“Every Story Told”: Centering Women’s History
Contents

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Dedication: For Bobbie and Karen
STEPHANIE K. MEEKS .......................................................... 3

Introduction: Understanding Our National Story Through Women’s History Sites
STEPHANIE TOOTHMAN .................................................. 7

Women’s History Doesn’t Begin or End: An Interview with Turkiya Lowe
SANDI BURTSEVA ....................................................... 16

Gender, Race, and Class in the Work of Julia Morgan
KAREN MCNEILL ..................................................... 26

“Women Are Everywhere”: Celebrating The Women’s Building
DONNA GRAVES ..................................................... 37

A New Demonstration for a New Era: Collecting the 2017 Women’s March on Washington
LISA KATHLEEN GRADDY ............................................. 46

Three Steps Toward a Radically Effective Preservation Movement
MEAGAN BACO ........................................................ 55

Cover: The Women’s Building in San Francisco.
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The Forum Journal issue before you explores the challenges, opportunities, and intersections associated with the preservation and interpretation of women’s history. As such, we are dedicating it to two inspiring preservationists who laid so much of the groundwork for the telling of these stories and struggles: Bobbie Greene McCarthy and Karen Nickless. Bobbie and Karen entered our field at a time when both history and preservation too often focused solely on “great men and great houses” and spent their careers working tirelessly to broaden our movement and elevate the stories of American women.

When I joined the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 2010, Bobbie Greene McCarthy occupied the office next to mine, and I couldn’t have asked for a more impassioned or empathetic guide into the world of preservation. After serving as the director of the Oral History Program at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and as deputy chief of staff for First Lady Hillary Clinton, Bobbie went on to become the director of Save America’s Treasures—a grant program that, in its first decade, assisted in the restoration of nearly 900 historic sites and resources across the country.

From the beginning, Bobbie worked hard to ensure that Save America’s Treasures did right by women’s history. In fact, it is thanks to her leadership that the Sewall-Belmont House was among the program’s first four grant recipients in 1999, alongside the Constitution of the United States of America, the United States Declaration of Independence, and the Star-Spangled Banner—heady company! Once the headquarters of the National Women’s Party, the Sewall-Belmont House in Washington, D.C., is now a national monument and museum dedicated to women’s suffrage.

Save America’s Treasures also supported scores of other important women’s history sites on Bobbie’s watch, including...
The Mount, Edith Wharton’s Massachusetts estate; the Harriet Tubman Home in Auburn, New York; and the M’Clintock House in nearby Waterloo, where the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments was drafted as part of the Seneca Falls Convention. Bobbie’s passion project was Val-Kill Cottage, the Hyde Park home of Eleanor Roosevelt and the only National Historic Site dedicated to a First Lady.

When I think about Bobbie, I most vividly remember her deep-seated conviction that our work is ultimately about people. Years before we crafted the Preservation for People vision statement to guide us in the next half-century, Bobbie was already supporting those who do the hard and unglamorous work of historic preservation on the ground. From her early days in the Peace Corps to her final years at Vital Voices, a nonprofit that works to politically and economically empower women around the world, Bobbie always put people first.

Much as Bobbie broadened the scope and mission of Save America’s Treasures, Karen Nickless brought the same laser-like focus on honoring women’s history to the National Trust. Karen was a scholar of women’s history: her doctoral research at the University of South Carolina focused on the community of Shaker Sisters in Pleasant Hill, Kentucky. “My biological family,” she wrote at the beginning of her Ph.D. dissertation, “recalls my interest in women’s history as early as fifth grade.”

While writing her dissertation, Karen engaged that interest in virtually every way she could, working with the Palmetto Trust for Historic Preservation (now Preservation South Carolina), the Edisto Island Preservation Alliance, the Historic Columbia Foundation, McKissick Museum, and the National Trust Historic Site Drayton Hall. After she joined the Trust, Karen applied her keen insights and fierce intellect to ensuring that we fully incorporated women’s history as central and integral to our signature portfolio of National Treasures.

“Every single historic site is a women’s history site,” Karen once wrote in an essay with Heather Huyck, president of the National Collaborative for Women’s History Sites, “including the ones you
don’t think are. If you think not, look again, and think about what prejudices you might bring to the process.” As a senior field officer in our Charleston Office, she helped bring in and manage critical preservation projects such as Little Havana in Miami; the Sweet Auburn neighborhood in Atlanta; and her own passion project, the Pauli Murray House in Durham, North Carolina.

The National Trust’s executive vice president and chief preservation officer David J. Brown recalls Karen’s enthusiasm: “I had no idea who Pauli Murray was or the scope of her impact, but Karen made sure that my shortcomings in this regard were quickly rectified. Her passion for this place, the history it represented, and the future of reconciliation that it promised was contagious.”

And indeed it was. I well remember Karen telling me the story of Pauli Murray. An LGBTQ African American woman, Murray was the brilliant legal mind who wrote States’ Laws on Race and Color, which Thurgood Marshall called the “Bible for Civil Rights law”; a cofounder of the National Organization for Women; the first woman African American Episcopal priest; and an Episcopal saint.

I am so glad that, before she passed away, Karen heard the news that the Murray home would be named a National Historic Landmark by President Barack Obama in January 2017. Karen requested that, upon her death, donations be made to the Pauli Murray Center in her name. She called saving the Murray House her “greatest achievement.”

Interestingly, in February 2016 historian Patricia Bell-Scott published The Firebrand and the First Lady, which tells the story of the close friendship between Karen’s historical muse, Pauli Murray, and Bobbie’s, Eleanor Roosevelt. Murray and Roosevelt began writing to each other in 1938, and became closer in the years after Franklin Roosevelt’s death, when Murray would often visit Roosevelt at Val-Kill.

“One of my finest young friends is a charming woman lawyer,” Roosevelt wrote in Ebony in 1953, “who has been quite a firebrand at times but of whom I am very fond.” When Roosevelt was dying nine years later, Murray wrote to her: “For many years, you have been one of my important models... Two generations of women
have been touched by your spirit.” At a conference a few years before her own death in 1985, Murray reflected on what Eleanor Roosevelt had meant to her. “Hopefully,” she said, “we have picked up the candle that she lighted in the darkness and we are trying to carry it forward to the close of our own lives.”

Many generations have been touched by Bobbie and Karen’s spirits and their tremendous work to highlight women’s stories. We will continue to carry forward the candles they lit for as long as it takes—until women’s history in America is given the full recognition it deserves.

Thank you, Bobbie and Karen. We miss you both, and this issue is for you. FJ

STEPHANIE K. MEEKS is the president and CEO of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

TAKEAWAY
Read a Forum Blog post by Karen Nickless.
Introduction: Understanding Our National Story Through Women’s History Sites

STEPHANIE TOOTHMAN

Recognizing and interpreting women’s history is vital to understanding the complexity and diversity of our national story. In 2017 the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Preservation Leadership Forum, in partnership with the National Collaborative for Women’s History Sites (NCWHS), published a blog series highlighting the “places that have re-envisioned, re-invigorated, and redesigned how we tell the stories of women’s history in the United States.” This Forum Journal issue continues that discussion.

The introduction to the 2017 series emphasized telling these stories not in isolation but rather as part of the broader American narrative. Women’s stories intersect with every aspect of American society—including ethnicity, class, gender, politics and law, and culture. As Jon Jarvis, former director of the National Park Service (NPS), explains in the introduction to the 2012 “Telling the Whole Story: Women and the Making of the United States” workshop:

Women … have been every ethnic/socio economic status, and fundamental to human society, yet women and girls are too often invisible in history. They provided much of our daily sustenance and support yet are omitted from much of our formal history. What happened historically and what we know as history are two different things. We need to work with parks [and historic sites—my note] to find these missing women, to uncover their lives and experiences.

While the articles in this issue explore different approaches to telling women’s stories, they all share a basic premise: that the experiences and roles of women are important to the narrative at
all historic sites, from those that focus on a specific woman or group of women to those that explore events prominent in our shared history. To understand the full truth of these stories, we must keep in mind that all of history is viewed through multiple lenses. Gendered differences in perspective, roles, and experiences are common across cultures. And because of these differences, which have often resulted in the diminishment or loss of women’s viewpoints, it is often challenging to fully document women’s stories. To meet this challenge, we need to draw on every available opportunity and discipline.

WHY TELL WOMEN’S STORIES?
It is important to tell women’s stories, first and foremost, because we need them to provide a fuller understanding of the who, why, what, and where of our past. To tell the “whole story” we must recognize the contributions of the women who came before us.

Women’s stories are also vital for inspiring present and future generations—of both women and men. My own experiences have been significantly shaped by my education at Smith College, where I learned about the many accomplishments of its alumnae. Doctors, lawyers, leaders of the feminist movement of the 1960s, CEOs, authors, scientists—all provided examples of the possibilities open to my classmates and me. We graduated feeling empowered by these examples and by the words of Smith
College alumna Gloria Steinem who, at our 1971 commencement, urged us to go out and break barriers to achieve our goals.

Today, thanks to the growth of women’s studies, to the advocacy of groups such as the NCWHS, and to the power of social media, we are learning much more about women whose contributions have at times been forgotten. We are documenting the lives and the challenges of women who carried out the traditional roles of wife and homemaker, many of whom also worked outside of the home to support their families and communities, and recognizing that their contributions to our understanding of society’s cultural foundations are just as important as those of women whose achievements transcended their contemporary gender expectations.

Young people today can draw inspiration from women such as Pauli Murray, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, Dolores Huerta, Harriet Tubman, and the “Rosies” who contributed to the World War II home front effort—all of whom are represented in recent National Historic Landmark (NHL) or national park unit designations. These women, together with so many others, have paved the way for those who are now serving as Supreme Court justices, cabinet officials, mayors and governors, scientists and engineers, astronauts and airline pilots.
Telling the difficult stories of women’s history can also begin to heal the wounds inflicted by the many forms of discrimination that have shaped our history and ultimately our present. In 2015 the National Park Foundation received a grant from the Kellogg Foundation to investigate the potential for healing social divisions by acknowledging difficult histories. The NPS has been working with the National Trust, NCWHS, and other partners to explore these relationships through the Multiple Voices forums funded by the Kellogg Foundation grant as well as at recent PastForward conferences.

