Viewpoints: Engaging New Voices in Preservation
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Cover photos (clockwise from top left):
- Young Preservationists Association bike tour in Pittsburgh’s North Side. Photo by Dan Holland.
- Biking along Little Miami Trail. Photo by Valecia Crisafulli.
- Student restoring a historic building. Photo by Vince Michael, School of the Art Institute of Chicago.
How Preservation Can Benefit from the Boomer Market

Valencia Crisafulli and Scott Gerloff

Bob and Virginia Jones, who are 60, opened Birds I View in Staunton, Va., in 2004, when Bob retired from a career with the federal government. The specialty retail shop, which features a wide range of accessories and gifts for bird-watchers and nature lovers, is located in an old warehouse building in the historic Wharf district in downtown Staunton. “Virginia and I were drawn to Staunton because of the historic aspects of the town—fine arts, a Shakespeare theater. It’s a great place to live,” Bob reports.

Dave and Sue Labrie, who are in their early 50s, left corporate jobs in Hartford, Conn., almost five years ago to manage the Harbor Hill Inn & Marina on the Connecticut shore in Niantic. Both gregarious and fun-loving, they enjoy the contact with people saying at the inn, as well as the chance to make a difference in a small community. “You come to a point in your life when it’s no longer about how much money you can make,” Dave explains. “It’s about a lifestyle change. We still need to work but don’t want the pace of the corporate world.”

Baby boomers are everywhere. Hardly anyone could have missed hearing that the first wave of boomers turned 60 last year. The November 14, 2005, cover of Newsweek featured photos of 25 notable boomers—George Bush and Bill Clinton, Diane Sawyer and Dolly Parton, all of whom reached that milestone in 2006.

The aging of the baby boomers—and what their retirement will mean to U.S. economic and social patterns—is dominating the news, and with good reason. Approximately 78 million people were born in this country in the post–World War II years from 1946 to 1964—and this generation ever since has been the proverbial pig moving steadily through the python of the American population. Boomer values were shaped by TV, the Cold War, JFK’s assassination, the civil rights movement, Viet Nam, and the sexual revolution, among other shared experiences. Boomers grew up dictating what was “hot” in the marketplace—from diapers and baby food to Barbie dolls and rock music. They have always been the consumer majority, which is even more important now because they have so much money to spend. Tracking boomer lifestyle trends has become a new preoccupation as businesses try to predict the spending and behavior patterns of this cohort.

Should preservation organizations be paying attention to retiring baby boomers? Matt Thornhill, founder and president of the Boomer Project, a market research firm, thinks it’s imperative for any company or organization. “We believe if you don’t focus on Boomers you won’t be in business in 5 years, much less 20,” Thornhill says.

Philip Wolf, president and CEO of PhoCusWright, an independent travel, tourism, and hospitality research firm, says that marketing to boomers is “necessary but not sufficient.” He explains that it’s not enough to tell companies they need to be targeting boomers. “That’s like telling people they need to breathe,” he says. He encourages businesses and organizations to target narrow segments defined by lifestyle.

Historic areas should incorporate pedestrian paths and running and biking trails in order to satisfy the active lifestyles of baby boomers. Photo by Valencia Crisafulli.
preferences and characteristics appropriate to their product, service, or mission.

The good news for the preservation movement is that many boomer preferences correlate closely with preservation values. This article examines these preferences and trends, specifically with respect to how boomers are aging, retaining, spending money, traveling, and donating their money and time. In many ways, profiling boomers is like trying to hit a moving target, since most researchers agree that boomers are consistent in nothing so much as their unpredictability. Conclusions drawn here are generalities and certainly do not apply to every baby boomer, but they should give preservationists useful ideas for making the most of the opportunities presented by the aging of the baby boomer generation.

How Boomers Are Aging

Longer life spans. Baby boomers are living longer than any previous generation. Average life expectancy for men is now 74.1 years, and for women 79.5. By the year 2020, more than one-third of Americans will be over 50. They are redefining what it means to be old. Phrases such as “50 is the new 30” and “60 is the new 40” are turning up on mugs and t-shirts. Boomers view “middle age” as starting somewhere closer to 50 than 35—and stretching well beyond 60. USA Today quoted one boomer using the term “deep middle age.”

Active lifestyles. Boomers are adopting much more active lifestyles as they move into their 50s and 60s. They want to look and feel fit and attractive. (This does not necessarily mean that they want to look young, though many do.) They know that their bodies are going to have to last longer. Though concerned about health and fitness, they are optimistic about their prospects; 79 percent do not expect to have any serious physical limitation until they are over 70. According to the International Health, Racquet and Sports-club Association, people over 55 now represent nearly a quarter of all health club members, and health clubs are tooling up their marketing campaigns to attract boomers. (Gold’s Gym in Pasadena has a “Silver Sneakers” program.) Jogging is regaining popularity, and boomers—who spent their 30s and 40s on the golf course—are rediscovering tennis, hiking, biking, and other active sports as a way to keep their bodies in shape.

Lifelong learning. The active lifestyle includes mental and social activities. As the most educated generation in history, boomers have continued learning long after their formal schooling ended. Many boomers are returning to college for an additional (or their first) degree. Many take courses related to interests and hobbies—woodworking, winemaking, French cooking, and ballroom dancing—and some are able to parley this into second careers.

Meaning and values. Boomers are searching for meaning and value in their lives. After several decades of working hard to earn money and accumulate possessions, when boomers hit 50 there is a decided shift toward spending quality time with friends and family and doing things that matter. Many boomers experience a renewed spirituality, which may or may not be associated with religion. Relaxation and mental health are important.

What This Means for Preservation

• Historic areas—especially downtowns and residential neighborhoods—will need to incorporate pedestrian paths, running and biking trails, and other lifestyle amenities attractive to boomers. (Is there a fitness club in the downtown? Yoga classes?)

• The history, heritage, and culture of a place will be fascinating subjects of study for this generation. But because boomers want and need to stay active, “hands-on” methods of learning, such as building trades workshops and “immersion” weekends, will be more appealing than lectures. Boomers will relate to popular culture and icons of their era (e.g., Graceland, Modernism, etc.). Boomers will also gravitate to organizations that offer this type of programming.

• The values-driven aspects of preservation—sustainable communities, green buildings, conservation of resources—will be extremely important to this generation and may well be a means of drawing more people to the movement. Boomers seeking a higher quality of life may be drawn back to small towns.

How Boomers Are Retiring

Working longer. Boomers are clearly staying longer in the workforce. Several factors may account for this. They have invested many years in their
education and profession and aren’t ready to leave it yet, especially if they enjoy high job satisfaction. Others cannot afford to retire yet. They are uncertain about the economy, Social Security, and whether or not their pension plans will be enough to support their higher standard of living, especially with life spans being longer. A Merrill Lynch report indicates that 76 percent of boomers say their ideal plan for retirement includes staying in the workforce. Another study from the Employee Benefits Research Institute shows that 70 percent of all boomers expect to earn a paycheck after retirement.

Phased retirement. One of the most predominant trends among boomers is “phased retirement,” when they no longer want to work full time but want to remain on the job, opting for part-time work or taking days, weeks, or even months off during the year. This allows time for travel, pursuing hobbies and leisure activities, visiting children and grandchildren, and volunteering.

“Boomer-preneurship.” Many boomers are retiring from or leaving full-time jobs to start consulting, begin a new career, or turn an interest or avocation into a small business. People over 40 accounted for 86.6 percent of start-up businesses in the second quarter of 2005 (www.maturemarket.com). According to a recent survey by the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP), 40 percent of all people in business for themselves in the U.S. are older than 50, with that percentage rising in recent years.

