noted, “not all of these losses involve outright demolition, subtle changes are constantly erasing post war design.” Depending on the scale of the building this could have a profound impact on the property’s appearance. Original materials are often removed or replaced because they are either difficult to repair, dated looking, or both. Such was the case with the Florsheim Building in Chicago, designed by the firm of Shaw, Metz and Dolio and completed in 1949. It was one of the first buildings constructed in downtown Chicago following World War II and was described in the AIA Guide to Chicago as “the first major Chicago structure to emphatically embrace the design elements of European modernism.” The building was converted to residential use in 1997 and dramatically, irrevocably, and unsympathetically altered.

The 50-Year Rule
In 1966, when the first list of properties in the National Register was established, it contained a total of 868 resources, and of those, 24 met Criteria Consideration “G,” which states that a property achieving significance within the past 50 years is eligible if it is of exceptional importance. Thus when the National Register was first established, less than 3 percent of the resources were “underage.” Almost 40 years later, this percentage remains nearly the same. According to the Recent Past Preservation Network, “as of January 2003, 2,332 of the nearly 76,000 listings in the National Register have been nominated under Criteria Consideration G.”

Because the National Register allows for buildings to be nominated for their national, state or local significance, it greatly expands the category of what can be considered exceptionally significant. Yet, despite this provision for underage resources, many people mistakenly believe a building must be 50 years old to be listed in the National Register. In other instances, neither the local community nor the state historic preservation office consider resources younger than 50 years old to be even worthy of consideration, and so they are likely to show bias in evaluating them or to reject the nomination outright.

The National Register is a valuable preservation tool, but in large part it is essentially a voluntary program for the private citizen and can do little to prevent demolition or alteration by private individuals. Generally, the only way to prevent demolition resulting from a non-federal action is through a local landmark designation program or zoning overlay program that has the authority to prevent demolition.

But while the National Register allows for properties less than 50 years old to be listed, many local governments impose a 50-year rule without exceptions. Thus, a property could be listed in the
National Register but not be eligible for local landmark designation. Consequently, the biggest problem that many of these resources face is that they lack real protection at the local level.

Gaining historic designation, whether at the national, state, or local level, provides credibility—a key tool for building public support. Without this, advocating for an underage resource is far more challenging.

Efforts to Examine and Preserve the Recent Past

Preservation of the recent past is by no means a new topic. Indeed since the preservation movement began, “underage resources” have always been threatened, the most notable example being Pennsylvania Station in New York. The neo-classical masterpiece designed by McKim, Mead and White was demolished in 1966, just shy of its 50th birthday. Its demolition helped galvanize the American preservation movement. In the decades following the passage of the Historic Preservation Act in 1966, there has been a steadily increasing interest in preserving underage resources, beginning with the establishment in 1977 of the Society for Commercial Archaeology, a national organization devoted to the buildings, artifacts, structures, signs, and symbols of the 20th-century commercial landscape.

In a 1978 article, “Remember Our Not So Distant Past,” which appeared in Preservation magazine, professor emeritus of history and founder of the historic preservation program at the University of Vermont, Chester Liebs, asked, “Will historic preservation be able to accept and selectively conserve the architectural species of the modern era?” In 1979, only 13 years after the National Historic Preservation Act was passed, the Department of the Interior issued How-To Guide No. 2: How to Evaluate and Nominate Potential National Register Properties that Have Achieved Significance Within the Last Fifty Years. The guide was written to “inform those who need to make recommendations of exceptional significance.”

DoCoMoMo, an international organization focusing on documentation and conservation of the modern movement, was created in the Netherlands in 1988 and a U.S. chapter was established in 1995/96. (www.docomomo.us) Local chapters are now operating in the New York tri-state area, northern California, Midwest, Philadelphia, western Washington, and New England.

In recent years, two national conferences cosponsored by the National Park Service and the Association for Preservation Technology have been held on the recent past: Preserving the Recent Past, Chicago, 1995, and Preserving the Recent Past, Philadelphia, 2000.

The Recent Past Preservation Network, a web-based advocacy initiative, was established in 2000 to assist preservationists in documenting and nominating sites to the California and National Registers. (www.eichlernetwork.com)

In Wildwood, N.J., the Doo Wop Preservation League was established in 1977 to advocate for and preserve Wildwood’s collection of mid-century commercial (or “Doo-Wop”) architecture. (www.dowopusa.org) In Miami, Fla., Miami Modern (MiMo) formed to advocate for its now-threatened 1950s and ’60s-era hotels located north of South Beach. In Texas, Preservation Dallas has taken an interest in its recent past by sponsoring tours and events on the subject, resulting in sell-out crowds. Houston, Tex., has also started a modernism committee.

Numerous statewide preservation organizations have placed recent past resources on their endangered lists. In 2003 the Preservation League of New York State put the 1964 2 Columbus Circle building on its annual Seven to Save list. The Landmark Preservation Council of Illinois placed Bertrand Goldberg’s Prentice Hospital on its annual Ten
Most Endangered list. Preservation New Jersey included Lustron Homes in New Jersey on its annual endangered list.

Neighborhoods from the recent past are now gaining local historic district designation, especially in the western states. Perhaps no place better illustrates this than Phoenix, Ariz., with more than 25 districts—many of which include post-war residential examples.

**Action Steps**

As said before, threats to post-war resources are not unlike those facing other historic resources, whether they are endangered by outright demolition, alteration, redevelopment, or neglect. What is different perhaps is the approach needed to encourage preservation of the recent past.

**Engage New Audiences**

Probably the greatest problem surrounding the recent past is the public’s lack of appreciation for and understanding of mid-century architecture. In some instances the threat and loss are acknowledged, perhaps even lamented. But in others, the loss is largely unnoticed as the public may not know the value of these places or how to advocate for a preservation alternative. The most important thing that can be done to preserve the architecture of the recent past is to educate the public about its importance and unite the emerging popular interest in preserving the recent past with proper preservation practices. The precedent for doing this and added value can be traced to the appreciation of Victorian architecture in the early 20th century and the resurgence of interest in Art Deco architecture in Miami’s South Beach district.