The interpretation and education programs in our parks and at historic sites, as well as the documentation of sites through the NHL program and the National Register of Historic Places, provide critical opportunities for preserving and sharing difficult histories. It became clear, however, that many groups, including women, are poorly represented in these programs. And, as we worked to address these gaps, it also became very clear how important acknowledgement can be to previously unrecognized communities. The designation of new park units such as the Rosie the Riveter WWII Home Front National Historical Park in Richmond, California; Stonewall National Monument in New York City; Harriet Tubman National Historical Park in Auburn, New York; and Belmont-Paul Women’s Equality National Monument (formerly the Sewall-Belmont House) in Washington, D.C., evoked strong emotional responses from the communities whose stories they represent, demonstrating the very real—and potentially very empowering—connection between acknowledgement and healing.

STORIES EMBEDDED IN PLACES AND OBJECTS
Why do historic sites provide such an effective forum for telling women’s stories? Examining the tangible physical resources of historic sites—buildings and other structures, landscapes, material culture—expands our opportunities to understand the lives of the people who created and inhabited those places, many of whom left no written record. Interdisciplinary research that incorporates methodologies from archaeology, ethnography,
history, cultural landscape analysis, and history can help us gain a range of new insights.

Exploring the multiple meanings of objects and physical features at sites—such as commonly used household items or the domestic and work patterns revealed by the layout of a dwelling or community—can support more comprehensive understanding. The landscape and the surviving mills and community buildings of Lowell National Historical Park in Massachusetts speak volumes about the relationships between the mill owners, the management, and the workers. Visiting the tar-paper barracks at Manzanar National Historic Site in Independence, California, vividly illustrates the hardships faced by the Japanese Americans confined there during World War II. The Pond’s face cream jars found in Manzanar’s trash pits speak to the very real desire to hold on to some aspect of normal life despite its interruption. The proximity of the Belmont-Paul House, longtime headquarters of the National Women’s Party, to the Senate office buildings, the Capitol, and the Supreme Court reminds visitors of the battles, past and present, to secure the vote, political representation, and equal rights for women. The narrow span of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, still reverberates with the courage of the marchers who

Community members marked the 50th anniversary of the Selma-to-Montgomery March at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, in March 2015.

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crossed it in their fight for civil rights. When I was a new mother during the sesquicentennial observation of the trail migrations, I rode over a segment of the Oregon Trail in a bone-crunching covered wagon; that experience increased my respect and empathy for the women who survived the trail with their families.

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE INITIATIVES**

In recognition of the opportunities that historic sites offer, in 2011 the NPS committed to expanding its efforts to “tell all Americans’ stories” both in its parks and through its national preservation partnership programs—the NHL program and the National Register. This commitment emphasizes collaboration between the research, documentation, interpretation, and education programs within our parks. Many partners, including the NCWHS, the National Trust, and state historic preservation offices, joined the NPS to support the research, interpretation, and preservation of diverse stories at sites throughout the nation.

One key strategy of this effort was funding NHL theme studies to provide the historic context that is critical to identifying and evaluating important stories and sites. Between 2011 and 2016, the NPS and the National Park Foundation funded theme studies for three groups whose stories are underrepresented in our official national narratives: American Latinos (2012), Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (2018), and the LGBTQ community (2016). In addition, in response to an NPS-Department of the Interior (DOI) proposal, Congress has been providing grants to support state and local surveys of underrepresented communities since 2014. These grants have funded projects such as a multiple-property nomination of sites associated with “The Latinos in 20th Century California”; city- and statewide surveys, respectively, of LGBTQ sites in New York City and Kentucky; a survey of African American sites in Milwaukee; and the identification of sites associated with the Moses Columbia tribe in Washington state.

In 2012 Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced a fourth initiative—one that would focus on women’s history, cut across these other theme studies, and build upon previous research. The DOI,
NCWHS, and the Belmont-Paul House (which is owned by the National Women’s Party) in Washington, D.C., sponsored the “Telling the Whole Story” workshop in December 2012. Hosted at the Belmont-Paul House, the workshop developed recommendations to improve women’s history programming at historic sites, encouraging the NPS and its partners to:

- actively seek out new parks, landmarks, and historic sites that acknowledge women’s contributions;
- recognize the presence of women across the full range of NPS sites through documentation, interpretation, and education programs; and
- revise existing criteria for listing properties as NHLs or on the National Register to eliminate the “institutionalized biases” that have prevented the listing of “women’s sites.”

These recommendations apply not only to NPS parks and programs but also to the efforts of other agencies and organizations managing historic properties. Thanks to the efforts of the NPS; NCWHS; and, through both its properties and advocacy, the National Trust—as well as many other public and private organizations—these recommendations are steadily becoming more widely adopted.

Many new NPS units tell the stories of significant women in American history and their work for justice and equality: the Harriet Tubman Park honors the courageous Underground Railroad leader and human rights advocate; the Belmont-Paul House was the longtime home base of the National Women’s Party and its fights for women’s suffrage and the Equal Rights Amendment; and the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site in Little Rock, Arkansas, is one of several units that pay tribute to the women who joined the fight for Civil Rights in the 1960s.

The NPS and NCWHS have collaboratively developed training programs to help existing parks expand their thematic frameworks, as well as their interpretive and educational programs, to incorporate women’s stories. NCWHS historians, supported through a cooperative agreement with the NPS, developed documentation that led to the
NHL designation of sites associated with Marjory Stoneman Douglas and Pauli Murray. Other sites designated as NHLs between 2012 and 2017 recognize the achievements of Lydia Pinkham, Concha Meléndez Ramirez, Katrina Trask, Lois Wilson, and Myrlie Evers. New guidance for interpreting the NHL criteria, which is currently under development, will incorporate recommendations from the Multiple Voices forums and the 2012 workshop to eliminate obstacles to nominating properties associated with women and other underrepresented groups.

The National Trust is expanding its telling of women’s stories at its own properties. At Belle Grove in Middletown, Virginia, interpretative programs based on the life of Judah, a woman who was enslaved at the plantation, are giving visitors new insight into the lives of enslaved people. Through its National Treasures program, the National Trust has been a key partner in advocating for the preservation of Pauli Murray’s home in Durham, North Carolina. The Trust’s 2018 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list includes the homes of Mary and Elizabeth Freeman—the oldest homes associated with the free black community in pre–Civil War Connecticut—as well as the Picotte Memorial Hospital in Nebraska, which was founded by the first Native American women licensed to practice medicine in the United States.

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION
The articles in this issue explore a variety of women’s stories at historic sites around the country, managed by both public and private organizations. Turkiya Lowe, chief historian of the NPS, discusses the evolving and intersectional interpretation of women’s history at sites in the national park system. Lisa Kathleen Graddy from the National Museum of American History explores the process of determining what items to collect from contemporary events such as the recent Women’s Marches. Karen McNeill’s and Donna Graves’ articles examine how buildings and sites—works of the renowned California architect Julia Morgan and The Women’s Building in San Francisco, respectively—can provide a platform for exploring race and class privilege and the interconnected histories.
of multiple communities. And Meagan Baco of Preservation Maryland concludes the issue with a look to the democratization of the preservation field.

Democratizing preservation is an important step in the effort to expand our collective acknowledgement, understanding, and appreciation of the contributions of women to the “making of the United States.” Every site preserved in communities throughout the nation, every story told, every community empowered contributes to a greater recognition of the diversity and complexity of our shared heritage. And that recognition is essential to our nation’s continued progress toward meeting the promise of our founding documents—equality under the law and the opportunity for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all. FJ

STEPHANIE TOOTHMAN is the former Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places and the former associate director for Cultural Resources, Partnerships, and Science at the National Park Service.

AUDIO
Listen to a Forum Webinar about including women in interpretation at historic sites.
Turkiya Lowe has been the chief historian of the National Park Service (NPS) since 2017, but her tenure at the NPS spans two decades. Lowe entered into the Cultural Resources Diversity Internship Program about 19 years ago, as a rising senior at Howard University. In the course of her time with the NPS, Lowe has seen a shift toward looking more expansively at the American story—from narratives that prioritized heroic, military men to ones that value the histories and experiences of underrepresented communities.

Lowe had been particularly gratified to promote the research and interpretation of women’s history, in particular that of women of color, at historic sites. We spoke with her about her work and about the evolution of women’s history sites within the NPS.
The NPS has been proactive in recognizing and celebrating the stories of all Americans, including by developing initiatives and theme studies for underrepresented groups. How were the investigations and outcomes around women’s history different from other theme studies? We first undertook an investigation of women’s histories in the 1980s. Instead of developing a historic context with individual sites listed, the NPS generated a list of large-scale sites that we felt were nationally significant. That theme study was not an expansive investigation of women’s history. Rather, it focused on identifying sites that we knew right off the bat were significant for their associations with individual women who did amazing things, who were first in their field, who won congressional medals, and who had other large-scale accomplishments—and were being protected, or needed to be protected, through the National Historic Landmark (NHL) Program.

As part of the NPS “Telling All Americans’ Stories” initiative, in 2011 and 2012 we focused on women and began looking holistically at women’s history. This time around, we looked more at individual stories—everyday, lived histories of women within our sites. This represents a shift in thinking, away from focusing exclusively on the actions of men to including the actions of women as well as their contributions to building the whole story. As with some of our past theme studies, we still identified those individuals who contributed to significant events in history, but this time we were looking more at patterns—patterns of gender development; patterns of civil rights; patterns of engagement in politics, inside and outside the home; and patterns that capture the silent work that women do.