Blend and balance. Unlike members of previous generations, who would spend 40 to 45 years in the workforce, retire at 65, and die at 70, the lines of demarcation between work and retirement are blurry for boomers. Many will move fluidly between different stages, in and out of the workforce. According to Kiplinger’s Retirement Report, boomer retirement will be a balance of work, leisure, education, and volunteering.

What This Means for Preservation
- “Boomer-preneurship” will offer opportunities for historic downtowns and commercial areas, since locally owned start-up businesses are ideally suited for spaces in older buildings. In addition, the preservation building trades are excellent second careers for boomers.
- Working boomers may not have much time to volunteer. Conversely, those who are “phasing in” their retirement will have more time to devote to things that matter to them. Whether or not they choose to spend their time on preservation issues will depend on how much preservation matters to them.
- The talent pool of well-educated, experienced retirees should not be overlooked when job openings in the preservation field become available.
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Where Boomers Are Living

Downsizing. According to a 2005 survey by Harris Interactive on behalf of Pulte Homes, approximately half (49 percent) of early boomers (age 51-60) who plan to move after retirement intend to downsize. Among late boomers (age 41-50), 36 percent plan to downsize their home.

Relocation. Many boomers are looking for a warmer climate when they relocate, or to be closer to children and grandchildren. These are factors that communities are unable to control. The AARP has identified 10 additional quality-of-life factors that retirees are looking for when they relocate. Among the desirable factors are several that are controllable, including “culture and entertainment” and a “sense of community (places with a walkable downtown)” and “ease of getting around.”

A report from the Strategic Development Group indicates:

Respondents over 45 years old with college educations are looking favorably at their hometowns as relocation options. The data show numerous qualities of America’s hometowns that make them a viable relocation option for baby boomers. It also shows that as many as 35 percent of individuals in this age group would like to start a business in their hometowns. Returning baby boomers represent a significant cultural and economic resource for small towns.

To support this, Housing-Zone.com notes that boomers “think longingly of the small towns where they grew up, and they talk over and over about wanting to simplify their lives and to recapture some of the warmth and camaraderie of their hometown experiences.”

Rather than a year-round relocation, many boomers are opting for second homes or vacation homes in warmer climates or areas that offer more of the desirable lifestyle amenities.

Urban lifestyle. Increasingly, whether for permanent residences or second homes, boomers are opting for an urban lifestyle that offers proximity to dining, shopping, and arts and culture. In May 2006, ABC News reported that “Cities are becoming increasingly popular retirement destinations as they offer access to culture, sports and the possibility of maintaining an active lifestyle.” This lifestyle is more likely to be found in larger cities, though not necessarily. Small towns that are able to offer these amenities are well positioned to attract the boomer market.

What This Means for Preservation
- Every city or town, regardless of size, has the potential to capture a portion of the boomer...
Instead of buying things, boomers are looking for relevancy and meaning, for fun and excitement.

How Boomers Are Spending

More discretionary spending. Boomers have more disposable income than any previous generation in history. The number of households in the 55-74 age bracket with incomes of more than $100,000 has risen significantly, and this increase is expected to continue as more boomers move into this age bracket. Due to uncertainty about the economy and Social Security, boomers are guarding their money, especially their 401(k) principal, and spending it wisely, since they know it will have to last them longer in retirement. Still, the sheer numbers of boomers and their cumulative discretionary wealth make them an extremely desirable target market.

Key spending areas. Apart from basic goods and services, boomers spend their money in ways that are consistent with their lifestyle and behavior patterns. Key areas include:
- Health care, health and beauty products
- Recreation and entertainment
- Dining (with growing interest in organic foods and homegrown produce, and diverse ethnic cuisine. Al fresco dining is also popular with boomers.)
- Travel (for more on travel spending, see the next section.)
- Luxury products and niche specialty items (Grandparent spending is on the rise.)
- Arts and culture
- Home furnishings (especially for second homes)
- Historic areas trying to find the “right” business mix when they purchase goods and services online.

Experiences, not products. Many boomers have accumulated enough “stuff.” In The Call of the Mall, Paco Underhill writes:

“We baby boomers are in a postshopping mode, psychically speaking. We’re not as thrilled as we used to be at the mere prospect of buying, of being in the presence of multitudes of objects, talsmans, fetishes, beautifiers, intensifiers, glorifiers, junk. If we needed it, we bought it, more than once. Now we’re feeling bought out. We’re bored.

Instead of buying things, boomers are looking for relevancy and meaning, for fun and excitement. According to the National Tour Association, 85 percent of Americans would rather spend money on enriching experiences than material goods.

Buying online. Though they did not grow up with computers, boomers are technologically savvy and slightly more likely to own computers than the generations on either side of them. They use computers differently than the younger generations do, being less likely to download music or text message their friends. They use computers for research (remember, this generation grew up with Ralph Nader and Consumer Reports), and, finding it convenient and a way to save time, they purchase goods and services online.

What This Means for Preservation
- Historic areas trying to find the “right” business mix will do well to focus their attention on the key boomer spending areas. Sophisticated market analyses notwithstanding, encouraging these types of businesses will position a downtown to capture boomer dollars.
- Interactive, informative websites will be essential for capturing the boomer market.

How Boomers Are Traveling

More travel. Most importantly, boomers are traveling, more than any previous generation—and more than any other age group. According to the Travel Industry Association of America, boomer travel accounts for nearly half of all household trips taken in this country, more than 268 million household trips in 2005, the
Historic areas should continue to offer cultural heritage festivals to attract weekend travelers. Photo by Valeria Ciafaloni.


control at each stage in their lives, boomers also want to control their travel experience. “Baby boomers want choices and want to have control of their vacations, although they still want trips to be easy to plan,” reports Berkeley Young, president of Young Strategies. Because they’re always in a time crunch and need everything to be convenient, boomers want to select from a menu of available options—with the convenience of a packaged itinerary that still allows free time, independent choices, and expressions of individuality. And boomers, who are busy working, often make spur-of-the-moment, last-minute travel decisions. Even so, they expect to get what they want, when they want it—and to be able to book it online, ideally on one comprehensive website. According to The Pho-CusWright Consumer Travel Trends Survey, Eighth Edition, 72 percent of travelers shop online, and 68 percent purchase online.

Independent. Boomers travel much more independently than previous generations, preferring the automobile over the tour bus, travel with friends and family over being herded along with a group of strangers. (This is true for domestic travel, less so for travel abroad.) Boomers do not see themselves in 15 or 20 years as the stereotypical tour group traveler: overweight and wearing polyester, climbing on a tour bus with 40 people whom they have just met, following a garrulous tour guide. This is not consistent with their active, forever young self-image.

Boomer trackers are seeing a marked increase in singles travel, especially among women over 55. RV purchases among boomers are on the rise, more so in the South. Air travel—as long as it stays affordable, schedules are convenient, and security measures do not become overly stringent—is another popular option.

Experiential travel. This generation has always wanted to be part of the action—on the stage, not sitting in the audience; on the playing field, not in the bleachers. Not content with being mere spectators, boomers are redefining heritage travel to be much more experiential and “hands-on.” Amy Jordan Webb, director of the National Trust’s Heritage Tourism Program, says, “Boomers not only expect high quality, authentic heritage tourism experiences, they also seek out exclusive opportunities such as a behind-the-scenes tour with the museum director and other value-added opportunities—and they’re willing to pay more for these added privileges.” Webb goes on to note the increase in “hands-on” tours in which participants provide volunteer labor to help preserve or enhance a heritage attraction as part of the travel experience.