Presently there is tremendous interest in mid-century culture ranging from furnishings to artwork. From television and product development to advertising, popular culture clearly illustrates this comeback. Indeed “Retro Modernism” was the theme of Time magazine’s 2004 special style and design issue. As demonstrated by the article, those interested, however, are not necessarily preservationists or aware of the greater preservation movement. This audience appears to be younger and more diverse. Many organizations, such as the LA Conservancy, have used the interest in the recent past to attract a new audience and build membership.

**Question the 50-Year Rule**

As stated previously, the 50-year rule for historic designation can be an obstacle for preserving many recent past resources. If a building cannot achieve national, state, or local designation, it can be challenging to convince the public of its quality and value, or to build proactive support for it at the local level. The issue of age is highly controversial. Many see it as an artificial filter, especially because so many significant resources are lost before their 50-year mark.

It’s important to look at alternative approaches. Some communities have a waiting list of buildings to designate once they cross the temporal eligibility threshold. Others, such as Chicago, are beginning to survey their mid-century resources. Still other communities are amending their ordinances to reduce or eliminate the age restrictions. The city of Chicago imposes no age restriction on locally designated landmarks and has a number of underage buildings listed including Skidmore, Owings and Merrill’s Inland Steel Building, completed in 1957. It was designated a Chicago Landmark in 1998.

The question of whether age matters is part of an evolving discussion of what is significance and why should we preserve the recent past. Some argue that if these resources struggle to meet the test of “the first, the last, or the best,” then other criteria will be needed to determine their value.

**Promote Continued Use and Rehabilitation**

Recent past resources are less often considered for the historic rehabilitation tax credit program. To date only about 200 buildings younger than 50 years old have been rehabbed with the help of the tax credit. Sometimes buildings aren’t considered simply because the structures don’t look “historic” and therefore the program is overlooked.

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*The National Trust included 2 Columbus Circle in New York City on its 2004 list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. Constructed in 1964 by architect Edward Durell Stone, the building is slated to be sold and renovated as a permanent home for the Museum of Arts and Design. The new design, however, calls for sweeping architectural changes that could rob the building of its distinctive character. Photo by Ezra Stoller. ©1964.*

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*The most important thing that can be done to preserve the architecture of the recent past is to educate the public about its importance and unite the emerging popular interest in preserving the recent past with proper preservation practices.*
Architectural tours that highlight buildings from the recent past such as the Casa de Cadillac in Los Angeles help increase the public’s understanding and appreciation for 20th-century architecture. Photo courtesy of the LA Conservancy.

Despite the inherent challenges of utilizing the historic rehab tax credit for the rehabilitation of recent past resources, there are some success stories. One example is the 1954, 36-story Republic Bank Building in Dallas which is undergoing conversion into apartments.

Buildings from the recent past also present unique challenges to rehabilitation. They may contain greater amounts of hazardous materials such as asbestos. Depending on use, character-defining features such as large fixed windows might pose problems. Perhaps the most troubling issue is how to, and whether to, replace original materials that have failed or are no longer in production. The Lustron House, for example, was an innovative, prefabricated post-war house made entirely of porcelain enamel coated steel panels. Only about 2,800 of the houses were produced between 1948 and 1950. Since production ceased, almost half have been lost to unsympathetic alteration and demolition. Finding replacement parts for damaged or deteriorating sections is tough, especially since the machinery that made the parts for the house is no longer in existence.

Showcase Best Practices

Not all news about the recent past is bad. Consider the following examples:

Arapahoe Acres, in Denver, Colo., was the first post- WWII subdivision listed in the National Register thanks to a grassroots, all-volunteer initiative and network of homeowners. The Downey, Calif., McDonald’s is considered the original McDonald’s prototype, yet it was once threatened by demolition. Saved by the LA Conservancy with help from a listing as one of the National Trust’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places, it is now one of the McDonald’s Corporation’s most profitable enterprises thanks to a heritage marketing program.

Advocacy efforts for the Gold Dome in Oklahoma City, Okla., illustrate a wide range of creative and extremely effective strategies including the use of bumper stickers, T-shirts, regularly scheduled demonstrations supporting saving the structure, and even a CD with a song about the dome.

Phoenix, Ariz., has a provision for properties to be locally designated if they are exceptionally significant. Phoenix has a number of local and National Register historic districts which include properties less than 50 years old. These districts are popular places to live because of the State Historic Property Tax Reclassification (SPT) for Owner-Occupied Homes, which offers a substantial reduction in the state property tax assessment for eligible owners of National Register listed properties or properties in a local district.

All these successes were accomplished by building a greater appreciation for the recent past, and capturing that interest remains a key need. Each day hundreds of resources are lost to demolition and insensitive alteration. By leveraging the emerging interest in the recent past that exists today, we can build greater support for these resources in the future.

Jeanne Lambin is the field representative in the National Trust’s Wisconsin Field Office. Adrian Scott Fine is the director of the National Trust Northeast Field Office.

NOTES


2 The inventory of National Historic Landmarks also includes a number of properties that were younger than 50 years old at the time of listing, including the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial (the St. Louis Arch) by Eero Saarinen. The Gateway Arch was listed in the National Register in 1966 and designated as a NHL in 1987.

3 Of the five largest cities in the United States (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and Philadelphia), only two—New York and Houston—impose a minimum age in their ordinance for properties eligible for local designation. In New York City, the restriction is 30 years. Houston currently has an age restriction of 50 years but the ordinances are now being amended. Philadelphia does not have a firm age restriction, but it does have an established practice of waiting until the architect is deceased before designating his or her buildings.
The Oversimplification of Gentrification

The story is told of the British mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, that he had a favorite pair of socks. Whenever the socks got a hole in them he had them darned. Then after years of wearing the socks, of getting holes in the socks, and of darning the holes, he asked himself, “Are these still the socks that used to be my favorites?” I would suggest that when we begin to ask ourselves about “gentrification” we are really asking ourselves, “Is this still the neighborhood that used to be my favorite?” It’s in the same location, within the same city, crossed by the same streets, and made up of mostly the same buildings. But is it the same neighborhood?