The stewards of many historic sites are revisiting their interpretation plans and doing new research to bring out a fuller story. Can you give an example of an NPS site where women’s history is now being told for the first time or in a different way? We’ve focused a lot in the last five to seven years on expanding the individual stories of women—their lived history within our
parks. We’ve expanded beyond our legislative purpose for our park units to really look at the participants. And while those participants have always included women, we may not have told their individual or collective stories at our sites.

One example is the Oney Judge story—the escape story at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia. In implementing our “Civil War to Civil Rights” initiative, we created trading cards that presented individual stories within the parks. While making those, we realized that we had not previously interpreted the Oney Judge story—her escape from enslavement by George and Martha Washington.

Staff at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site in Vancouver, Washington, have been doing important research about women at the fort, particularly around the pre–Civil War era. They’ve uncovered the story of Monimia Travers—a woman who was enslaved by a U.S. army captain and freed in 1851. The park’s archives include her freedom papers. And the Minuteman Missile National Historic Site in Philip, South Dakota, is featuring great interpretation about women missileers—telling that more recent history from the 1970s, ’80s, and ’90s of all-women crews as well as the first integrated crews on missile sites.

All these stories are new or updated in the spirit of this initiative based on research and our own resources. We are attempting to recapture such stories, to hear women’s voices and study their lived experiences within our parks and in relation to the nationally significant events that we document.

A number of the stories that you mentioned are intersectional—relating to the woman’s race as well as her gender. Has the NPS encountered challenges in doing that work? Can you speak specifically about intersectionality and telling women’s stories?

One of the challenges that we have encountered in the earlier study of women’s history is knowing where to begin and where to end—because it doesn’t begin or end. Women’s history is not a separate category, although we oftentimes view it that way for the purposes of scholarship. But lived experience isn’t separate:
Women are African American, they are racially identified, they are sexually identified. Women are interwoven into the definitions and identities of class.

Sometimes it’s a matter of bracketing the story. We at NPS are charged with telling the breadth of United States history, but it can be difficult to operationalize that in our individual units, each of which is charged with telling a specific story. In some ways we are bound by our legislative purpose—which is usually limited to one identity—and that becomes part of the challenge. We are also a very large and very bureaucratic organization, so sometimes integrating the most current scholarship, which is always evolving, into our interpretation can be challenging. But so many of us are trying.

As an agency, we are trying to meet these challenges in part through our online interpretation and research. Our Telling All Stories website gathers content from all around the NPS—from multiple parks, multiple programs, using tags such as “women’s history,” “women at work,” “women in the war.” So we’re pulling from multiple sites to create these stories, which are individual but also speak to the larger patterns in women’s history—what it means to be an African American woman, what it means to be a working-class woman, what it means to be a white woman—and what it has meant to be those women at different times, in different time periods. We have to be careful not to, in telling these individual stories, forget the multiple identities of all women in our history.

The centering of underrepresented communities has spurred the creation of new units of the NPS focused on women’s history. Could you talk about some of these new sites? How have they been received? Has this generated new interest in women’s history?

One of the sites that I want to highlight is the Belmont-Paul Women’s Equality National Monument in Washington, D.C., which was designated in 2017. This site is a companion to the Women’s Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls, New York, advancing the story of women’s suffrage and women’s rights from
the 18th to the 19th century. Belmont-Paul has spurred us to complicate the history of women’s rights and voting rights in interesting ways that again touch on intersections—in this case of gender and class. The tools that the women of the 18th and 19th centuries, often powerful women in formal spheres, used to address inequality and the lack of civil rights stand in juxtaposition to the women of the 20th century who used these activist techniques and their public voices to gain formal political power, voting rights, equal treatment, and justice.

Belmont-Paul has brought up questions about what it means to be a citizen of the United States, reminding women that we did not always have the vote, that women sacrificed and struggled, were
shunned, arrested, and ostracized to obtain those rights. What does that mean for today?

Another example is Harriet Tubman National Historical Park in Auburn, New York, and the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad park in Church Creek, Maryland. The park in Maryland is focused on Tubman’s work as an Underground Railroad activist, as a freedom seeker herself, whereas the site in Auburn addresses her post-slavery and post–Civil War social work. The two parks reflect different narratives about womanhood—the fighter and the caregiver—both of which have influenced how women focus their energies and have shaped women’s achievements and accomplishments. Two park sites dedicated to interpreting the history of one woman shows that her one life can create multiple legacies and different impacts.

These units have been very well received. Visitorship to those parks has been excellent in the first year, especially at Belmont-Paul—which is near the Capitol, and so has attracted not only tour groups but also congressional visitation. Some of the public engagement meetings that the U.S. Treasury Department hosted around the inclusion of women on the $20 bill were held at the Belmont-Paul House.

The local community has been helping us tell the stories at the Harriet Tubman sites as well as at Belmont-Paul. And the National Women’s Party has been instrumental in maintaining Belmont-Paul, helping with its interpretation, and ensuring the accessibility of documents and research.

The National Register of Historic Places and the NHL Program are potential tools for promoting women’s history. Can you give some examples of properties nominated thanks to the NPS focus on underrepresented communities? What has the NPS done to dismantle obstacles to nominating properties associated with underrepresented groups?

One of my favorite sites is the Pauli Murray Family Home in Durham, North Carolina. We partnered with the National Collaborative for Women’s History Sites [NCWHS] to nominate
that site, which is focused on Reverend Pauli Murray’s civil rights work as an attorney as well as her role in the National Women’s Party. The site is therefore connected with contemporary advocacy and the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. The nomination of this site came out of the focus on telling all American stories and particularly our focus on women’s history.

The Casa Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez in San Juan, Puerto Rico—which honors literary critic Concha Meléndez Ramírez—is unique because we had not previously designated a site for a Puerto Rican woman. It was an honor to do research and participate in the creation of that NHL for a site that also came out of the Telling All Stories initiative and the focus on women’s history.

One of the barriers we’ve identified to nominating properties associated with underrepresented groups is simply the lack of necessary information. We’re, again, a bureaucratic agency with criteria and paperwork that members of the public may not understand or may not know how to access—often because we haven’t reached out to them.
Public outreach to ensure that community groups, which are already preserving many sites at the local and even state levels, starts with introducing those communities to the NHL program and the associated criteria. The next step is providing training and on-site assistance to help those communities document their own histories. Through the Telling All Stories initiative, we have made a concentrated, targeted effort to say, “We are here. We understand that your story is nationally significant. You’re already doing the work on the ground, but the NHL program is another tool through which to tell your story. We can use this tool to assist you in your preservation efforts.” I am thinking specifically of the Asian American Pacific Islander National Historic Landmarks Theme Study as an example of successful public outreach.

One challenge that is often associated with nominations to the National Register and the NHL program, is having enough information to meet the integrity standard. How does the NPS help groups manage those criteria?

Part of our job is to communicate to the community that a resource with “high integrity” is not necessarily one that meets all seven integrity criteria; all of the criteria are important, but not all of them are equally important for every property. The criteria that best illustrate why a site is significant are the ones that should be emphasized when writing a description of that site or thinking about its preservation.

That said, there are very real barriers to access. We have to acknowledge that the integrity of historic resources is oftentimes affected by the race and class of the surrounding communities. Historical barriers to accessing funds have made it difficult to maintain and preserve a site’s physical appearance from a particular period. And when telling the story, we need to acknowledge that that fact might be part of the story—that the change in the physical appearance of a place and its setting could be part of its legacy and a contributing aspect to its integrity.
In 2012 the NPS and the NCWHS hosted the “Telling the Whole Story: Women and the Making of the United States” workshop focusing on the need to research, interpret, and preserve women’s history within NPS parks and programs. How have recommendations from that workshop been implemented and/or expanded upon? What recent successes can be attributed to the outcomes of the workshop?

The movement on the women’s history theme study—nominating individual sites like the Pauli Murray House—is one of the recommendations that came out of the workshop. The workshop also precipitated a shift in mindset. As we moved forward into celebrating the NPS centennial and the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, we really started focusing our interpretation on what was happening with the women who experienced historic events. What was the experience of women in the Gold Rush? What was the experience of women at battle sites—as nurses, as fighters, as spies? We have started telling those stories through our individual sites—like the story of Cathay Williams, the only known woman Buffalo Soldier.

In the Park History Office, we are undertaking an oral history project about civil rights in the NPS, spurred by an interview that our program conducted with Tina Short, one of the first African American women to serve as a park ranger in the National Capitol Region. We’re interested in placing women back in the story not only as historical actors but also recent participants.

I would say that the increase in the number of NHLs related to women’s history and in the number of history sites that are specifically legislated for women’s history are both markers of success—but so is the inclusion of individual, everyday women’s stories in our narratives of the past.

The NPS is seeking to expand our stories, and we need partnerships to do that. Partnerships with scholars, partnerships with organizations such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation can help us identify what should be preserved and tell the stories that need to be interpreted. The patterns of our designations in the last couple of years reveal that we’ve really
focused on partnership parks because we realize that many people and organizations are already telling women’s stories. As an agency, we just need to provide the mechanism to amplify that work. FJ

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TAKEAWAY
Explore the women’s history archives of the National Park Service’s “Telling All Americans’ Stories” initiative.
On June 22, 1972, architect Julia Morgan’s Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument, also known as Hearst Castle, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Since then, 19 more places—including approximately 26 buildings—that Morgan designed or was otherwise closely associated with have been listed individually or as part of historic districts. (Hearst Castle and Asilomar Conference Grounds are also National Historic Landmarks.) No fewer than 15 of those National Register properties are associated with organizations of, by, and for women, underscoring how closely the architect’s career was intertwined with the pre–World War II California women’s movement.