Realizing that boomers do not like to be referred to as “elders,” Elderhostel®, which offers “Adventures in Lifelong Learning,” has launched a new program for the boomer audience. Its Road Scholar® program offers experiences such as “Austin Express: Racin’ the Music Train” and “Life in Death Valley” that target a younger, more active market. The National Trust has developed a series of heritage adventure tours called Sojourns to attract the boomer market. The experience does not always have to be dramatic or expensive, but it does need to be original and authentic. (For more on the authentic experiences, and terms such as cultural tourism, heritage tourism, sports tourism, active tourism, adventure travel, and ecotourism will be commonly used within the next decade.

Controlled experiences. Just as boomers have been in control at each stage in their lives, boomers also want to control their travel experience. “Baby boomers want choices and want to have control of their vacations, although they still want trips to be easy to plan,” reports Berkeley Young, president of Young Strategies. Because they’re always in a time crunch and need everything to be convenient, boomers want to select from a menu of available options—with the convenience of a packaged itinerary that still allows free time, independent choices, and expressions of individuality. And boomers, who are busy working, often make spur-of-the-moment, last-minute travel decisions. Even so, they expect to get what they want, when they want it—and to be able to book it online, ideally on one comprehensive website. According to The Pho-CusWright Consumer Travel Trends Survey, Eighth Edition, 72 percent of travelers shop online, and 68 percent purchase online.
experience, see “Looking at Kansas with New Eyes through ‘Explorer Tourism,’” by Marci Penner, director, Kansas Sampler Foundation, Forum Journal, 20, no. 4, Summer 2006.)

Activity and adventure.
After a decade or so of spending more time on the golf course than on a bicycle seat, boomers are rediscovering hiking, biking, climbing, kayaking, and other adventure sports as a way to stay active and feel young—and taking in one or more historic attractions along the way. For most boomers, adventure vacations are more aptly called “adventure lite,” since boomers find that their bodies at 50 cannot do what they did at 25. At the end of the day, boomers want to be pampered. It’s not unusual for adventure excursions to pack along gourmet meals; for a day of rigorous hiking to be followed by a day of complete rest at a nearby spa; or for bikers to end a 50-mile ride with a soak in the hot tub at a luxurious inn, before heading out to a sumptuous dinner featuring regional wines and local cuisine.

Dining and shopping. Of course, the dining and shopping experience is part of the integrated package for traveling boomers. They are willing to spend more for local crafts and products that they can’t find at home, especially items that represent the location they are visiting. And finding out-of-the-way, unique dining spots has become one of the most important aspects of experiential travel, just one more part of the adventure.

What This Means for Preservation

• Heritage travel, which focuses on the history, culture, and stories of the place and its people, will increase as large numbers of baby boomers travel more in retirement. To capture this market, preservationists will need to redefine and rethink interpretation and create ways to involve visitors experientially.

• Historic hotels, inns, and B&Bs should thrive—but only if they offer lifestyle amenities that boomers expect when they travel. This means private baths, cable TV, phones, and wireless internet—as well as other luxury and value-added experiences.

• Historic places and destinations must package their offerings and collaborate to create web-based itineraries that offer choices for the traveler. Shopping and dining options should be part of the comprehensive package.

• Historic areas should continue to offer signature cultural heritage festivals and tours, as well as small-scale immersion experiences for the everyday or weekend traveler.

• Communities must insist on preservation planning and good design principles for their historic areas, as well as adherence to smart growth principles. Boomers do not want to travel to Anyplace USA.

• Partnerships with environmental and cultural groups, especially those that encourage hiking and bike trails or regional heritage trails, are essential.

• State and national scenic byway designations will encourage auto-oriented travel, a growing trend for retiring boomers.

How Boomers Are Giving—Money and Time

Philanthropy. Over the next 20 to 30 years, this country will see the greatest transfer of wealth in its history. Boomers are by far the wealthiest generation to ever move into retirement. According to the Pew Charitable Trust, baby boomers are “redefining American philanthropy, just as they’ve redefined business.” While previous generations could be counted on for their generosity to nonprofit concerns, boomers—no less generous—are nonetheless writing new rules for philanthropy. They are much less likely to write checks to nonprofits with which they’ve had no involvement or relationship. Boomers are giving to causes (a) that are close to home; (b) that are making a tangible impact and showing measurable results; and (c) with which they have been personally involved.

Unlike previous generations, boomers do not feel that they necessarily owe their children an inheritance. They will leave some money to their children, but they are also spending it on themselves—and giving it away to causes they believe in. Small family foundations are on the rise, as are community foundations. Charity is coming much closer to home.

Volunteerism. By now it should be no surprise that baby boomers are volunteering differently than their parents’ generation did. As the most educated generation in history, boomers want to use their education when they volunteer. Attorneys and accountants may want to provide their services pro bono. The director of marketing at a local corporation may want to provide marketing consultation for a nonprofit, or a graphic designer or web master to share those skills. Boomers want to add value and relevance to their lives, and they want their volunteer experiences to be meaningful. Boomers also like to have fun, so they are looking for volunteer activities that provide opportunities for social interaction.

What This Means for Preservation

• If boomers are not personally involved and engaged in the work of their local preservation organization, chances are greatly reduced that the organization will ever benefit from their philanthropic dollars. The money will follow personal involvement and volunteer activities.

• Organizations will need to rethink the way they are using volunteers. The image
of a group of elderly ladies stuffing envelopes and putting labels on newsletters is passé. Volunteering will take a 180-degree swing, with menial tasks being outsourced and volunteers used for more professional and skilled services.

Limited Window of Opportunity

These trends are just a snapshot of what boomers are doing—and how they have the potential to affect the preservation movement. One final challenge: The clock is already ticking, boomers are already retiring, and the window of opportunity to benefit from the wealth, education, active lifestyle, and large numbers of this generation is limited to only 15 or 20 years at most. Historic areas and preservation groups must position themselves now, and a boomer strategy should figure prominently in any marketing, outreach, and fundraising plans.

Valeria Crisafulli, a self-proclaimed boomer tracker born in 1948, is director of Statewide and Local Partnerships at the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Scott Gerloff, born in 1949, is director of the National Trust Tours program.

Where to go for boomer information

Boomer profiling can be found in almost every mainstream publication, in trade journals, on radio and TV news segments, and on the web. Several useful resources include:

- The Boomer Project, at www.boomerproject.com, which has boomer market research available in monthly free and paid newsletters.
- USA Today, whose reporters regularly spot the latest in boomer lifestyle, business, and behavior trends.
- Newsweek, which offers in-depth research and reporting in a regular series, “The Boomer Files,” in print and online.

Changing Culture: A New Way to Save Our Downtowns

Kyle Ezell

When I was a child, I cherished visiting my small town’s historic square in Lawrenceburg, Tenn. (population 10,000), especially the five-and-dime store and the drugstore that served those tall ice cream floats. My parents took me shopping for clothes, baseball gloves, and shoes. For its size, it bustled with pedestrians and shoppers, and cars circumnavigated the roundabout around the grand historic courthouse that anchored “The Public Square.” It was the soul of my hometown.

Whenever my parents took me to a downtown event, I expected a carnival or parade. But what I witnessed at six years old changed my life and the life of the historic business district: the demolition of my beloved downtown’s historic courthouse.