Gentrification means change, and I use the word “change” very consciously. Because often when we shout against “gentrification” we are really shouting against change. But a shout against change is a hollow shout of foolishness. There will be change. There is no neighborhood that is static—it is getting better or it is getting worse.

But “change” and “progress” are not necessarily synonyms. Change that is so rapid, change that is so dramatic in scale, change that so mutates the physical character and the human character of the neighborhood that it creates a widely felt damage to the sense of community is a form of change that does not constitute progress. We need to have change in our neighborhoods, but we also need the time for adaptation and evolution.

I have not yet defined “gentrification.” I have deferred that because I think there are lots of times when we yell “gentrification” but we really mean something else.

And all too often “gentrification” is simply a code word for “not like us.” Chinese moving into an Italian neighborhood, Hispanics moving into Jewish enclaves, Koreans opening shops in African-American neighborhoods, Vietnamese businesses in Latino neighborhoods, Mexicans coming into Puerto Rican districts, gays moving into blue-collar family neighborhoods, middle-class blacks moving into poor black neighborhoods. All of these are called by someone “gentrification.” I’m more than a little troubled by that. Our calls for diversity and tolerance are diminished when we apply them to others’ neighborhoods but not to our own. And legitimate concerns about gentrification are debased when the term is loosely and erroneously used to mean only that “newcomers are buying houses and they don’t look like us.”

In more and more places, when a strategy of revitalizing older and historic neighborhoods is advocated, this issue of gentrification emerges. But the word itself—gentrification—has become so loaded with economic, social, cultural, and often racial overtones that rational, reasoned discussion is often simply not possible. To some people gentrification means new investment, homeownership, neighborhood stabilization. To others, gentrification means loss of affordable housing and a revitalization of the physical character of a neighborhood at the expense of the human character.

So perhaps it makes sense to step back from the word itself and look more closely at the change that can take place in neighborhoods, the role historic preservation may play in that change, and the positive aspects and the potential negative consequences of the change.

The Positive and Negative Aspects of Change

Almost by definition, gentrification results in a number of outcomes encouraged by public policy, including:

- reinvestment
- increased levels of home ownership
- improved public services
- improved commercial activities
- renovation of vacant and abandoned properties
- adaptive use of “white elephant” structures
- increased property tax, sales tax, and income tax revenues
- neighborhood jobs
- property value appreciation
- economic integration

But if those are the positive consequences, what are the negative consequences of gentrification—at least negative for some?

- rising rents
- rapidly rising property taxes
- potential change in the human character of the neighborhood
- loss of sense of “power” and “ownership” by long-term residents
- potential conflicts in priorities between new residents and long-term residents

In short, to be “for” or “against” gentrification obscures the issues. Reinvestment and economic integration are positive results and should be public policy priorities. Economic displacement is a negative result, and public policy tools are needed to mitigate it.

Addressing Displacement

The most significant adverse impact of “gentrification” is the displacement of residents of modest means. This affects both renters and homeowners. Renters are affected when rents rise beyond what they can afford. Homeowners are potentially displaced when the property taxes on their home rise beyond their ability to pay.

Both forms of displacement, of course, need to be...
in-depth analysis of the gentrification issue. Here, in part, was what it found:

Low-income households actually seem less likely to move from gentrifying neighborhoods than from other communities. Improving housing and neighborhood conditions appear to encourage the housing stability of low-income households to the degree that they more than offset any dislocation resulting from rising rents.

(Source: The Urban Prospect, “Gentrification and Displacement,” (Citizen’s Planning and Housing Council), Vol. 8, No. 1, January/February 2002)

5. For those homeowners who are potentially displaced because of rising property taxes, it needs to be recognized that theirs is a cash-flow problem, not a wealth problem. The family economic equity is growing; there just is not enough current cash coming in (a problem particularly with older homeowners living on fixed income retirement payments) to be able to afford the annual outlay of increased taxes. This problem can be easily addressed, and programs are needed to do so.

6. At least in the early stages much of the “gentrification” is movement into vacant properties. Except for the occasional drug dealer or prostitute squatter there is no displacement in the reoccupation of a vacant structure.

People are attracted to historic neighborhoods for many reasons including the proximity to restaurants and entertainment and the pedestrian orientation. Photo courtesy of the National Trust for Historic Preservation

Diversity a Key to Healthy Neighborhoods

Now I’d like you to think for a minute about the qualities of a healthy neighborhood. My guess is that your list includes things like good schools, safe
When people move “back to the city” they often choose the historic neighborhoods. The Capitol Hill Historic District in Washington, D.C., is perennially popular for its fine rowhouses in a mix of architectural styles, all within walking distance of the Capitol and other federal offices, Eastern Market, Union Station, and mass transit. Photo courtesy of the Washington, D.C., Convention and Tourism Corporation (WCTC).

...thing—and who in their right mind would suggest it wasn’t—how can the return of those middle-class households not ultimately be a good thing?

While there is not much national consensus on overall urban policy, there is broad agreement on one conclusion: Cities would be healthier if the diversity of the city as a whole was reflected at the neighborhood level. Cities would be healthier if citizens with a range of incomes, races, occupations, and educations lived side-by-side as neighbors. But research across urban areas indicates that is typically not the case, that at the neighborhood level most neighborhoods are essentially all white or all black (or all Asian or all Hispanic); all rich or all poor; all blue collar or all white collar. Nearly 40 years after the passage of fair housing laws, most neighborhoods in most American cities are essentially still segregated by income, race, occupation, and education.

But the exception, in study after study, is found in local historic districts. If having diverse neighborhoods is a public policy goal, it is in historic districts (and almost exclusively in historic districts) where that is taking place.