This might suggest that Morgan’s legacy is well understood and that the spaces of women’s activism of Progressive Era California have been well documented and preserved in the landscape. But a closer look reveals significant gaps and weaknesses in our understanding of Julia Morgan’s career and its significance. It also exposes, more generally, the challenges of recognizing and preserving the history of gender and women—and other underrepresented groups—in the built environment, as well as the opportunities to improve.

A VARIED BODY OF WORK
No single building on the National Register could capture the breadth of Julia Morgan’s architectural significance, but when her contributions are considered collectively, certain themes emerge.

Several properties—including St. John’s Presbyterian Church, Asilomar, the Sausalito Woman’s Club, and Girton Hall (now Julia Morgan Hall)—are excellent examples of the Bay Tradition style, an expression of the Arts and Crafts movement in the San Francisco/Berkeley region. Bay Tradition is characterized by the use of
unadorned natural materials, such as redwood and river rock, inside and out; sleeping porches; and the informal arrangement of interior spaces. The use of these features was idealistic and moralistic, evoking a close relationship with nature and, through simplicity of forms and materials, critiquing political corruption,
mass consumption, and urban ills—real and perceived—of the industrial capitalist age.

The exposed structural systems of these buildings—particularly the roof trusses with large iron brackets—both reflect how adept Morgan was at designing on shoestring budgets and, through the beauty and visual interest that she created with these elements, belie the engineer at heart. Morgan’s innovations in engineering and technology are typically both underappreciated and largely unexamined. Walter Steilberg, Morgan’s longtime engineer and a highly respected structural engineer in his own right, has called the Berkeley City Club possibly the most complex reinforced concrete building in California as of the mid-1970s. The club showcases Morgan’s enthusiasm for the infinite plasticity and aesthetic possibilities of technology.

The Oakland YWCA, meanwhile, adheres most closely to the architect’s formal Beaux-Arts education and training. Its exterior recalls the palazzo form of the Italian Renaissance, while the interior nearly replicates the cloisters of Donato Bramante’s Santa Maria della Pace in Rome. Morgan was no slave to historical purity, however; indeed, her mentor in Paris, François-Benjamin Chaussemiche, lamented his protégée’s tendency toward historical eclecticism. This could be subtle, as in the case of the North Star House in Grass Valley, which combines Bay Tradition with the Californio ranch house. Morgan’s extensive use of stone and unpainted redwood celebrates the Sierra Nevada landscape, while the U-shaped plan and the abundance of covered porches and rooms with direct access to the courtyard evoke the ranch house and romanticized Californio culture.

Other examples are not so subtle, like Hearst Castle, which combines a pastiche of styles—not to mention relics—of Mediterranean and Western European architecture from ancient Greece through the Renaissance to create a fantastical landscape. It was much maligned by classical purists and modernists but later embraced by late-20th-century postmodernists.
THE LENS OF GENDER
As enlightening as a purely architectural analysis might be, no building is created outside of a historical and cultural context, and one of the most important contexts in relationship to Julia Morgan is gender. Applying the lens of gender to San Francisco’s Fairmont Hotel—an important example of Renaissance-style architecture by James and Merritt Reid with interior designs by the New York firm of William Baumgartner & Co.—reveals its significance as a critical commission early in Morgan’s career. Following the earthquake and fires of 1906, she was hired to oversee the reconstruction of the palatial hotel, which stood above the rubble and ashes as a symbol of hope and survival. Under the watchful eyes of wealthy property owners, fellow architects and men in the building trades, and the press, Morgan managed a crew of 400 men who repaired minor exterior damage and an interior mess of twisted rebar and concrete, wavy floors, collapsed ceilings, and buckled columns. The task would have been challenging for anybody, but if Morgan had failed, she easily could have been made a poster child for women as naturally unfit for the architectural profession. Instead, despite organized labor strife and another fire, the building was ready for a grand re-opening on the one-year anniversary of the natural disaster. A workman at the site commented that Julia Morgan’s name might as well have been “John,” signaling that she had gained the respect and authority she would need to build a remarkable career in an overwhelmingly male profession.

In spite of all this, the Fairmont Hotel’s National Register nomination specifies that the building is not significant in association with Morgan because it does not reveal her hand. Had the writers of the nomination displayed a better understanding of women architectural professionals in 1906—and of the degree to which Morgan’s professional reputation hinged on the success or failure of that commission—the building would surely be listed as significant in relationship to Julia Morgan.

Morgan is well known for going on to design dozens of buildings for women’s clubs and institutions. She was able to thrive in this niche not because she was a woman but because she had a
minute understanding of the needs and desires of modern women’s institutions—and no building exemplifies that ability better than the **Phoebe Hearst Memorial Gymnasium** at the University of California, Berkeley. Bernard Maybeck designed the original plans for this monument to the Hearst matriarch, who was a fervent champion of women in higher education and of the University of California. When her son, media mogul William Randolph Hearst, saw Maybeck’s plans, he commented that they reeked of pleurisy and lacked grandiosity. He wanted to see a pool. The university president and the head of women’s athletics, on the other hand, did not like the design because it failed to address most of the programmatic needs that had been presented to Maybeck. Julia Morgan came to the rescue.

While the romantic, Neoclassical design of the building bears Maybeck’s aesthetic signature, Morgan made sure it would serve the women who used it. By this time, she had designed many YWCAs with complex programmatic needs fit into relatively compact spaces. For this project, she planned a two-story-over-basement, U-shaped building with lockers, dressing rooms, and showers all located on the ground floor. Concrete ramps lead to the main floor above, which features three large gymnasia and two smaller ones. Perhaps knowing from experience that swimming and aquatic sports were of paramount importance to young women of the 1920s, she included not one or two pools, but three. When it was completed, the Phoebe Hearst Memorial Gymnasium provided more dedicated space for the social, recreational, and educational interests of women undergraduates than anywhere else in the country.

**UNEXPLORED HISTORIES**

Regrettably, few of Morgan’s residential buildings are on the National Register. Residential buildings can be particularly tricky for preservationists to document and protect—their quantities are vast; survey work is expensive and time-consuming; and, for a variety of reasons, few owners want their properties placed on the register. But exploring these spaces reveals a complex new world, often shedding light on the history of women and gender. Among
the hundreds of houses that Julia Morgan designed is the Berkeley home of doctors Elsa Mitchell and Clara Williams (which is not listed on the National Register). While the exterior looks like any other brown-shingle bungalow in the Berkeley hills, Morgan came up with one of her most innovative and modern domestic designs to accommodate the needs of these two physicians. The house is divided into three distinct spaces: public, private, and work. Immediately to the left of its front entrance lies the door to a small office and bathroom, ensuring that the women could work from home without work crossing the threshold into their domicile. Double doors lead from the front hallway to the first floor, which follows an unusually open floor plan that removes all hierarchy of space. Downstairs, the clients requested some atypical features. Two of the four bedrooms contain a wash basin, while the master bedrooms share one basin. The toilet and bathtub, shared among all the bedrooms, reside in separate chambers. No extant documents explain this unique organization of space, but we can hypothesize. As doctors and busy professional women, hygiene and efficiency likely ranked high on their list of concerns. The
personal basins for guests may have been provided and parts of the bathroom may have been separated to contain germs. The shared basin between the two master bedrooms renders them only semi-private, suggesting that Mitchell and Williams may have been romantic partners, trying to create a private space for their relationship to thrive within a world that would have rejected it.

One other feature of the Mitchell-Williams house underscores their particularly modern life: the garage. Early automobile ads played up freedom; independence; and, above all, masculine virility. As historian Virginia Scharff has argued, though, women also wanted to drive and, indeed, learned to drive as soon as cars were available; they embraced independence, freedom of mobility, strength, and speed as much as men did, signifying a new era of gender relations. While an attached garage was a rare feature for any home in 1915, doctors were most likely to have them in order to make emergency calls easily. The doctors’ garage was indicative not only of their professional lives but also of women’s escape from domesticity. Contemplating the Mitchell-Williams house invites us to consider the distinction between domestic and non-domestic spaces, women’s use of the built environment to facilitate their move into the professional sphere, and LGBTQ people’s construction of their homes as safe spaces.

RACE AND CLASS DIMENSIONS
One of the few Julia Morgan–designed residences on the register, the Charles and Mary Glide Goethe House (now the Julia Morgan House) in Sacramento, underscores the class and race dynamics of both the Progressive Era women’s movement and the preservation movement. Not much is known about Mary Goethe, except that she was a daughter of Joseph and Lizzie Glide; her father earned a fortune speculating in land, cattle, sheep, and infrastructure, and Lizzie managed and grew that fortune after his death while also doing charitable and missionary work. Charles Goethe was a businessman, land developer, conservationist, and education advocate who donated generously to the future Sacramento State University. But Goethe was also a eugenicist and unabashedly
outright white supremacist until the day he died. This house, which is a fine work of architecture, made it onto the register without a single mention of the racist ideas and actions of its owners.

While the Goethe house might be a particularly egregious example of historic preservation turning a blind eye to racism, it is emblematic of the challenge inherent in attempting to capture the complex tapestry of the past. The same themes are present in the rest of Julia Morgan’s oeuvre, as many of her clients were white, affluent women who did not particularly question the hierarchy of race and class. Virtually all of the YWCA buildings that Julia Morgan designed, for example, represent contested spaces of class and women’s morality. The Emanu-El Sisterhood Residence, now the San Francisco Zen Center, is the manifestation of a power struggle between men and women in the German Jewish community. In the aftermath of the earthquake and fires of 1906, organizations led by Jewish men exerted increasing control over social and recreational services within San Francisco’s Jewish community, thus diminishing the influence of the Emanu-El Sisterhood, a settlement house–like institution founded by Jewish women in 1894. In an act of defiance, however, the women hired Morgan—a woman architect—to design a residence for the sisterhood. When the men demanded that a Jewish architect design the building, Morgan devoted resources to helping Dorothy Worsmer,

In a nod to Chinese cultural tradition, Julia Morgan designed an iris keystone to hang above the entrance of the Methodist Chinese Mission. Believed to ward off evil spirits, the iris also symbolizes health and hope.