Unlike a quick implosion, the courthouse demolition wasn’t sexy—it was a slow, deliberate (and painful to watch) wrecking ball job that caused the structure’s walls to fall, one-by-one-by-one. I can still hear the loud crashes of steel hitting mortar and some of the local spectators’ cheers, responding to the carnage like spectators at a demolition derby.

Not far away from where I stood with my parents, some of the older children were grabbing a few of the stray bricks to keep as mementos. To me, the scene was a Twilight Zone episode. How could my local townspersons harbor this much wrath for the town’s oldest, tallest, and most beautiful structure, complete with a cupola clock tower, the iconic symbol for Lawrenceburg? I was thinking, “Could be I the only one feeling this way?” And there, adjacent to the destruction zone, was the protected statue of David Crocket, the town’s first urban planner. Would he have approved?

I learned that the rationale for the building’s removal was high maintenance costs, the need to expand office and courtroom space, and a lack of parking that could accommodate both the courthouse
The old courthouse grounds first held a water fountain and later a gazebo with the old clock tower plunked on top of its green metal roof. In the "new and improved" downtown square, patrons could usually find a space directly in front of a store’s entrance—that is, if the store was still in business. And, ironically, more people began walking on the sidewalks of the basically traffic-free downtown Lawrenceburg roundabout—using it as an exercise track. The downtown has never been the same since the courthouse was torn down. Neither have I.

I couldn’t have known back then that my personal childhood horror scene was being repeated in cities and towns across much of the United States, at a time when downtowns were being obliterated. As much as I was affected by the demolition of only one (but very important) building, I can’t begin to imagine what others in my adopted home city of Columbus, Ohio—now a historic building graveyard—must have witnessed over the years.

Today’s downtown Columbus consists of upwards of 50 percent surface parking lots where historic office buildings, old hotels, original retail establishments and grocery stores, apartments, and single-family homes once stood—gone forever. Some areas of downtown currently have four to five square blocks of asphalt parking lots, used during the weekdays, making downtown Columbus a ghost town as workers abandon these lots at nights and on weekends. But even though much of today’s downtown Columbus resembles a post-war zone, the demolition job must not have been sufficient: Unbelievably, the biggest complaint by the locals here (and in most other cities) is the downtown’s lack of parking.

And it’s not just downtown Columbus. Downtown Fort Wayne, Ind., was a bustling regional city with streetcars, sidewalk merchants, and many pedestrians. But today, Fort Wayne, like Columbus and hundreds of other American downtowns, has wiped out much of its history to pave huge surface parking lots.

Over the years, downtowns in the majority of cities and towns were sufﬁced as the result of individual decisions by property owners and city ofﬁcials, by state and federal policies (such as urban renewal and “Model Cities”), and by market factors. It goes without saying that preservationists fought and lost many battles trying to save these now-leveled historic structures. But the unacceptable physical state of too many of our cities and towns has been caused by a much broader, much more powerful force: cultural values.

Cultural Values that Work Against Cities

As a lifelong city buff, it’s ironic that I discovered the power of culture while analyzing folk barns in South Dakota while a master’s student studying cultural geography. Clearly, a farm family’s culture, including its values, was responsible for the agricultural landscape. The
Logically, if the American culture valued historic buildings, bustling sidewalks, a strong pedestrian culture, and higher density urban neighborhoods, downtown neighborhoods would reemerge.

barn and its layout, the architecture of the farm house, animal stall design, and even the tractor, hoe, and every farm tool used on the property mirrored the cultural values of the land’s inhabitants.

These principles also hold true when analyzing (and planning or developing) any landscape, including a downtown environment. Logically, if the American culture valued historic buildings, bustling sidewalks, a strong pedestrian culture, and higher density urban neighborhoods, downtown neighborhoods would reemerge.

Residential developers are in business to serve their clients’ needs, including providing plenty of convenient parking spaces. Our culture enjoys shopping at strip malls, appreciates drive-through windows, drives everywhere for everything, and places high value on cul-de-sac lots and single-family homes. And because most of us wouldn’t be caught dead on a city bus, don’t ride bikes or motor scooters, disdain high density, and generally reject the basic aspects of urban living, why should development designs, even in downtown, conform to a culture that doesn’t exist?

As a great admirer of Main Street organizations, downtown business improvement districts, and downtown development professionals, I am inspired by their vigorous attempts to improve the places that they are passionate about. I marvel at marketing and event planners who work around the clock to provide exciting venues to lure people downtown for a special experience. The array of financial incentives—including tax abatements, historic rehab tax credits, low-cost development loans, facade grants, and other inducements for individual projects—are impressive. So is placing historic buildings in the National Register and establishing historic zoning districts to keep the character of downtown neighborhoods intact. Today, many downtowns can celebrate the preservation and transformation of old warehouses and empty bank buildings into loft apartments, crumbling iconic hotels into new, gleaming destinations, and other still-standing structures into viable new uses.

All of these successes are remarkable considering that downtown and Main Street professionals are working against the tide of culture. To me, change is not happening fast enough; and when judged comprehensively, how can downtown revitalization sustain itself when the very idea of “downtown” is out of sync with local cultural values?

Even thriving downtowns and central city neighborhoods can normally expect just a fraction of the overall population gains and business expansion experienced in their metro areas. Still, headlines claim that downtowns are on the rebound because the very idea that a few dozen (or few hundred, or few thousand) new residential units, or a new movie theater, or stadium (or anything!) has been built in downtown is enough to impress most writers. Downtowns in too many regions are, in reality, losing their relevance, and continue to be hammered economically (and even culturally) by the suburbs and the new exurban communities. For the majority of people, all of this is acceptable. But for people who are waiting to see and experience a real downtown revitalization in their lifetimes (and not just because high gas and energy prices and long commutes will have forced people into town), it will take more than financial incentives, zoning code revisions, and building anchors designed by rock star architects. Downtown planners are doomed to less than stellar results unless a cultural values shift takes place.

Ideas Into Action

The power of culture and its strong influence on the land-
Teaching “Downtown Living Seminars”

It’s a fact that most Americans have never lived in a downtown or urban environment in their lives, but many are generally intrigued by the idea of being taught to live in the city. (The same principle applies to people who’ve never played golf and need a golf lesson.) Downtown organizations that want to drum up new demand for full-time residents, and urban developers who need suburban-to-urban converts to sell their units both hire me to teach Downtown Living Seminars.

Depending on the venue and situation, Downtown Living Seminars can be delivered as single, hour-long presentations or taught in more detail over multiple classes. The one-time version concentrates on a lesson in “normal” cultural values versus “trendy” cultural values. For instance, it’s normal to rely on the car trunk to haul things, but trendy to use a schlep bag and schlep groceries on the sidewalk. It’s normal to use the drive-thru and eat a burger while sitting in your car in the fast-food restaurant parking lot, but trendy to enjoy a burger after walking to an outdoor downtown café. Students learn that all “trendy things are urban things,” and that, in their lives, they have to try to turn trendy living into normal living. With vivid photos, they also understand the landscapes that both normal and trendy behaviors and values produce.

Teaching Downtown Living Seminars to larger audiences could spawn more future urbanites who want to live this kind of currently exotic, almost foreign, lifestyle. The landscape then will automatically change to match the newly evolving cultural values of its inhabitants. The more people who are encouraged to transform their lives, the more downtown developers and businesses that will benefit.