A couple of years ago the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) hired some academics to look around America and try to determine if there were such a thing as a neighborhood that maintained economic and racial diversity over several years. And they found several such neighborhoods, in fact, and wrote case studies about them. When I was reading the case studies I thought, “These certainly sound familiar.” So I checked—nearly all of them are historic districts. Did these researchers recognize that? No! The fact that the common denominator of these diverse neighborhoods was that they were historic eluded these August scholars.

Gentrification and Historic Districts

Why are new residents attracted to historic neighborhoods? People of all incomes, races, educational levels, and occupations are attracted to historic neighborhoods for multiple reasons: the quality of the building stock; the character of the neighborhoods; the diversity; the urbanity; the proximity to work, school, shopping, and transportation; the affordability; the range of housing options; and the pedestrian orientation of the neighborhood. In short, people want to come to historic neighborhoods because they are great neighborhoods.

In most studies that have been conducted around the country, property values within historic districts tend to have rates of appreciation greater than the overall local market.

I certainly acknowledge that there is gentrification in historic districts but is historic designation the cause? The underlying causes of gentrification are long-term economic and market forces. While some would like to make the case that historic designation is the direct cause of gentrification, that relationship often confuses cause and effect. A great neighborhood is in high demand. It is not the historic designation that makes it a great neighborhood; it’s already a great (or potentially great) neighborhood. Historic designation is 1) the recognition of the neighborhood quality, and 2) one of the few tools available that assures it will stay that way.

There is one direct relationship between local historic districts and property values, however. In most studies that have been conducted around the country, property values within historic districts tend to have rates of appreciation greater than the overall local market. This is attributable not just to the quality of the housing stock but also the owner confidence that the character of the neighborhood will be protected through the historic preservation ordinance. Real estate values come largely not from within the boundaries of a single property but from the larger context within which the individual property exists (hence the old cliché of location, location, location). A local historic district protects the context of the neighborhood, and thus protects the major source of the value of an individual property.

What is insufficiently recognized is the role local historic district designation plays in preserving more affordable housing through the prohibition of “tear downs” in historic neighborhoods. In “hot neigh-
The crisis of affordable housing in America has been critically exacerbated because we have torn down what was affordable and built what is not affordable for many of our citizens.

Let’s look at Washington, D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams has an initiative to add 100,000 to the population of Washington in the next decade. As a city Washington, D.C., lost population in each of the last three decades. But it didn’t lose population from every neighborhood. In fact some neighborhoods grew while the city overall was shrinking. Which neighborhoods? Historic neighborhoods.

During the decade of the 1990s Washington lost 35,000 residents, while on a composite basis Washington’s 25 historic districts added residents. In fact, had the historic districts lost population at the same rate as the rest of the city, the 2000 population of the District of Columbia would have been only 561,896. Conversely had the rest of the city grown at the rate of the historic districts, the 2000 population would have been 621,472. This population gain within historic districts was not limited to the most expensive neighborhoods like Georgetown or Kalorama. The more modest Shaw Historic District and LaDroit Park both

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The crisis of affordable housing in America has been critically exacerbated because we have torn down what was affordable and built what is not affordable for many of our citizens.
had more residents in 2000 than in 1990.

The conclusion should be obvious. When people do choose to move to the city, they move first to the historic neighborhoods of the city.

The District of Columbia will be in competition for those 100,000 residents. Who will the competition be? Primarily the close-in suburban jurisdictions of Virginia and Maryland. Washington will succeed in that competition only if it differentiates itself from those suburban alternatives. The urban quality of Washington and its historic neighborhoods are a central defining feature of that differentiation.

There are very few large parcels of available land upon which major residential development can occur, so the majority of new residents will have to be accommodated within existing neighborhoods. And new residents—especially those who have the financial means to increase the tax base—will be moving into existing neighborhoods, and that is “gentrification.”

**Lessons for D.C. and Other Cities**

There are complex issues regarding neighborhood change taking place today. The magnitude of those issues will only increase as the goal of adding 100,000 residents to Washington, D.C., is achieved. It no longer serves a useful purpose for neighbors to scream the word “gentrification” at each other. It needs to be broadly recognized that there are aspects of this change that are desirable—reinvestment and economic integration—and aspects of this change that are undesirable—human displacement. If Washington is to be a healthy city it will recognize the difference.

Gentrification comes about because Washington, D.C., and other cities are blessed with great neighborhoods—many of them great historic neighborhoods. The economic description of rapidly rising prices is “too many dollars chasing too few goods.” Simply put the demand for houses in many historic districts is far outstripping the supply. But there are dozens of neighborhoods in cities across the country, hundreds of blocks and thousands of houses, that could meet the test of being a local historic district. The response is not less historic preservation; the response should be more historic neighborhoods identified, protected, and enhanced.

Historic preservation should be the key tool for the economic integration of neighborhoods, and a key component in providing affordable housing.

We as preservationists have not overestimated the importance of our historic neighborhoods. In fact we have vastly under-recognized the multiple contributions to healthy cities historic neighborhoods provide. Historic preservation is not the answer to every urban problem, but it is part of the solution to most of them.

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**Issue-Based Preservation: The Prairie Churches of North Dakota Project**

*James Lindberg*

At the outset, it seemed implausible. Could an all-volunteer preservation group with little money, no staff, and few active board members successfully take on a huge preservation issue involving hundreds of structures and powerful socioeconomic forces? Not likely.

Or maybe it was a case of little to lose and much to gain? That was how the board of Preservation North Dakota (PND) saw their situation back in 1998. Formed in 1991, the group had established a modest track record by hosting annual conferences, presenting awards, and printing an occasional newsletter. But it seemed that the audience for these activities was always the same 30 or 40 people. Board members became discouraged, attendance at meetings declined, and PND’s survival was in doubt.

The solution—developed with the support of partners including the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the State Historical Society of North Dakota—was to focus on a major issue with the potential to engage a much larger audience: the loss of the state’s historic churches. Six years later, the success of the Prairie Churches of North Dakota Project illustrates how even small preservation organizations can grow and become more effective by concentrating on key issues affecting their states and communities.