PHOTO BY KAREN MCNEILL
a Jewish employee, obtain her architectural license and lead the project design. And the Methodist Chinese Mission, or “Gum Moon,” in San Francisco’s Chinatown; the disinfectant annex of the hospital building at Angel Island Immigration Station; the Joseph and Rose Shoong House in Oakland; and the Chinatown YWCA in San Francisco all invite questions about power dynamics and cultural identity when considered against the backdrop of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Alas, neither the Emanu-El Sisterhood Residence nor any of the buildings related to the Chinese American community, apart from the hospital annex, is on the register. The Nihonmachi Little Friends House, which was originally built in San Francisco’s postwar Western Addition neighborhood for the Japantown YWCA and later served the African American community, is the first Morgan commission to be nominated to the register for its association with underrepresented groups.

WOMEN’S SPACES PRECARIOUSLY PRESERVED
Among the ongoing efforts to document and preserve the history of Julia Morgan’s remarkable career, and the built environment for 20th-century women that she and her clients created, two buildings stand out, though in vastly different ways. Julia Morgan Hall opened in 1912 as Girton Hall, the senior women’s hall at UC Berkeley, and has always represented the liminal space of women at the university. It took years for the administration to decide on a place for the hall—the university’s very first purpose-built women’s space—and the administration finally gave the women a bucolic spot overlooking Strawberry Canyon, but just east of the campus boundary. In contrast, the senior men’s hall had been built a few years earlier just behind the men’s faculty club, where it still stands today. Girton Hall has been moved twice—first to make way for Memorial Stadium, and then to accommodate the expansion of the business school. In both cases, the building could have been demolished and, notably, was not. Thanks to the herculean efforts of many people who raised funds for the second move, Julia Morgan Hall now stands in the botanical gardens and is open for public and private events and educational activities.
The Phoebe Hearst Memorial Gymnasium, on the other hand, is rusting, cracking, leaking, and crumbling under the weight of deferred maintenance. It is arguably the single most important building related to women’s history at the University of California—as well as a monument to the woman who almost single-handedly catapulted the university to international acclaim; funded by her son, the most powerful media mogul in the country at the time; and one of the few collaborative efforts of two California architectural giants, Maybeck and Morgan—and yet there is no urgent effort to preserve it.

EXPANDING THE NARRATIVE
When Hearst Castle was nominated to the National Register in 1972, Julia Morgan was listed second to William Randolph Hearst as the architect of the elaborate estate. Nowhere else in the narrative description or statement of historical significance was Morgan mentioned, let alone credited for having made sense of Hearst’s ever-changing mind and the cacophony of architectural styles and elements that he wished to combine. Today, we cannot imagine writing a nomination of Hearst Castle without recognizing the architect, which speaks to Morgan’s rise as an important historical figure as well as more appreciation for the history of women and architecture.

There are still countless opportunities, however, to build awareness and understanding—and to expand and enhance the register by exploring gender, race, and class as they apply to architecture and historic preservation. This calls for a better understanding of gender dynamics in the architectural profession, and of the particular impacts that women pushing the boundaries of opportunity, power, and influence had on the built environment. It is essential to examine spaces that functioned as alternatives to institutional buildings, to document a more representative range of people, trends, themes, and events that have shaped history—venturing beyond the realm of affluent white people. And women’s spaces, like those of other underrepresented communities, face a precarious existence; they tend to be fewer in number, smaller in
scale, and not as obviously associated with grand themes in U.S. or regional history as spaces created by or for white men. There are no explanations sufficient to excuse the lack of documentation and preservation of spaces associated with women and historically underrepresented people, and although revising our historical record to tell a more inclusive story can be challenging, we must nevertheless persist. FJ

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MAP
See Julia Morgan’s design masterpieces plotted on an interactive map.

TAKEAWAY
Read about Julia Morgan’s architectural legacy.
“Women Are Everywhere”: Celebrating The Women’s Building

DONNA GRAVES

The Women’s Building (TWB), an iconic mural-covered structure in San Francisco’s Mission District, was recently added to the National Register of Historic Places for its history as a site of radical and intersectional feminist organizing. Recognizing this aspect of U.S. history is itself something of a landmark. Women’s history—specifically the history of second-wave feminism—has not yet received the level of site-based documentation that has been undertaken for other under-represented histories in recent decades. Not a single local, regional, or national survey or theme study has yet been conducted to situate this important history in the built environment.
Because properties associated with post–World War II feminism have just begun to reach 50 years, the age at which resources are typically considered for the National Register, few places currently listed on the register are designated for their association with this history, even though the national significance of this social movement and its contributions to broad patterns of U.S. history are well established. As historians Rosalynn Baxandall and Linda Gordon write: “Women’s liberation was the largest social movement in the history of the U.S. ... The women’s liberation movement, as it was called in the 1960s and 1970s, or feminism, as it is known today, reached into every home, school, and business, into every form of entertainment and sport. Like a river overflowing its banks and seeking a new course, it permanently altered the landscape.”¹

Second-wave feminists (a term that is rightfully debated)² in the United States took on the important project of creating opportunities for women to envision a more equitable society and to establish their rights. While some feminists worked to gain entry for women into previously all-male or male-dominated realms, others created women-centered arenas to nurture women’s cultural, social, economic, and political expression and autonomy. The physical manifestations of second-wave feminism—the spaces where these activities took place—were nearly always in existing buildings that were usually rented, not owned. The remarkable longevity of TWB, described as “the first woman-owned and operated community center in the country,” is due to its founders’ decision to purchase and maintain a large historic social hall for their own use.

FINDING A ROOM OF THEIR OWN
A coalition of women’s groups seeking to support and catalyze a broad range of women’s rights initiatives and projects founded the San Francisco Women’s Centers (SFWC) in 1970. In 1975 SFWC and its local partners began organizing a pioneering conference about violence against women. The ethnically and racially diverse group of women who planned the event developed a broad definition of violence that included physical, social, political,
economic, and cultural acts directed against women. Conference organizers debated who should be welcome at the event and finally settled on a position that only women and girls would be admitted, prompting San Francisco State University to pull its sponsorship as host just a few weeks before the gathering.

The experience of scrambling for conference meeting space led a core group of SFWC members to look into purchasing a building, and they settled on 3548 18th Street. Originally built in 1910 as a German athletic and social hall, the four-story building then served as home to the Sons and Daughters of Norway until SFWC purchased it in 1978. Buying and managing TWB presented a significant challenge for a grassroots organization, calling for new and expanded skills in fundraising, financial planning, contract negotiations, publicity, tenant recruitment, and property management.

Horizontal power structures and collective decision-making were hallmarks of radical second-wave feminism. Thus, in the early years of establishing TWB, volunteers motivated by their passion for the vision donated hours upon hours of time to numerous committee meetings as well as to the labor of repairing and renovating the structure. The relatively reasonable rents and low cost of living in the Bay Area in the 1960s and ’70s made the project possible, as did work subsidies from federally funded programs such as Volunteers in Service to America and the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, which employed many young, low-income people in those decades.

Despite organizational growing pains and hostile external political forces—the building suffered an arson fire and received a bomb threat—TWB successfully provided rental space to more than 300 community organizations during its initial year and operated a childcare center for women working or attending events there. Thanks to an open-door rental policy, a remarkable range of activities drew thousands of people to TWB over the course of that year—from the continued meetings of the Norwegian lodges that had traditionally gathered there to the annual Mr. Golden West Body-Building Championship, the wedding
of a young Latinx couple, and a reading by renowned African American poet Gwendolyn Brooks.

ESTABLISHING AN INTERSECTIONAL ORGANIZATION

From the beginning, TWB activists rejected the singular focus, and sometimes separatist stance, that characterized some feminist organizations at the time. Instead, they hosted or organized myriad events that reflected the concerns and cultures of diverse communities across the Bay Area. Motivated in part by the need to meet the cost of maintaining a large building, TWB organizers realized the importance of attracting broad constituencies and expanded their reach across differences of race/ethnicity, disability, gender and sexual orientation, and opinion. Tenants of TWB held varying ideological positions within the feminist movement, which created an unusual overlap of organizations in newfound proximity and fostered debates, conflicts, and alliances.

This poster advertising the first black lesbian conference is emblematic of the intersectional events held at The Women’s Building.

IMAGE COURTESY OF DOCS POPULI
TWB founders envisioned their purpose and constituencies broadly, as evidenced by their carefully crafted goal statement of 1979: “The Women’s Building will actively work to further people’s struggles against oppression through race, minority, culture, disability, sexual orientation, age, life style, and class differences.”

TWB was birthed at a time when many women were grappling with what a feminist identity outside of the heterosexual, white, middle-class experience would look like. The U.S. women’s movement has often been understood as primarily by and for middle-class white women—due, at least in part, to an understanding and documentation of what constitutes women’s activism that has often left out the activism and influence of poor women and women of color. Beginning in the late 1960s, feminist organizations developed more nuanced approaches to social change that incorporated many voices analyzing and addressing race and class issues. African American feminists were at the vanguard of considering the intersections of race, class, and gender. As they and other activists increasingly questioned the idea of “woman” as a singular political, social, and even experiential category, the term “intersectionality” emerged.³

Such explorations fundamentally shaped TWB’s program and politics, and it was among the first to apply this approach to feminist organizing at the institutional level. As the organization’s first executive director, Carmen Vasquez, recalled: “The race and class conversations at the building, they were continuous, they really were. They imbued just about everything we did.” Roma Guy, one of TWB’s founders, recalled, “We understood that we can’t have real social change for women unless we connect with all people’s issues, because women are everywhere.”