The first Downtown Living Seminar was sponsored by the Lifelong Learning Program at Columbus State Community College in September 2006. Only 15 people showed up. But this class was great practice and the beginning of the many seminars that would be presented in cities all over the country. The next Downtown Living Seminar was held in two sessions with nearly 300 people for The Clare at Water Tower, a retirement living 55-story high rise on Michigan Avenue in Chicago’s Gold Coast neighborhood. Then came the Downtown Milwaukee’s Downtown Living Expo, Seattle’s Skyline at First Hill development, Downtown Fort Wayne, and then for developers in Dallas, Fort Worth, Coral Gables, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Cleveland. What if Downtown Living Seminars caught on everywhere? Our historic urban landscapes will more quickly benefit if thousands of graduates in each city suddenly “got” urban values.

Hosting “Ruppie Parties”

“Ruppie” (Retired Urban People) is a term I coined for my book Retire Downtown: The Lifestyle Destination for Active Retirees and Empty Nesters. Urban retirement is a minority trend that has the potential to grow exponentially as 78 million baby boomers move through their retirement years. Many will make “lifestyle” moves, so in order to attract them to live in cities, down-
The more Ruppies a city has, the more historic buildings will find new uses, and the more empty spaces will be filled again.

Realtor groups and even a bank(!) held show-and-tells, setting up booths and talking to guests about what Ruppies could do for downtown Rockford. Drinks and hors d’oeuvres were enjoyed as I made my presentation, including Photoshop images of what downtown Rockford could look like if thousands of locals would gain urban values.

SC Johnson Foundation and Downtown Racine, Inc., held the first “Ruppie Lunch,” in which a similar format to Rockford’s took place in the middle of the day. Here, Racine’s urban developers and Realtors displayed their new historic warehouse loft apartments alongside new condominiums fronting Lake Michigan. Ruppie parties, lunches, breakfasts, brunches—it all works the same way, and these events are being scheduled all over the country.

The more Ruppies a city has, the more historic buildings will find new uses, and the more empty spaces will be filled again. Because of their sheer numbers, boomers must be encouraged to love and live urban. Cities can’t afford to ignore them; instead they need to court them with a party or two.

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How Demographics Shape the Future of the Preservation Field

Dan Holland

The Young Preservationists Association (YPA) of Pittsburgh recognizes that who we are trying to attract to our profession is as important as the buildings we are trying to save. YPA starts with the premise that demographic trends play an increasingly important role in the future viability of preservation organizations, the preservation field itself, and how regions compete for young, well-educated workers.

One might conclude that, as a movement and an industry, historic preservation, which has traditionally focused on saving buildings, overlooks demographic trends as a major component of the field. To be sure, as some cities revive as vibrant destinations to live, work, and play, place matters more than ever. But people also matter. As the movement of people radically reshapes American cities and countryside, only those preservation organizations that consider diversity and youth as positive forces will remain relevant and effective agents of change.

Recent population statistics show that the United States has grown older, more urban, and increasingly diverse. According to a 2006 Brookings Institution report, The State of American Cities, “Across the 20th century, as the United States population nearly quadrupled, it transformed from a predominantly white one rooted in Western culture, to a society with significant representation from a diverse array of racial and ethnic minorities.” Today, the US has as many Hispanics as blacks, a significant Asian population, and a young and fast-growing population of more than one race.1

Demographic data should raise the following questions for historic preservationists:

- How should the preservation field adapt to America’s expanding diversity?
- Do people of different races, ethnic backgrounds, and sexual orientations feel comfortable at the local historical society?
- Are preservation organizations representative of the communities they are trying to transform?
- Have preservation organizations established the necessary mechanisms to procure the next generation of leaders?
- Where do young people fit into an industry that has been characterized by an older generation?

Preservationists need to have a clear understanding of changing demographics for three reasons. First, population shifts will affect how preservation programs are implemented. One of the most important questions preservationists must ask themselves and their constituency is: As communities change, whose history are we preserving?

For instance, take the recent transformation of Harlem from an African American and Latino community to one that is increasingly populated by upscale whites. One Puerto Rican activist recently told the New York Times, “We’re in crisis mode right now, and as far as retaining the Puerto Rican and Latino identity in the neighborhood, we’re in red alert.”2 How should preservationists interpret such signals? Demographic information can help preservationists deploy programs to reduce displacement and recognize local historical flavor.

Second, demographics will determine the future viability of preservation organizations. Labor unions, civic and professional associations, ethnic organizations, and sports leagues have seen their ranks shrink over the years as young people gravitate to more open, diverse, and exciting organizations. Some don’t gravitate to any organization at all, as Robert Putnam describes in Bowling Alone: “Kids today just aren’t joiners.”

Preservationists must understand how these trends affect organizations that rely on a new supply of members to sustain their programs and identity. More importantly, preservationists must ask: Where will the new leaders...
This need for “social capital” or brainpower is what drives metro areas to strive to attract and retain young people who can provide ideas, become investors, and contribute to the rebirth of communities as owners of homes and businesses. And what these brains are looking for is stimulation in the form of stroller-friendly sidewalks, diversity, density, and, of course, the all-important coffee shop. Preservation organizations that can emphasize these aspects in their work will not only be able to attract young talent to their communities but to their organization as well.

Capturing the youth demographic, then, becomes a desirable goal for companies, developers, politicians, and organizations. But it’s easier said than done.

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Experience

A number of critical preservation issues are facing Southwestern Pennsylvania, such as sprawl, vacant properties, the loss of African-American history, and diminishing industrial heritage. But no issue is more pressing than the Pittsburgh region’s “demographic dilemma.” It’s no secret that Pennsylvania is a chief exporter of young people.

The Brookings Institution’s Metropolitan Policy Program produced a watershed report in 2003, Back to Prosperity, which reaffirmed our greatest insecurities, but also jump-started an important dialogue about the region’s future:

Lively downtowns, charming traditional neighborhoods, and a vibrant cultural scene are essential to attracting the young, educated workers and innovative companies that drive the new economy. Unfortunately, the Pittsburgh region is characterized by a hollowing-out downtown, a city that is losing population and jobs, and rampant suburban development instead of reinvestment in older, more established areas. These trends don’t bode well for attracting and holding onto the young people needed to bolster the region’s economic competitiveness.  

Much of the region’s population decline is the direct result of job losses over several decades between the 1960s and 1980s related to the loss of manufacturing employment. Between 1980 and 2000, the Pittsburgh metropolitan statistical area lost more than 200,000 people—32 percent of its population, one of the highest rates of population loss in Pennsylvania.  

Most of those who left were young people. While the Pittsburgh area’s elderly population grew by 2 percent, the region lost 8.2 percent of people aged 25-34—prime leadership development years. That leaves the region with almost 18 percent of Allegheny County’s population over 65.  

The population and job losses have continued in recent years. Pittsburgh’s population dropped again to an estimated 316,718 in 2005, a loss of 4,000 people from 2004, making Pittsburgh the 57th largest city in America. Such a bleak outlook earned Pittsburgh the shameful label as “the worst place in America to be stuck with a lonely heart” by Forbes.

The implications of this population loss for the Pittsburgh region are dire. Not only does a loss of young people represent fewer voters, shoppers, and homeowners, but also skilled workers. According to a report by the Coro Center for Civic Leadership, “key industries like manufacturing and health care already face challenges in finding qualified workers; absent changes in current demographic trends, these challenges will become more difficult.”

Participants in the YPA bike tour, Wheeling through History, learn about the history and architecture of Pittsburgh's North Side. Photo by Dan Holland.
Why Young People Matter
Why do young people matter to old communities? Young people give life to old neighborhoods, they bring new ideas and energy, they are willing investors, and young people make regions globally competitive. They are also entrepreneurial. The Coro report notes that “eighty percent of new businesses are started by people under the age of 39.”