**The Issue: Endangered Rural Churches**

The plight of North Dakota’s rural churches was not a new concern. In fact, the statewide “crisis” of declining rural congregations and abandoned churches developed over a period of 70 years.

North Dakota’s population rose quickly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as waves of immigrants from northern and eastern Europe moved west, seeking prosperity and religious freedom. The flood of settlement reached its high point in 1930, when...
In North Dakota, these changes left behind a landscape dotted with farmsteads, commercial main streets, schools, and churches built to serve a resident population that was once much larger. Churches are particularly numerous, in part because early immigrants sought to maintain the faiths and traditions of their homelands. Settlers from Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Russia, and the Ukraine each built their own separate houses of worship, even in smaller towns. For example, before World War I in the town of Dickinson, Catholic services were held in three languages: German, Bohemian, and English. Each required a separate church.

Today many of these churches remain standing, providing tangible connections to North Dakota’s rich ethnic heritage. Many are simple wood-frame structures visible for miles on the open prairie landscape. Others are large cathedrals designed by architects and built in stone or brick to serve farm families from the surrounding countryside. Often these structures house original stained glass windows, altar paintings, carvings and statues. Church grounds frequently include stone grottos, shrines, iron crosses and other grave markers.

Although the overall level of church membership remains high in North Dakota (only Utah has a higher percentage), most rural congregations are shrinking. As few as a dozen members remain to support many country churches. The average age of rural church members is well over sixty. As a result, budgets are modest and many churches have suffered from years of deferred or inadequate maintenance. Church leaders have responded as best they can, but consolidation, closure, and demolition are common occurrences.

**Partners Organize to Address a Common Concern**

The history of North Dakota’s churches was the subject of a 1997 conference entitled “Deep Roots: Preserving Our Sacred Heritage,” organized by the state historical society. This conference increased understanding and awareness of the state's religious architecture and folk traditions among preservationists and historical society members from around the state. It also raised the question: What, if anything, could be done to save historic church buildings and artifacts?

Three months later representatives from local preservation groups, historical societies, church congregations, the SHPO, PND, and the National Trust met to examine this question in more detail. Each group looked at the church preservation issue from a different perspective.

For some it was simply a matter of how to keep a particular church open for services. Others expressed interest in the architecture of specific denominations, altar paintings, or cemetery art. Many commented on the importance of maintaining churches as anchors of community life and focal points for future revitalization. At the Mountains/Plains Office of the National Trust, we hoped that preservation strategies for North Dakota churches could be developed and shared with other states facing similar challenges.

As the many dimensions of the church preservation issue were articulated, it became obvious that no single organization could tackle this problem. Partnerships were necessary to produce meaningful results. Because the scope of the issue was so large, there appeared to be plenty of work for all and little need to battle
There are 2,200 church buildings in North Dakota.
- 78 percent are in rural areas or small towns with populations under 2,500.
- 57 percent were built before 1950.
- 20 percent are closed; there are more than 400 vacant churches.
- 7 percent are being used for another purpose, including as museums, community centers, private homes, bars, machine shops, and barns.
- As many as 10 churches are closing every year.

The survey took more than a year to complete. During this time National Trust staff gathered more information through a series of interviews with experts and stakeholders, including leaders from each of the major denominations, architects, historians, sociologists, demographers, government staff, and nonprofit directors. Numerous onsite interviews with local congregation members provided further insights and anecdotes about the challenge of maintaining older churches when there are small budgets and few volunteers. Examples of successful church preservation efforts were collected, along with suggestions for future technical assistance.

Results from the surveys, interviews, and site visits were shared at a series of regional meetings attended by more than 150 people. The media were invited as well, and—somewhat surprisingly—they attended. The research results were news! With facts and figures in hand, the project partners quickly became quotable experts on the subject of historic churches. Numerous articles, interviews, and special reports began to appear about the newly named Prairie Churches of North Dakota Project. Awareness and expectations grew.

The Organizational Benefits of Focusing on a Preservation Issue

By the fall of 1999, it was time to begin thinking about how to implement some of the ideas for saving endangered rural churches in North Dakota. A grant to the National Trust from the Bush Foundation of Minneapolis helped the partners to create a strategic plan that detailed a range of new programs and services. A critical piece of this plan was increasing PND’s capacity to lead the project.

Preservation North Dakota organized a volunteer project to rehabilitate the abandoned Ladbury Church for use as a community events center. Photo by Dale Bentley.

Researching and Owning the Issue

The partners agreed that additional research was needed to learn more about the condition of historic churches in the state. There were many unanswered questions: How many churches were there in North Dakota? Why were they closing? What kinds of building repairs were needed? What were possible adaptive use alternatives? To find the answers, the partners decided to conduct a statewide volunteer photo-documentation project that was called “Picture North Dakota Churches!”

Dozens of volunteers signed up to help carry out this survey, many of them members of the North Dakota Local History Council, a coalition of city and county historical societies. Funding from the National Trust and the SHPO allowed a part-time consultant to recruit and manage the volunteers. The SHPO also supplied film and survey forms, processed and cataloged the photographs, and provided overall supervision to ensure that the survey met professional standards.

Volunteers logged more than 15,000 miles driving up and down North Dakota’s backroads, documenting every standing church in each of the state’s 53 counties. Their work produced an invaluable permanent record of church architecture and resulted in several key findings:

- There are 2,200 church buildings in North Dakota.
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Developing a successful nonprofit organization is particularly challenging in rural
states such as North Dakota, where distance and sparse population make it difficult to find members, recruit board leadership, and secure stable funding. Throughout its short history, PND had failed to overcome these barriers and grew slowly, if at all. It was with little hesitation, therefore, that the PND board decided to take a risk and commit all of its resources to the Prairie Churches Project. They never looked back.

To increase public awareness of the Prairie Churches Project, PND and the other partners continued soliciting media interest whenever possible. A new round of stories appeared in 2001, after the Prairie Churches of North Dakota were named to the National Trust’s list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. North Dakota Congressman Earl Pomeroy joined PND to announce the listing in front of a historic Moravian church. He applauded the Prairie Churches Project, and said that historic churches were “the billboards of North Dakota.”