Many of the organizations housed at TWB were strongly lesbian identified, and a significant portion of the projects sponsored by TWB were developed by lesbians to serve lesbians and other LGBTQ-identified women—including the San Francisco Network for Battered Lesbian and Bisexual Women, Lesbian Visual Artists, Lilith Lesbian Theatre Collective, Older Lesbian Organizing Committee, and Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center. In addition,
a remarkable range of community meetings and programs reflected the concerns of others whose identities fell within the LGBTQ umbrella, from AIDS activism and research to participation in the first National Bisexual Conference (1990) and the first transgender female-to-male conference of the Americas (1995).

While developing a broad and inclusive vision for a progressive women’s movement, TWB activists and tenant organizations also worked to forge authentic partnerships with organizations and residents in their new, predominately Latinx neighborhood, which was undergoing a wave of gentrification. Owning a building in the Mission District, a place with a complex political and social history, gave them a stake in the neighborhood’s well-being and future. As they settled into their new home, TWB activists explicitly built on the organization’s feminist and lesbian roots to encompass the thriving activism of their working-class and immigrant Latinx neighbors. From its earliest days, TWB was announced by two signs—one reading “The Women’s Building” and the other “El Edificio de Mujeres”—a pointed recognition of where it was located and who was welcome there. TWB activists also sought to
find common ground with their Mission District neighbors in campaigns against police violence. The bombing, threats, and arson TWB had suffered made the organization more dependent on the police. Yet those same threats also reinforced the vulnerabilities that tenants of TWB had in common with other marginalized communities, which were targets of police violence and suffered from a lack of police protection.

By the early 1990s, in part due to concerns raised by the major 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, TWB’s directors were considering the need to renovate and retrofit the building. An ambitious mural project, Maestrapeace, provided the centerpiece for public events designed to draw attention to the building’s history and future. The title is a semantic play on the term “masterpiece”—maestra is Spanish for woman teacher or master. Maestrapeace was created collaboratively by a collective of seven artists: Juana Alicia, Miranda Bergman, Edythe Boone, Susan Kelk Cervantes, Meera Desai, Yvonne Littleton, and Irene Perez. Bergman described the group as “two African Americans, two Latinas, one East Indian, and two Caucasians, one Jewish; lesbian, straight, and bisexual.” Completed in 1994, the enormous painting took almost 18 months to create and required labor from dozens of volunteers. It functions as a visual history and celebration of women activists, scientists, artists, anonymous heroines, and deities from around the world and is widely recognized as a major example of the mural arts movement. Mural scholars have pronounced Maestrapeace “easily one of the most significant mural projects in the history of the city” and “the most ambitious collectively produced women’s muralist project ever.”

**THE ENDURING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WOMEN’S BUILDING**

Even in the absence of a national theme study about second-wave feminism (which should be undertaken), we know that tangible remains of this movement endure—from sites with ephemeral associations, such as places of protest, to buildings that housed feminist organizations, activities, and businesses. Looking at the variety of women-centered spaces established during the 1960s
and ‘70s, preservationists could easily compile a list of property types to document, protect, and interpret—including domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, feminist presses and bookstores, coffee houses, financial institutions that served women, women’s health clinics, and arts/performance spaces.

Recent scholarship demonstrates that women’s centers like TWB, which appeared in various forms and occupied a variety of building types across the United States in the 1960s and ‘70s, were especially important manifestations of the grassroots movement for gender equality and social transformation. According to scholar Daphne Spain, more than 100 women’s centers had been independently established across the United States by the mid-1970s. California, New York, and Massachusetts had the largest numbers, but 39 states had at least one. TWB is uniquely significant for the breadth of its vision, the inclusive definition of its constituencies, and its longevity; the Cambridge Women’s Center in Massachusetts appears to be the only other 1970s women’s center that is still operating today.

Traditional historic preservation evaluation criteria of “the first, the largest, or the only” aren’t relevant to many sites associated with second-wave feminism. Because the movement was not centralized, its manifestations were dispersed across the United States and occurred primarily at the grassroots level; very few could be described as having a “singular” influence on national history. But places like TWB are powerful embodiments of second-wave feminism—ones that shaped, and were shaped by, the national movement.

Securing the large and well-located building at 3548 18th Street enabled TWB’s founders to create a new type of social, cultural, and political space for feminism and other progressive movements. While some members were concerned that becoming property owners would institutionalize and dilute their radical goals, posing a conflict with their grassroots nature, it is now clear that owning a building could be a radical act in and of itself. Ownership has allowed the organization to stay true to its grassroots commitments, especially now that spiraling rents are squeezing
many of San Francisco’s community organizations out of their facilities. For 40 years, TWB has been an anchor for the social change efforts of women, feminists, LGBTQ people, immigrants, and progressive groups in the Bay Area, acquiring layers of significance as an early laboratory for inclusivity and intersectionality. FJ

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2 Women’s history has traditionally been divided into periods, with the suffrage movement called the “first-wave” and the post–World War II women’s movement called “second-wave” feminism. These categories have been rightly criticized as erasing the ongoing struggles for equity by women in the labor movement and women of color in their respective communities.


VIDEO
Learn more about the history and programming of The Women’s Building.
A New Demonstration for a New Era: Collecting the 2017 Women’s March on Washington

LISA KATHLEEN GRADDY

On March 3, the day before the 1913 presidential inauguration, 5,000 women who had come from around the country marched up Pennsylvania Avenue in a “national procession.” Their point was simple, emblazoned on the foremost float: “We demand an amendment to the constitution of the United States enfranchising the women of this country.” They came in a show of strength and determination for a common cause. The extravagant parade and the near-riot that almost derailed it kept women’s suffrage in the newspapers for weeks and revitalized the voting rights movement with a new drama and militancy.

On January 21, the day after the 2017 presidential inauguration, approximately 750,000 women and girls—as well as men and boys—had once again come to Washington, D.C., from around the country and gathered on the National Mall for a rally and a march to the Ellipse across from the White House. Their points were many and complex. Marchers held signs proclaiming concern for the environment, reproductive rights, immigration rights, LGBTQ rights, racial and economic justice, and women’s empowerment—and expressing anger at the new administration. They came in a show of strength and determination to resist what they considered likely attempts to strip away hard-won rights and protections and impose new restrictions. The exuberant march, one of the largest ever in the nation’s capital, and its sister marches in 653 cities around the country generated widespread media coverage and encouraged women to embrace what their guiding vision document called a “bold message of resistance and self-determination.”

Separated by a century, organizers of both marches used the attention focused on Washington during the inaugurations to
revitalize their movements and send clear messages to the incoming presidents Woodrow Wilson and Donald Trump—as well as to both Congresses—that they must take American women and their concerns seriously.

For curators at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History (NMAH), the 2017 march provided an opportunity to add to the museum’s women’s history and protest collections and to evaluate our methods for collecting material related to marches on the National Mall.

COLLECTING THE MARCHES ON WASHINGTON

In the preface to the 2004 edition of her book, “Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Political Tradition,” historian and archivist Lucy G. Barber concludes that “people who march on Washington believe that their opinion belongs in their capital, and they want to present it there themselves. They want to be with other people who share their opinion so that they can see each other and so that the rest of us can see them united.”

Since Coxey’s Army’s 1894 attempt to march on Washington, references Inez Milholland, who rode as the herald in the 1913 woman suffrage parade.

This poster, collected at the 2017 Women’s March on Washington, references Inez Milholland, who rode as the herald in the 1913 woman suffrage parade.

PHOTO BY RICH STRAUSS; COURTESY OF NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY
and rally at the United States Capitol building to demand jobs for unemployed men, groups of Americans have been taking their causes to the capital. Framing their protests as “petition in boots” (Coxey’s Army) or “a new type of lobbying” (the 1932 Veterans Bonus March), marchers have asserted their right to use the highly visible parts of the city to confer legitimacy, urgency, and visibility on their causes. Groups promoting economic relief and fairness, women’s suffrage, civil rights, pro-choice and anti-abortion positions, women’s rights, and anti-war stands have all used the capital as a platform. Barber argues that, whether or not marches achieve their political or reform goals, their cumulative effect has been to forge the National Mall, Pennsylvania Avenue, and the United States Capitol grounds into national public spaces and legitimize their use by citizens to air grievances, make demands, rally support, and draw strength and comradeship from fellow demonstrators as far-flung participants come together in the capital.¹

Some of these demonstrations have been captured by local and national media. Some, like the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, have been immortalized. And some have found their way into the NMAH. In the late 1960s, staff began shifting the museum’s political history collections away from a concentration on great men, great events, and governmental institutions to a focus on participatory American democracy. This shift included enlarging the collection of political campaign memorabilia and establishing a collection related to protest and reform movements.

The museum’s Division of Political History staff began the protest collection after realizing the opportunity they had missed in not collecting from the 1963 March on Washington. Curators then began paying attention to the activity happening just outside their new office in what is now the NMAH building. Eager to add material culture to the museum’s collection and include the untold stories of African Americans, women, and Native Americans and their struggles for equality, they began saving material from the marches and demonstrations on the Mall.

In a 2011 blog post, Smithsonian archivist Pam Henson shared curator Keith Melder’s recollections of salvaging pieces of the plywood shelters from Resurrection City, the makeshift village near the Lincoln Memorial that housed participants in the 1968 Poor People’s Campaign: “We simply went down and loaded the truck up with pieces of some of the shelters, and that was our collections [sic] for the Resurrection City. And those turned out to be valuable. … [T]hey’ve been on exhibition a number of times, and I don’t think anyone else preserved any residue of Resurrection City.”

Curator Larry Bird noted that members of the curatorial staff “placed under desks and behind doors all manner of objects for eventual accession.” Unofficial amassing eventually became sanctioned collecting, and the division’s catalog files record the expeditions that curators and specialists made to collect among the crowds on the Mall and nearby streets. The posters, buttons, sashes, t-shirts, and banners collected in the field are usually supplemented with material donated by marchers, which are often used for displays and research.