YPA has taken steps to promote, advertise, and actively work toward preserving the Pittsburgh region’s unique sense of place and authenticity, with young people as its target audience. Through our events, publications, and tours, YPA sends a message to young people that history is worthy of investment and revitalization.

For instance, YPA created an annual list of the “Top Ten Best Preservation Opportunities in the Pittsburgh Area” as a way to market historic properties to developers and investors. YPA annually hosts a networking reception to unveil the new Top Ten list during National Historic Preservation Month in May. YPA pioneered the “Wheeling Through History” bike tour of Pittsburgh’s North Side, a great way to see a lot of history in a short period of time while experiencing some light exercise. In 2005, YPA hosted the first conference for young preservationists, entitled “Places & Spaces: The Regeneration of Preservation.” YPA also presents smaller, focused workshops, such as “The Economics of Preservation” which it hosted in the National Historic Landmark district of Old Economy, Pa.

Through these activities and publications, YPA connects and engages with young people by providing them with opportunities for interaction and offers them a fun and exciting way to experience history.

The Pittsburgh region is home to nearly half a million 20-34 year olds. Fifty percent live in Allegheny County, the other half resides in nine surrounding counties. And they are highly educated. Young people in the region are more likely to have completed high school and college than the national average.

The Young Preservationists Association is not the only organization to respond to the region’s grim demographic outlook by working to engage young people. Southwestern Pennsylvania is now home to numerous youth-oriented organizations, such as the Cool Space Locator, Coro Center for Civic Leadership, Leadership Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Urban Magnet Project, Pittsburgh Young Voters League, Urban Land Institute Young Leaders Group, Urban League Young Professionals, and 360 Entertainment, a hip hop promotion agency.

Pittsburgh’s image as a rising force for young people recently received a boost when a 26-year-old city council president, Luke Ravenstahl, was sworn in on September 1, 2006, to be the city’s 59th, and youngest, mayor.

The Pittsburgh Region’s Preservation Challenges
Despite this good news, substantial challenges remain.

The Pittsburgh region’s population losses have created real problems for the preservation community. How does one revitalize a community that has lost so many people? The rallying cry of preservationists in the region has become, “so many great spaces to preserve, so few people to occupy them.”

One major problem has been sprawl. Southwestern Pennsylvania continues to wastefully develop land in spite of population declines. Thomas Hylton writes in the Post-Gazette, “315 square miles of land in southwestern Pennsylvania—an area nearly six times the size of Pittsburgh—were urbanized from 1982 to 1997, even as the region lost 166,000 residents.” According to 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania, the state lost more than 1 million acres of cropland, forest, and open space in just five years, 1992-1997, ranking number two in the nation (after Texas) in conversion of total acres of land to development.

As a result, the region’s historic landmarks remain at risk. For instance, the 1802 Meason House in Fayette County, a National Historic Landmark, is threatened by...
Pittsburgh has experienced a dramatic population loss in the last 25 years—a statistic that YPA seeks to change by emphasizing the city’s funky spaces, safe streets, parks, dramatic scenery, and affordability. Photo by Byrd Wood.

Encroaching development and loss of its rural historic context. Another casualty is the neighborhood school, which is being abandoned at an alarming rate across Pennsylvania. “In recent decades, hundreds of distinctive neighborhood schools have been closed across the commonwealth, only to be replaced with generic mega-schools to which students are bused,” writes Hylton.

The loss of jobs and population also increases the number of vacant properties and land. The Pittsburgh Green Forum estimates that there are between 6,000 and 12,000 vacant lots in the city of Pittsburgh. These vacant properties threaten recent community reinvestment gains in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods.

The Pittsburgh region’s African-American history has been hit particularly hard. In 1992, when the African American Historic Sites Survey of Allegheny County was completed, a number of historic sites were threatened by demolition and neglect. Today, only three African-American historic sites are protected by the city’s historic preservation ordinance. Moreover, none of the 70 African-American historic sites eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places in Allegheny County are actually listed.

From the perspective of outside observers, as well as those of us living here, these negative aspects often overshadow the more attractive qualities of southwestern Pennsylvania. The lure of more vibrant regions elsewhere in the U.S. is strong. Therefore, regions such as Pittsburgh that have suffered population and job losses must be repositioned to emphasize different assets that young people are looking for.

What Young People Want

Aside from jobs, what’s the magic formula for attracting and retaining young people? A number of scholarly reports suggest that young, well-educated creative people want an authentic sense of place where they live, work, and play. In many respects, the Pittsburgh region offers these things: funky old spaces, safe streets, ample parks, dramatic scenery, and affordability—but lacks a critical mass of young people.

This preservation of place is what numerous writers—such as Jane Jacobs, Tony Hiss, and Richard Florida—claim will ultimately lead to a region’s economic, social, and political growth. As Florida says in his book The Rise of the Creative Class:

“The nation’s geographic center of gravity has shifted away from traditional industrial regions toward new axes of creativity and innovation. The Creative Class is strongly oriented to large cities and regions that offer a variety of economic opportunities, a stimulating environment and amenities for every possible lifestyle…. These places offer something for everyone—vibrant urban districts, abundant natural amenities and comfortable suburban "nerdistans" for techies so inclined.”

Still, there’s hope for the Pittsburgh area, provided that the region’s leaders can take advantage of some emerging demographic trends. The report The Young and the Restless in a Knowledge Economy argues that young people seek communities that preservationists are trying to save:

“Today’s 25- to 34-year-olds are about one-third more likely to live in neighborhoods within three miles of a region’s downtown than are other Americans. Close-in neighborhoods with higher density, mixed uses, walkable destinations, lively commercial districts and interesting streets can make a region more competitive for talented workers…. Those regions that lack vibrant close-in urban neighborhoods will be at a disadvantage in attracting and retaining talent.”

The good news for Pittsburgh is that American cities are cool again for Gen Xers. According to Research Advisors, a market research firm, 25-39 year olds want more family time and quality neighborhoods. Young people are the primary targets for “new urbanism” or neo-traditional, walkable communities. While only 26.8 percent of the total population, Gen X is highly mobile. Therefore, regions must compete for this highly educated and discriminating workforce.

Right now, however,
Pittsburgh competes against Sunbelt and western cities such as Albuquerque, Atlanta, Austin, Charlotte, Phoenix, and Portland, Ore., which are winning the “youth race.” In Atlanta, for instance—once featured on the cover of Time for its suburban sprawl—“young & urban” is hot to developers. Consider that the city of Atlanta is expected to gain more than 150,000 households in 15 years. The city is issuing more building permits than are suburban counties. There are 100 major projects under construction or proposed through 2007-2008 in Atlanta, including 15,785 condo units currently under construction.21

Some believe it’s just a matter of time before Pittsburgh becomes a more desirable destination for young people; others say our time is now. One young Coro Fellow, Justin Sosne, a North Carolina native, writes in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette:

Most importantly, the overall quality of life in Pittsburgh is fabulous. It’s clean, safe, and affordable—if only we could do something about the weather! As the population continues to age and baby boomers retire, job opportunities for new professionals increase. These benefits must be announced loud and clear to young people across the country from the top of Mount W-ah-shing-ton.22

From YPA’s perspective, it’s hard to separate our organizational mission—engaging young people—from our role in the region. The more folks we attract to our events, programs, and tours, the more it benefits our region. We firmly believe that the same old strategies just won’t work to attract young people into the fold.