The credibility and visibility of the Prairie Churches Project further increased when major national media began taking an interest. Communication with several publications resulted in stories, including a well-illustrated piece in House Beautiful magazine, a front-page feature in the Sunday New York Times, a Christmas day story in the St. Paul Pioneer Press, and, most recently, a Washington Post magazine feature.

North Dakota residents couldn’t help noticing all the attention being paid to their state’s church architecture. As word about the Prairie Churches Project spread, memberships and small donations began trickling in to PND. The media coverage and focus on churches also made it easier for PND officers to explain the goals of their organization to potential new board members. Several former survey volunteers joined the PND board, along with church representatives, businesspeople, and university faculty.

North Dakota has no major foundations and few corporations, so fundraising has always been a struggle for nonprofits, especially statewide groups. The strongest financial support for the Prairie Churches Project has come from outside the state, including from individuals as far away as California and New Jersey. The office of North Dakota Senator Byron Dorgan helped secure a $100,000 Save America’s Treasures (SAT) grant for the project. Most of the SAT funds were passed through PND to help local groups preserve historic churches that are no longer used for religious purposes.

In late 2001 the National Trust responded to a query from the J. M. Kaplan Fund of New York City. The Kaplan Fund was looking to support cultural heritage preservation in selected cross-border ecosystems, including the Great Plains of the United States and Canada. Recognizing that the Prairie Churches Project was a perfect fit for their interests, the Kaplan Fund awarded PND a $100,000 matching grant.

Portions of both the SAT and Kaplan Fund grants were used to match a Collaborative Pilot Grant from the National Trust. This funding allowed PND to hire its first professional staff person—former survey volunteer and PND past president Dale Bentley. As the National Trust’s Statewide and Local Partners Program demonstrated, the benefits of having full-time
staff are numerous. Gaining a staff person allowed PND to begin delivering a range of services to support local preservation efforts.

The centerpiece of PND’s technical assistance is a Grassroots Grants program that has assisted more than 20 church preservation projects. These grants often fund basic repairs: roof replacement, foundation work, painting, installation of security systems. In some cases PND has helped create new affiliate organizations to manage these projects. For instance, PND helped form an organization in the town of Stanley, which is converting an abandoned church into a new arts and community center.

Another small grant was used to support a PND demonstration project. Believing that they needed to roll up their sleeves and get involved locally, PND board members selected an abandoned church to rehabilitate in the summer of 2001. PND board members and volunteers contributed more than 3,000 hours to convert the turn-of-the-century church into a new community center.

PND has documented a range of church preservation success stories from across the state in the hopes that these examples will inspire similar projects. These projects illustrate different strategies for preserving churches, including continued use for religious services, adaptive use, and occasional use. Through the Prairie Churches Project, PND has shown that many historic churches can be saved for periodic summer use, including for special events such as weddings, family reunions, homecomings, funerals, and heritage services.

The Prairie Churches of North Dakota Project reached a milestone in the fall of 2003, when a new exhibit about recent statewide church preservation efforts opened at the North Dakota Heritage Center in Bismarck. The exhibit was jointly sponsored by the SHPO, PND, and the National Trust and featured photographs and case studies gathered since the project began in 1998. More than 250 people attended the exhibit opening.

Future Directions

Through its leadership in the Prairie Churches Project, PND has gained a reputation as the leader of the statewide grassroots preservation movement. The organization is expanding its interests beyond churches. In addition to providing technical assistance to local preservation organizations, PND now manages an endangered list, organizes an annual conference and awards program, publishes a quarterly newsletter, and hosts a popular statewide preservation list-serve.

Both PND and the Prairie Churches of North Dakota Project continue to grow and evolve. With support from the Kaplan Fund, PND is now reaching across the Canadian border to explore partnerships with organizations in Manitoba and Saskatchewan that are dealing with similar issues. Ideas for possible cross-border conferences, tours, and exhibits are being discussed.

Seeking to capitalize on state and national awareness of their work with historic churches, PND recently took its first steps into the world of nonprofit business development and earned income. It has trademarked the “Prairie Churches” name, along with a new tagline, “Preserving Prairie Places,” and plans to include an online store as part of an expanded website. Books, postcards, and collectables are among possible future products, all designed to earn unrestricted income while increasing appreciation for historic places.

Though much has been accomplished, no one involved in the Prairie Churches of North Dakota Project believes that the problem of endangered rural churches has been solved. Numerous historic churches have been rescued, but others remain vacant and deteriorating.

The biggest change is that now there is hope for these structures, where as before there was none. A true grassroots preservation movement has developed in North Dakota, led by a reinvigorated PND and supported by partners at every level. All of these organizations became stronger and more effective by working together to achieve a common goal.
The National Trust and Federal Agencies as Partners

Peter Brink

The story of historic preservation in America has always been a story of partnerships. Ever since Ann Pamela Cunningham rallied the women of the nation to save Mount Vernon in the 1850s (and especially since the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966) the spirit, resources, and leadership needed to save historic places and revitalize communities have been provided by partnerships involving private citizens, elected officials, grassroots organizations, corporations, educational and cultural institutions, philanthropic foundations, the media, and agencies of government at the local, state, and federal levels.

Partnerships between public agencies and private organizations can make great things happen. And now, thanks to an executive order, federal agencies—from the Fish and Wildlife Service to the Coast Guard—are being encouraged to seek out partnerships that promote preservation. In 2003 President Bush issued Executive Order 13287, which challenges federal agencies not only to protect their historic properties and use them to support agency missions but also to pursue preservation through intergovernmental cooperation and public/private partnerships. The executive order is a component of the Preserve America initiative, which seeks to highlight and celebrate America’s historic and natural heritage assets and the role they play in promoting tourism, revitalizing communities, creating jobs, and educating the public.


These recommendations provide an opportunity for all of us working to preserve and protect historic resources to renew our efforts to work with public agencies at all levels to form innovative and creative partnerships.