Although protests, rallies, demonstrations, and parades take place in all American cities, NMAH museum staff concentrate on collecting from those with a national focus; this usually means the ones that find their way to the National Mall. The museum’s new exhibition “American Democracy: A Great Leap of Faith” includes a show-stopping wall of protest posters mounted against a backdrop of the Capitol building. The interactive exhibit allows visitors to find out more about the demonstrations from which the posters were collected, which span from the 1963 March on Washington to the 2017 Women’s March.

A NEW KIND OF MARCH

The woman suffrage procession was the first civil rights parade to use the Capitol as a backdrop, thus underscoring the national importance of the cause and of women’s identity as American citizens. After 1913, Alice Paul and the National Woman’s Party (NWP) continued to hold demonstrations in the nation’s capital. Women’s rights activists of the 1970s also used the Mall as a stage
to focus the country’s attention on their demands for national solutions to the issue of women’s inequality.

There are only a few pieces in the museum’s collection from the 1913 woman suffrage parade: a parade cloak; a fundraising card; and a letter from Florence Hedges, a participant in the parade, chronicling for her father the experience of being heckled and hemmed in by the crowds as she marched. Nor is there much from the “Silent Sentinels”—the NWP picketers who, under Alice Paul’s direction, carried on a one-sided conversation with President Woodrow Wilson at his own front gates; the banners that still exist are in the collections of the NWP at the Belmont-Paul Women’s Equality National Monument. Like many other museums, the NMAH pieces together the material culture of those signature women’s rights demonstrations bit by bit, one donation and discovery at a time.
The modern collections are stronger. Led by curator Edith Mayo, NMAH collected sashes, buttons, banners, posters, and literature from marches and rallies supporting the 1972 Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and reproductive rights as well as the annual Right to Life marches that began in 1974. Collecting continued into the 2000s, as rallies in Washington began to center issues of immigration, war opposition, and economic justice. When the Women’s March on Washington was proposed the night of the 2016 presidential election, it was set to be the first major women’s rally on the Mall in more than 10 years.

But the 2017 march turned out to be neither simply the next in a series of modern women’s right demonstrations nor merely an homage to the 1913 suffrage parade. It was designed to be something quite different. In their Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles document, march organizers envisioned a movement conscious of the alienation that many women of color and working-class women had felt from both the suffrage movement and “second-wave” feminism. They aspired to “bring together peoples of all genders, ages, races, cultures, political affiliations, and backgrounds.” The march embraced a “de-centralized, leader-full structure” that would honor all movements that had come before—suffragist, abolitionist, feminist, Civil Rights, Occupy Wall Street, Native American, marriage equality, and Black Lives Matter. The sweeping agenda touched on reproductive rights, prison and judicial reform, violence against women, pay equity, immigration, environmentalism, racial equality, economic justice, LGBTQ rights, and ratification of the ERA. The march, as described, promised to be exciting, potentially overwhelming—and a challenge to collect.

A DAY ON THE MALL
Several colleagues and I headed out to the National Mall early on Saturday, January 21. While a large crowd was expected—and the morning ride on the D.C. Metro indicated that people were already heading downtown—not many people were out when we arrived. We began to wonder whether turnout would be less than anticipated. But by noon marchers filled the Mall, Constitution
Avenue, and Pennsylvania Avenue. Over the course of four hours we moved between Constitution and Independence avenues, up to the Capitol, and back down to NMAH in search of material culture, working our way through crowds so dense in places that they sometimes came to a complete standstill.

Just as collecting at a political convention is about more than funny hats, collecting at a rally is about more than funny signs. Through demonstrations, Americans publicly communicate their grievances and attempt to influence the actions of their elected representatives and fellow citizens. We seek out the objects that demonstrators create to convey their messages. These include the official posters and leaflets that the organizers of a march produce, as well as the signs that advocacy groups and organizations—in this case, groups such as Emily’s List, the National Organization for Women, NARAL Pro-Choice America, and Planned Parenthood—produce to highlight priority issues. Such mass-produced placards usually become a solid sea of similar messaging, as seen in photographs of rallies. This time, however, they were overwhelmed by a variety of homemade signs. Uplifting, confrontational, funny,
and poignant, the signs were unquestionably the stars of the media coverage and the collecting. Marchers could not part with them during the march, so we distributed business cards inviting them to donate their signs afterward. We foraged through the bins set out in front of the NMAH, where participants who visited the museum post-march were invited to dispose of the signs, which were not allowed inside.

We tried to build a collection of signs that, exhibited or researched a hundred years from now, would convey the primary themes of the demonstration. We looked for material that would document the diversity of the march, show its connections to earlier women’s marches, and hold up for decades of museum use. We augmented these with pussy hats in various designs and shades of pink and with official Women’s March buttons and t-shirts, as well as the ones hawked by street vendors.

Even in the midst of a demonstration, field collecting is more about curating than documenting. It required us to constantly compare the signs that we were seeing to determine which ones would best convey the themes of the day and illustrate public engagement. It also necessitated checking them against a mental inventory of the material from past protests that was already in our collection to see what connections we can draw between causes, slogans, and symbolism. And, indeed, we did find a sign or two that referenced the suffragists and their inaugural parade 104 years earlier.

PROCESSING THE WOMEN’S MARCH
After our day on the Mall, we turned to processing the material that we had collected, following up with donors, and sifting through unsolicited offers from people who had read about our work documenting the march. One poster from the march, a Black Lives Matter sign, is already on display as part of the “American Democracy” exhibition’s protest wall. Meanwhile, we are still searching for some objects, including a set of Shepard Fairey’s “We the People” posters that were used at the march.

We have begun answering requests from researchers who are writing about the march and would like to see the material we’ve
added to the collection. We have also begun to contemplate the questions that the march raised about collecting items from contemporary demonstrations. How can we be sure that we reflect the diversity of the march? We do not know who used many of the signs that we collected that day, and although the demonstration was intended to be diverse—and a number of its organizers were women of color—many of the participants were white. How do we incorporate the sister marches and anniversary marches into our collection? Do we treat them as supplements or as completely separate events? In a world of downloadable posters and websites that feature photos of the march’s “best signs,” which posters should the NMAH save? Should we concentrate on the signs that will survive the longest and work best as part of an exhibition? Should we look for slogans that will not need lengthy explanation 50 years from now? Should we save the most typical signs—or the most extreme ones? Should we prioritize current or long-standing issues? Should we look for the most visual signs or those carrying the strongest messages? We are always drawn to issues and slogans that tie to the past and will still resonate in the future. A curator’s mental checklist is never-ending, and we try to strike a balance between the possibilities.

The solution may be to plan collecting materials from large demonstrations as multistep projects, with different stages of evaluation and targeted follow-up collecting. This would allow us to build more comprehensive collections for each march, ones that could balance the sweeping overview of an event with specific stories of individual participants. One nice thing about contemporary collecting is that it quickly becomes historical collecting—time is on our side. FJ

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TAKEAWAY
Read a National Museum of American History blog post about collecting political history.
Three Steps Toward a Radically Effective Preservation Movement

MEAGAN BACO

While “suffragist” is the proper name for the courageous women’s voting rights activists, they are often called suffragettes,” which—though many may not realize it—originated as a dismissive term. Similarly, public historians leading the way in LGBTQ research will know to search for terms such as “deviant” and “perversion.” For those who have been vilified in America’s story, history is not just romantic accounts of obstacles overcome and virtuous victories. It is, in fact, a glimpse into a dangerous past or potentially worse—an empty vista.

Winston Churchill famously said, “History is written by the victors,” but history is not a war. History is a cloak of understanding and visibility that we can all find comfort in wearing. We must weave storied threads together to cover all of us. Right now, there is an opportunity to weave in women involved in preservation and focus on those who are working to preserve women’s history. It is not enough to appreciate all that our foremothers have done to equalize and advance fair and truthful representation. While looking backward for steady footing and understanding, we must also direct our attention toward creating a more inclusive and equitable future.

In 2015 Preservation Maryland included the curious triangular, telescoping building of the Washington Suburban Sanitation Commission (WSSC) headquarters in Hyattsville, Maryland, on a bus tour of midcentury treasures. And in the summer 2018 issue of Preservation magazine, the National Trust for Historic Preservation listed the same building as a threatened property. Earlier this year, a grassroots group called Save Our Sustainable (SOS) Hyattsville—which was leading the community’s opposition to demolishing the structure—drew...
attention to an out-of-character townhouse development proposed for an adjacent parking lot.

It turns out that this parking lot may be the site where, on July 31, 1913, more than 500 suffragists from across the country rallied before starting their automobile caravan to Washington, D.C. Known as the “Couriers to Congress,” these activists went to the capital to deliver 75,000 signatures urging Congress to enfranchise women with the right to vote. “Many consider the motorcade to be one of the most significant advancements in the women’s movement since the first American women’s rights convention in Seneca Falls, N.Y., in 1848,” Andra Damon wrote for the Hyattsville Life & Times. The Maryland Historical Trust commemorated the site with a highway marker earlier this year.

As the fate of this site, as well as that of the WSSC, hangs in the balance, a difficult path to preservation continues to be led largely by women in the Hyattsville community.¹ How can preservation professionals better support local efforts by such grassroots groups? Here are three ways.
GROW PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCY AND ENSURE FAIR COMPENSATION

We know that there are more historical societies and house museums in the United States than McDonald’s and Starbucks locations combined—and that groups like SOS Hyattsville are doing the work of saints with small budgets, volunteer corps, and limited capacity. A 2015 study of statewide preservation organizations in the United States showed that the typical organization has a mean staff of three—implying a reliance on volunteers, who have traditionally been women—and a mean budget hovering just above $300,000. To support these groups, we must make capacity-building and professional-advancement funding streams available to them. A professional development program with multiple access points would strengthen the workforce and justify expectations for fair compensation. A number of organizations and initiatives have already begun making new education and training opportunities accessible to preservationists at all levels.