The writing is on the wall. Unless preservationists make a conscious effort to identify and cultivate a new and diverse generation of leaders, the future of preservation organizations is in jeopardy of irrelevancy. Recognition that young leaders must be nurtured is a key ingredient to regenerating the preservation movement, as well as revitalizing entire regions. What better way to preserve the legacy of the preservation establishment than to encourage the participation of young people in historic preservation.

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NOTES


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10 Coro Report.


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I’m Over 100—Can I Still Go Green?

Sophia Lyns

Does sustainable design apply to historic preservation? The answer is a resounding “yes,” and the rehabilitation and preservation of a 1905 Beaux Arts style building as the future Visitor Education Center serving the President Lincoln and Soldiers’ Home National Monument in Washington, D.C., proves the point. The National Trust for Historic Preservation recently launched a project in partnership with the United Technologies Corporation (UTC) to rehabilitate the 100+ year-old building for adaptive use as a visitor center using sustainable design. The building formerly was used as the Administration Building for the Soldiers’ Home, a federal retirement community for retired and disabled veterans, in continuous existence since 1851.

The center will complement a fascinating “new” national monument that honors and interprets the house at Soldiers’ Home where Abraham Lincoln resided during one quarter of his presidency. An 1842 Gothic Revival style cottage (“Lincoln Cottage,” where the Lincolns stayed) is the centerpiece of the national monument. The new visitor center will contain exhibits, amenities, classrooms, staff offices, and educational signs that explain why and how rehabilitation of this old building used sustainable design.

“Sustainable design” has become a popular buzz word of late. Sustainable design has slowly gained credence since the 1970s when it was coined in the larger context of “sustainability.” Yet the concept of sustainable design is not self-explanatory for those still unfamiliar with it. And although many people use the term freely, few offer a direct, simple definition. The National Park Service describes it this way:

Sustainable design balances human needs with the carrying capacity of the natural and cultural environments. It minimizes environmental impact, it minimizes importation of goods and energy as well as the generation of waste. The ideal situation would be that if development is necessary, it would be constructed from natural sustainable materials collected onsite, generate its own energy from renewable sources such as solar or wind, and manage its own waste.1

The definition doesn’t lend itself to one sentence, perhaps because the concept is inter-disciplinary and requires scene-setting for the audience. For instance, when asked to define sustainable design, one preservationist said, “Cases are the perfect examples of sustainable design! You always have a roof over your head. You have a built-in constant temperature. Security is solid. You might have a reliable water source within your dwelling, and the bat guano provides fertilizer for your farming.” That explanation certainly includes all the important points that the Brundtland Commission (a UN-convened body formally called the World Commission on Environment and Development) highlighted in its emphasis on sustainability in 1987, namely, that sustainable design “takes account of the interrelationships that exist among people, resources, environment and development.” The cliff dwellers at Mesa Verde, for instance, had this harmonious interaction with their environment down to an art for a sustained period of time.

Architect Carl Elefante argues persuasively that applying sustainable design to historic buildings represents the front line of the increasingly popular movement to embrace green building practices. “The greenest building is the one that’s already built,” is the mantra that Elefante shares with new audiences seeking to understand sustainable design.

Elefante, who serves as co-chair of the Technical Committee on Sustainable Preservation for the Association for Preservation Technology, emphasizes that sustainable design is not a new idea. The concept is rooted in traditional designs that capture and
harness available resources such as natural light, air flow, and temperature.

One central idea gaining momentum today in sustainable design is that buildings can reduce carbon production by using more energy efficient mechanical systems. The urgent new focus to reduce greenhouse gases drives designers to contemplate all the different ways that buildings ideally might offer a positive return to the environment—such as by recycling water or including green roofs (that is, having a garden on a roof)—rather than exerting a negative drain on limited environmental resources. Somehow this goal seems potentially more achievable for new buildings, yet preservationists may reach for this goal too.

On the topic of sustainable design, Frank Matero, the director of the Architectural Conservation Laboratory at the University of Pennsylvania, asks simply, “In the transformation of our physical environment, what relationships should exist between change and continuity, between the old and the new?” Private entrepreneurs and corporations, market forces, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations, among other entities, shape these relationships that try to balance change and continuity.

The LEED Rating System

The U.S. Green Building Council, a private nonprofit organization, has helped drive the market transformation embracing sustainable design with its “Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design” (LEED) Rating System. The LEED program presents architectural and engineering criteria to maximize energy efficiency, minimize wear and tear on the environment, generate clean power, decrease water usage, keep storm water onsite instead of directing it into regional watersheds, integrate recycled materials into new construction, and reward creative green design. Building owners, builders, and designers can win platinum, gold, and silver ratings from the USGBC for their efforts.

The competitive ranking system encourages effective communication and teamwork among the diverse members of any preservation or construction team as the team organizes to achieve a successful sustainable design. The teamwork itself helps build the green ethic and raises participants’ awareness that making environmentally sensible decisions translates into economic savings which enhance our shared quality of life. Developing an energy model at the design phase is the perfect example of how the building owner and the design professionals tackle a big issue up front that often brings unity of purpose to the whole project. This exercise defines the owner’s energy needs and matches those with the optimum building envelope—or works with the existing one, as the case may be—and HVAC equipment.

Whether one is working on a new construction project or rehabilitating a historic structure, the idea that environmentally sound choices represent the best economic options available is compelling. Some cities and counties have begun to require LEED compliance for new construction for the dual reasons of economic efficiency and environmentally sound policy. The two benefits are becoming inseparable.

New Visitor Center Integrates Sustainable Design

The National Trust for Historic Preservation joined the green bandwagon several years ago in response to an internally generated mandate to pursue environmentally conscious policies and practices. William Dupont, chief architect for the Trust, suggested examining how sustainable design might be integrated into the rehabilitation of the Visitor Education Center for the President Lincoln and Soldiers’ Home National Monument. United Technologies Corporation (UTC) sponsored a one-day charrette on this topic for the Lincoln Cottage project in spring 2005. Charrette participants included representatives from the National Trust, UTC, Browning & Banning, LLC, Hillier Architecture, Loring Consulting Engineers, Robert Silman Engineers, and a few other invited guests. The team agreed that not only was a sustainable design feasible but that the adaptive use of this historic building could attain LEED certification at a minimum or possibly a higher ranking, even though the U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED Rating System does not offer guidelines for how historic properties may adopt sustainable design.

The construction project to rehabilitate the old building as a visitor center is about half complete. The guiding LEED-
Sustainable architecture does not always mean high tech. This historic photo of the Administration Building shows rolled awnings above the windows, which were unfurled to protect the interior from the summer sun. Photo courtesy of President Lincoln and Soldiers’ Home National Monument.

Compliant design reduces the need for new material and energy inputs, and reuses or recycles the historic fabric of the building. This approach maximizes the building’s so-called “embodied energy” and diminishes potential pollution. LEED standards instruct the building owner to use a commissioning agent, and this guideline makes excellent sense whether one is seeking LEED certification or not. The commissioning agent evaluates mechanical systems for their environmental and performance efficiencies in the design phase, verifies the systems during installation, and tests those same systems at intervals after installation and during full-functioning periods of use. Relying upon a commissioning agent’s dispassionate expertise greatly improves any owner’s chances of success in achieving long-term economic and environmental gains.