The National Trust’s Role in Partnerships

The past decade has been a period of significant change for the National Trust. Beginning in 1995 our annual federal appropriation was phased out, and we began the transition to reliance on private funding. A key element in the transition process was our first-ever comprehensive fundraising campaign, which focused on building our endowment. By the time we closed the books on the campaign last year, we had raised almost $136 million.

Our newly won financial independence provides the underpinning for a thorough reinvention of the National Trust. It’s still very much a work in progress, but we are in the midst of planning for what we want the Trust to become over the next five to ten years. This plan, or the “Next Trust” as we call it, is still limited to some “big ideas”—things like engaging a million people in preservation, and securing enactment of federal incentives for rehabbing older buildings for housing. The themes of partnership, diversity, and education recur in every aspect of the plan.

What does this plan and the financial independence that fuels it mean for others—especially our partners—in preservation? The answer rests with that word “independence.” That one word describes what we bring to the partnership table—not only our independent status as a non-governmental entity but also our independent outlook. I don’t want to claim that we can “boldly go where no man has gone before,” but I do believe we can—and will—at least be able to offer an informed and independent perspective on preservation issues and be unafraid to speak out on politically sensitive issues that federal agencies may have good reasons not to tackle.

Effective, innovative partnerships between the National Trust and a wide variety of federal agencies have been in place for years, or even decades. These partnerships are much more than a ceremonial handshake and photo opportunities—these cooperative efforts are at work in communities across the country and making
preservation a reality for hundreds of Americans. Several recent cooperative projects between the National Trust and federal agencies illustrate the range and potential of public-private partnerships.

**Department of Defense**

Last year the U.S. Army established the Army-Community Heritage Partnerships program to strengthen ties between Army installations and neighboring historic commercial districts. The National Trust’s National Main Street Center was asked to be the Army’s partner in this initiative, which aims, among other things: to create stronger bonds between the installation and the community by spotlighting their shared heritage; to use preservation as a tool to spark revitalization in the community commercial districts; and to enhance shopping opportunities and services in the commercial district and thereby better serve the needs of local residents and Army personnel alike.

The program is currently at work in three demonstration sites: Highland Falls, N.Y., adjacent to the U.S. Military Academy; Columbus, Ga., next door to Fort Benning; and Leavenworth, Kan., site of Fort Leavenworth. In each place, Main Street staff—among other tasks—assess conditions in the downtown area and the existing relationships between downtown and the Army installation, work with Army officials and local government and business leaders to strengthen ties, explore ways to provide incentives for marketing and for building rehab efforts, encourage the use of downtown buildings to meet installation housing needs, and help develop and implement strategies for promoting heritage tourism.

Army officials are so pleased with what’s happening in the three pilot communities that they’ve provided funding for the Main Street Center to deliver training and technical assistance to three additional sites. One of the new localities has been selected—Sierra Vista, Ariz., adjacent to Fort Huachuca. Plans for the second site—Carlisle, Pa., home of the Carlisle Barracks—are now being finalized, and the third site will be named soon.

For the past few years, the Army—and last year, the entire Department of Defense—have been official cosponsors of the National Preservation Conference, thereby gaining an opportunity to present their views on major preservation issues, engage in dialogue, and take advantage of training opportunities the conference provides. We value the mutually beneficial relationship that has grown between us. Now we’re very pleased that this Heritage Partnerships program is giving us the opportunity to work even more closely together on a preservation issue that concerns us both: bringing new life to America’s traditional business districts.

**Department of Housing and Urban Development**

The Trust’s National Main Street Center is also working in partnership with the Department of Housing and Urban Development on a new federal funding source for developing affordable downtown housing. This new program—Main Street/HOPE VI—grew out of the American Dream Downpayment Act—and occupancy phases of their projects, the Trust and HUD hope to make a significant contribution to efforts to meet the nation’s critical affordable housing needs.

Another way we work together to support innovative local efforts is through the annual presentation of the National Trust/HUD Secretary’s Award for Excellence in Historic Preservation, which honors projects that make effective use of historic preservation in providing affordable housing or expanded economic opportunities. In the six-year history of the award,
Department of Transportation

Given the number of times preservationists have squared off against highway officials over road-building projects, the Department of Transportation might seem an unlikely preservation partner. In fact, the National Trust has recently collaborated on a number of issues and projects, and we’re eager to do that more.

In partnership with the Federal Highway Administration and other agencies, the Trust has sponsored a series of conferences on “Preserving the Historic Road in America” at which preservationists and representatives of state transportation departments have met to talk about strategies for balancing historic preservation and highway safety and design. This kind of dialogue leads to innovative transportation policies that enhance and preserve community character.

Last year DOT—particularly the Federal Transit Administration—was the Trust’s partner in the production of a report entitled The Returning City: Historic Preservation and Transit in the Age of Civic Revival. This report came out of a study commissioned to examine how decisions about public transportation, community development, and historic preservation have been made—and how their respective values have contributed to successful transit-related projects. It presents important information gathered from a number of communities across America—and the good news is that it barely begins to cover all the positive developments out there.

We’re eager to form other partnerships with the federal DOT and its state-level counterparts to gather and share additional examples of how preservationists and transportation officials are working together on issues such as context-sensitive design and the integration of transportation planning and smart-growth initiatives. This kind of partnership is absolutely essential if we hope to create truly livable communities, to provide safe and efficient ways of getting there, and to ensure that “there” remains worth getting to.

General Services Administration

The Trust has enjoyed a long history of partnership with the General Services Administration. In 2000 we kicked off National Preservation Week with a ceremony at the Old Tariff Building in Washington, D.C., celebrating the roles of GSA and the Advisory Council in facilitating the landmark’s rebirth as a luxury hotel. The following year, we formed a partnership with GSA to use three communities—Baltimore, Athens, Ga.; and Springfield, Ill.—as pilot sites to study the impact on downtown business districts when federal government offices are located there.