The Preservation50 initiative created the ARCUS Preservation Leadership Training program in 2016. In the first two years, almost 50 fellows completed the six-month program, which consists mainly of short online courses and admits new students twice a year. Now its operators, Cultural Heritage Partners, LLP, have smartly transitioned their web-based modules to on-demand training, making them that much more accessible.

Baltimore Heritage created Explore Baltimore Heritage 101, a free four-week series of evening workshops focused on the ethics of preservation, with free online tools also available to community members seeking to learn about and advocate for their resources. Baltimore Heritage developed this program into an open learning environment with funding from the National Park Service (NPS) and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers. Now that funding has ended, this unique resource lives on Github (a platform that had previously been reserved for open source code) thanks to the savvy and commitment of Baltimore Heritage staff.

Other organizations have created as-needed and topic-specific trainings. Preservation Maryland hosted Facebook Live videos on
the fly during the recent flurry of historic tax credit advocacy. The Texas Historical Commission and Ohio History Connection regularly offer free webinars and workshops on topics such as cemetery preservation and oral history. Preservation Buffalo Niagara hosts free drop-in tax credit workshops for private property owners.

We are striding toward the professionalization and democratization of preservation, an evolution supported by the influx of new preservationists eager to get to work. A review of the preservation-degree-granting programs listed by the National Council for Preservation Education shows that nearly 60 programs across the country are graduating more than 2,200 trained specialists per year. But those graduates are embarking on a difficult career path.

If you use Facebook for professional networking, you may have noticed that the Historic Preservation Professionals group has gained significant traction, and many of the posts are jobs announcements. What’s the first question asked in the comments? “Does anyone know the salary range?” Opaque hiring guidelines discourage applicants and unfairly skew underrepresented groups toward requesting lower salaries based on their peers’ current earnings; this disadvantages women, who we know are paid less on the dollar than their male contemporaries.

Compensation for preservation professionals is well behind that of the museum world, which has benefited from strong voices calling for pay equity and livable salaries. The Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums and the National Emerging Museum Professionals Network recently followed the University of Delaware’s Museum Studies program, a national leader, which simply won’t promote in its MuseWeekly newsletter, which reaches thousands of recipients, any job opportunities that don’t include a salary range.

Large-scale owners and managers of historic sites and house museums, networks of preservation professionals, and national and regional preservation organizations should insist on professional equality in our field by adopting similar job board policies, ensuring equitable pay, and demanding the same of our private funders and
foundations. If preservation is really “about people,” then it must also be about respecting and appropriately compensating the people doing the hard work of correcting our historical record.²

**EMPLOY NEW TECHNOLOGY THAT PLAYS WELL WITH OTHERS**

ARCUS leadership courses and Explore Baltimore Heritage 101 are also exemplary for their use of new technologies. If we are to continue operating in a highly regulatory profession, we should echo the efforts of early preservationists, who created standards for treatment at the dawning of the field, by creating democratized standards for data.

One of the best examples of the democratization of property data is the [Preservation-Ready Sites](http://preservation-readysites.org) wiki for Buffalo, New York. Developed by unaffiliated volunteer Kevin Hayes and updated by a handful of others, this free online resource has documented nearly 2,000 buildings, identifying them as at moderate, high, or imminent risk. Each building listing provides such information as GIS coordinates, owner, political district, historic district, current condition, and recent events and actions—valuable not only for professional preservation advocates but also for community members who might want to take on a project.
Crowdsourcing is taking on greater importance across the preservation world. For example, The SurveyLA project, which won the 2017 Richard H. Driehaus Foundation National Preservation Award, encourages citizens to submit information about potential historic resources in their communities. New Haven Modern and Explore Baltimore Heritage invite users to share photos, information, and stories about specific resources.

And these collaborative databases can support regional approaches to preservation. Consider, for example, Dominion Energy’s plan (now abandoned as a result of public pressure) to erect a natural gas compression power plant in Charles County, Maryland. Government agencies on both sides of the river in Maryland and Virginia assessed and ultimately approved this development without considering what is just across the Potomac River: George Washington’s Mount Vernon and its historic natural viewshed. A crowdsourced database might have prevented such an oversight. The work of preservationists, whether professionals or grassroots activists, would be supported by a holistic digital database of historic places. And democratized data standards are vital for building more inclusive representation and expanding our conception of what is considered historic.

PUSH FOR RADICAL INCLUSION OF UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES

No understanding of women’s history or women’s work in preservation is complete until it acknowledges intersectionality—recognizing that any one person does not have a singular identity. The women participating in the women’s suffrage movement, for example, surely had other important personal identities beyond suffragist—identities that may have included their race, class, or sexual orientation. It is by reckoning with this intersectionality that we can continue to understand that women’s history is American history, African American history is American history, and LGBTQ history is American history.

The early work of collecting materials related to an underrepresented community is often first led by members of that
community—usually untrained volunteers doing the work because they recognize a pressing need. It is just such pioneering preservationists that we have to thank for early collections related to LGBTQ history. Many of the LGBTQ archives that are now professionally staffed and supported grew from collections that were initially housed in basements and attics for years. While the current website of the Madeline Davis Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Archives of Western New York, which spans LGBTQ history from 1920 to 2018 and is now at Buffalo State College, states that the collection was founded in 2001, it truly started in Davis’ basement, the bulk of the material coming from her formative years in the 1970s.

Before marriage equality and earlier waves of acceptance, LGBTQ people were forced to hide their lives to protect their safety and reputation. With nowhere to donate papers and posters, allied friends and family members recovered and protected these items, sometimes gathering potentially damaging relics of a gay life before an unsympathetic family member discovered them in the wake of a friend’s death. A great many
such resources held in private—and in secret—were lost, denying access to future generations. But as prejudice has abated, crowdsourcing and other digital tools have made it easier than ever to unearth and share LGBTQ stories. Many LGBTQ history initiatives have been truly public efforts that rely on input from the everyperson to fill in the details of maps and the gaps in the historical record.

What if we treated all history with this collectivist spirit? How differently would the concept of Churchill’s “victor” be if the singular voice of an aggressive, oppressive white-male-dominated patriarchy was challenged by choruses of other voices? What can these grassroots approaches teach us—if we are agile enough to accept them and adapt accordingly?

In the lead-up to the release of the LGBTQ Theme Study, the NPS hosted many panel discussions and community events. Indeed, for several years, many of the study’s researchers hosted a public Google Doc and Google Map to collect baseline information from across the county—a pin here, a pin there. The map resides on Historypin, boasting nearly 800 pins and almost 5,000 views. The sites documented there range from safe places such as bars, churches, and individual living rooms to locations associated with violence, protest, and institutionalized exclusion and injustice. Advocates from New York City to Kentucky are using this theme study’s framework to address the dearth of LGBTQ information in official preservation databases.3

Grassroots organizations like the national Rainbow Heritage Network seek to carry on this kind of groundbreaking work, but have limited capacity. At the local level, the Washington, D.C.-based Rainbow History Project is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization focused on collection, preservation, and access. This group does not shy away from collecting new media materials, and its collection includes cassettes, DVDs, t-shirts, papers, posters, and now digital audio files of oral histories. Perhaps groups like this one tackle preservation challenges because the alternative would be to risk losing vital voices in the same way that so many of our past family members have gone silent. We owe it to these pioneering,
resourceful, and brave amateur activists to make sure that our society does not continue to delete LGBTQ history.

Many collecting and preservation efforts benefit from democratization, including efforts to tackle difficult history—even as it is happening. In her article, Lisa Kathleen Graddy describes collecting and curating the 2017 Women’s March on Washington, D.C. The resulting collection is just one of the permanent and digital archives that have sprung up immediately after recent marches in the capital, including the National Pride March in June 2017, the March for Science held on Earth Day of that year, and the March for Our Lives led by student gun-control advocates in spring 2018. During and immediately after these protests, Twitter and Instagram function as quickie archives of the day’s funniest or saddest signs. Coffee-table books became available just months after the Women’s March and included photos from sister marches across the world. Thanks to such efforts, the signs and sentiments will not be lost and will instead become the suffragist sashes and the cool queer pins of future museum collections.

The story of a young black man named Freddie Gray, who died in police custody in Baltimore, Maryland, and of the protests that followed will also not be lost. The Maryland Historical Society—with the University of Maryland Baltimore City and with support from the William G. Baker, Jr. Memorial Fund as well as hundreds of Baltimoreans—has curated a stable digital archive of images from the Baltimore Uprising of 2015. The digital archive has the credibility of its creator, a distinguished 174-year-old museum and library, coupled with the fluidity and authenticity of a crowded—and perhaps rowdy—public meeting.

Such collections tell us about ourselves and each other, and our society must document and learn from these wounds if they are to yield not just pains, but growing pains.

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So let’s go back to that Hyattsville parking lot. Honoring a place that commemorates the hard work women did to enfranchise women is inherently important and rewarding. But turning the
national spotlight on the achievements of this movement is an integral part of telling the story about American ideals of democracy, protest, and advocacy for the underrepresented. We need only scan the history section of a bookstore or library to understand that seeing and knowing ourselves is vital to the human condition. Representation is a step toward inclusion and an early step toward affirmation.

Only by reckoning with the messy truth of our history can we incorporate a more diverse—and more complete—cadre of historical figures into our national story. Our archives, museums, and historic sites can and should tell stories that are true and affirming for all Americans. FJ

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1 To support SOS Hyattsville’s work to uncover local suffrage history, sign its petition.
2 This article references preservation job research by Dr. Jeremy C. Wells and preservation leadership research by Nicholas A. Redding.
3 For more information about bringing LGBTQ history and heritage into your work, see Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Sites by Susan Ferentinos.

**TAKEAWAY**

Read the “Preserving Difficult Histories” *Forum Journal* issue.