To tell the truth, a major factor in our relationship with GSA is pure admiration. The National Trust has its hands full taking care of only 25 historic sites, while GSA is responsible for 1,700 federal properties, including some of the nation’s most significant historic and architectural landmarks. We’ve recognized this fine record of stewardship on a couple of occasions: In 1999 we gave one of our National Preservation Honor Awards to the GSA/National Capitol Region in recognition of its work at Washington-area sites such as the National Building Museum, the Old Executive Office Building, and Clara Barton’s wartime office. Just last year, GSA received our John H. Chafee Trustees Award for Outstanding Achievement in Public Policy for its innovative Legacy Vision policy that promises a bright future for scores of historic federal buildings that anchor and adorn communities from coast to coast.

The Department of the Interior

That brings me finally to our longstanding partnership with the Department of the Interior—and this is a case where “last” is most certainly not “least.” In matters having to do with historic preservation, the Trust and Interior—especially the National Park Service—are practically sister organizations. Like most siblings, we sometimes butt heads over a particular issue, but we’re quick to jump to each other’s defense when the need arises.

For many years, the Park Service has been a valued cosponsor of our National Preservation Conference as well as numerous workshops, seminars, and other educational programs. More recently, we have partnered with NPS in Save America’s Treasures, which is one of the most ambitious, most far-reaching preservation initiatives ever undertaken in this country. Launched in 1998 as the keystone of the nation’s celebration of the millennium, the program has been a real bi-
Save America’s Treasures has helped people realize that every community has something—a building, a statue, a document—whose loss would cost the community a part of its own soul.

partisan effort, as evidenced by the fact that its honorary chairs have been Hillary Rodham Clinton and Laura Bush.

SAT has designated more than 1,000 official projects across the country. Congress has appropriated $188 million in matching grants for the preservation of these sites and artifacts. These funds, which are administered by the Park Service, are complemented by $55 million that the Trust has raised from private sources. This is a partnership that works, in a program whose significance, I believe, is impossible to overstate. Save America’s Treasures has helped people realize that every community has something—a building, a statue, a document—whose loss would cost the community a part of its own soul. Even more important, it has reminded us that saving the places and things that tell America’s story is not someone else’s job.

It is our job as preservationists to help the Park Service get the funding it needs to take care of the thousands of historic structures for which it is responsible. On more than one occasion the National Trust has used its 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list to call attention to specific historic resources in trouble. NPS sites listed—almost always with the Park Service’s support—have included Valley Forge, Mesa Verde, buildings at Glacier National Park, the schooner C. A. Thayer in San Francisco, Bathhouse Row in Hot Springs, Ark., and battlefields at Chancellorsville and Antietam. In most cases, our listing has been instrumental in generating the attention needed to pull the sites out of crisis. To help keep them from falling into crisis in the first place, our public policy staff and its grassroots lobbying network of preservationists across the country almost always has obtaining more funding for the National Park Service at or near the top of the “to-do” list.

Recently our ongoing dialogue with Interior has focused on a couple of important preservation issues. One is the frequently vexing matter of protection of historic and cultural resources—especially Native American sacred sites—on lands controlled by the Bureau of Land Management. The other is an effort to help improve the use of the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit program. The National Trust and the Historic Preservation Development Council hosted and supported a working group that included Trust staff, the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, Preservation Action, members of the development community, and other stakeholders. The working group identified a number of specific challenges to fully utilizing the potential of the rehab tax credit. This effort has culminated in a series of recommendations prepared last December by the working group. The recommendations have been generally well received by NPS. We believe this is an excellent illustration of how the Trust and the Park Service can be true partners in pushing each other forward toward our ultimate goal of making preservation and revitalization happen.

Potential Partnerships

In addition to these, there are some other agencies with which we hope to forge strong partnerships in the future.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) was our partner, along with DOT, in the 2001 production of Stories across America: Opportunities for Rural Tourism, which presented case studies of small towns and rural regions that have developed successful tourism initiatives. We’re very pleased by USDA’s development of a national pilot program to preserve and reuse older barns, an effort that builds on the National Trust’s BARN AGAIN! program. We’re now seeking an appropriation for USDA to carry out this initiative with partners across the country. Finally, we’re excited by the potential for participation by the U.S. Forest Service as we prepare for the 2005 National Preservation Conference, to be held in Portland, Ore.

Resolving Conflicting Points of View

Conflicting points of view are inevitable in our relationships with federal agencies and our goal is the keep the lines of communication open and to look for positive solutions.

As preservationists we know the value of keeping
post offices in small town centers and in rural communities, and the Trust’s relationship with U.S. Postal Service has sometimes been adversarial in the past. We’re looking forward to a more positive and more productive association in the future.

Similarly, at the Department of Veterans Affairs, we’re very concerned about the CARES (Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services) implementation and its potential impact on historic resources. At the Eisenhower VA Center in Leavenworth, Kans., which we listed as one of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in 2000, some two dozen historic buildings that were originally threatened with demolition are now slated for preservation and reuse. We’d like to work with the agency to ensure the same sort of happy ending at other VA sites across the country.

We also have a growing concern for the preservation of prehistoric and historic sites on public lands in the West that are threatened by escalating energy development. To protect archeological, cultural, and sacred historic places from energy development projects, such as mining, and oil and gas drilling, the Trust would like to encourage BLM to comply with Section 106 prior to leasing federal lands for energy development. This approach puts the issues out in the open before any commitments are made, so the parties are aware of what they are entering into.

Conclusion

Add to this list the many partnerships that take place at the state and local level between preservation organizations and public agencies, and I suspect we could come up with an impressive array of accomplishments, tempered only by the occasional areas of friction that are bound to develop in working relationships. Our job as preservationists is to seek out and take advantage of the many available opportunities to engage public partners in our efforts to preserve and protect our nation’s heritage.

Peter Brink is the senior vice president of Programs at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Laura Skaggs, director of Federal Agency Affairs, and Dwight Young, senior communications associate, also contributed to this article which was originally prepared as a speech to be presented at the 2004 Federal Preservation Forum in Annapolis, Md.