What follows here is a simple description, in list form, of the National Trust’s specific efforts to fulfill the LEED criteria at the Visitor Education Center. Worth mentioning is the fact that the Trust used the LEED NC (or “New Construction”) v2.2 criteria because there are no USGBC criteria that address the needs and concerns of historic structures. Within this framework, the Trust chose mechanical systems manufactured by the United Technologies Corporation that meet LEED standards and also Energy Star-rated equipment to complement these larger systems. All category headings that appear below are determined by the U.S. Green Building Council. Currently, the Trust is on track to qualify for a silver rating for this building. Each bullet point represents one or more points in the LEED rating system.

Sustainable Sites

- Promote connection between the building site and its immediate community within a half-mile radius; employees and visitors may use services such as restaurants, barbershops, banks, etc., that serve this zone.
- Emphasize access to historic site by handy public transportation (Metrobus and Metrorail).
- Provide bicycle storage area and changing room to encourage bicycle commuting by employees and tourism by bicycle.
- Improve storm water management to allow all water runoff to drain on site via bio-swales (similar to French drains in concept) which encourage direct downward filtration into groundwater rather than re-direction of runoff to municipal drainage system that feeds into regional watershed.

Water Efficiency

- Reduce water use by utilizing low flow aerators in sinks and shower.
- Reduce water use by utilizing automatic flow controls on faucets.
- Reduce water use on site by utilizing dual flush toilets.

Energy & Atmosphere

- Optimize energy performance by using UTC-designed high performance 55-ton chiller, fan coil units, computer room air conditioning unit, and energy recovery ventilation unit.
- Engage enhanced commissioning. With the assistance of a commissioning agent, the National Trust will verify that all systems are performing to highest efficiency for which they are designed once they are installed and operating.
- Implement enhanced refrigerant management; all refrigerants used in connection with United Technologies equipment will be free of HFC chemicals and, therefore, will not degrade the ozone layer.

Materials & Resources

- Reuse existing building (existing walls, roofs, floors) and thereby maximize reuse of the embodied energy and resources used in the original materials and construction of the building.
- Manage construction waste by segregating reusable materials from those going to landfill and diverting them to recycling.
- Use building materials with recycled content. The majority of materials used on the project specify a certain percentage of recycled content; this standard applies to steel, bathroom partitions, carpets, and numerous other materials.
- Use FSC certified wood, which is wood grown in an

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ecologically managed forest that treats the tree crop as a renewable resource and thereby helps preserve forest habitats.

**Indoor Environmental Quality**

- Increase ventilation. The UTC-designed energy recovery unit to be housed in the Visitor Education Center attic will provide increased ventilation by recapturing energy in the exhaust air to pre-condition the ventilation air, a process that results in greater ventilation without increased energy usage.
- Employ construction Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) management plan to ensure that the HVAC systems remain free of dust during construction phase and that the building remains free of mold due to construction activities.
- Use low volatile organic compound–emitting materials in paints, caulking, finishes, and carpets in order to reduce presence of harmful chemicals in the environment. Low VOC-emitting finishes offer a full spectrum of benefits; construction workers receive less exposure to potentially harmful chemicals during the build phase; building occupants enjoy more healthful daily surroundings; and museum or exhibit collections (frequently a component of historic sites) also may benefit from a less- or non-toxic environment.
- Provide individual control system for thermal comfort in work and public areas to enhance worker productivity and visitor comfort, respectively.
- Use as much natural light and views to the exterior environment as possible to reduce energy use and to enhance connection between people and their environment, respectively.

**Innovation and Design Process**

- Employ signage at the building site to educate visitors about LEED standards used in building design and rehabilitation. Some signs may highlight the positive contribution of UTC equipment in achieving the environmentally sustainable environment.
- Use “green” housekeeping –products to reduce introduction of harmful chemicals into the environment and to improve employee safety.

**Historic and Sustainable—Making the Connection**

Representatives of the National Trust, the Association for Preservation Technology, the American Institute of Architects, and the National Park Service will meet this year with leadership of the U.S. Green Building Council to address the lack of guidelines in LEED standards for integrating historic preservation with sustainable design. There’s a certain irony that historic buildings may be the last to be integrated into the new green standards since these very structures often epitomize best how to reduce, reuse, and recycle. There also exists a genuine opportunity for the U.S. Green Building Council to refine current LEED standards by adopting some basic practices common in the preservation field.

Historic buildings tend to include a wealth of sound traditional design that actually represents the foundation of what is considered green design today. Consider the Lincoln Cottage itself, built in 1842–3 for the private banker George Riggs as his principal residence in a then-rural part of the District of Columbia. Likely inspired by the comprehensive design theories for cottage dwellings conceived by Andrew J. Downing, the cottage contains many design elements that illustrate sustainable design principles:

- **Passive heating.** The structure is well-sited to maximize southern exposure of the sun to reduce the need for mechanically generated heat; a vestibule on the north side maximizes heat containment.

- **Passive cooling.** The covered porches on the south side reduce solar gain during the summer.

Lincoln Cottage itself incorporates many sustainable design elements, such as thick insulating walls, working windows and shutters, and covered porches. Photo courtesy of Robert C. Lautman Photography 2005.
enhance visitor enjoyment of the historic site.

The Lincoln Cottage and its adjacent Visitor Education Center offer an excellent case study for how historic structures truly can be at the center of the exploration to achieve sustainable design. The broad selection of original design features evident in both buildings might be overlooked by architects and engineers who are not attuned to seeking simple solutions in rehabbing historic buildings. Sustainable design and historic preservation work together naturally. Historic buildings tend to be green by definition, and they represent irreplaceable links to our cultural heritage as well as substantial investments in material and energy resources. With sensitivity and understanding, modern green building design and practices may be applied to historic properties, resulting in a higher standard of preservation for all.

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NOTES
4 EnergyStar is a government program sponsored jointly by the U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that rates products for their energy efficiency.

For further reading on this subject, see the January 2007 issue of Environmental Building News (16, no.1, at Building-Green.com) for a thoughtful analysis of how historic preservation and sustainable design both mesh and conflict.

Educating Preservationists: Mirroring the Movement

Late last year, at the National Preservation Conference in Pittsburgh, the National Council for Preservation Education (NCPE) approved new standards for non-degree granting historic preservation programs. The action reflected a recent trend in preservation education: the emergence nationwide of adult continuing education and short courses in historic preservation. The new standards are the manifestation of the mainstreaming of historic preservation and its emergence from an isolated field to a regular part of the social landscape. The same could be said of preservation itself.

Preservation education has evolved in concert with the preservation movement since the beginning. The very first preservation courses were created at the University of Virginia in 1957, followed by Columbia and Cornell universities in the 1960s. James Marston Fitch at Columbia was recognized as an early educational leader during a period of unprecedented activity in preservation. New York City was about to adopt a local landmarks ordinance, and the federal government was drafting the epochal National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966. The idea at the time was that many new preservation professionals would be needed to administer these new laws. The focus of preservation education was architectural preservation as it had evolved through the National Park Service’s Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) projects of the 1930s and 1960s.

Preservation education grew slowly as NHPA was implemented in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the first full-scale master’s degree programs in historic preservation emerged at that time. The National Trust for Historic Preservation conducted an assessment of preservation education in the late 1970s which recommended the formation of a national association to promote educational standards and support preser-
The NCPE standards, established in 1981, required each program to have a dedicated director, and, most importantly, require that students work beyond the classroom by serving an internship with an architectural office or a preservation agency or organization. By requiring this work experience as part of a degree program, preservation education was set apart from the traditional academic architectural history programs that preceded it. This reflected the influence of the activist preservation movement on the new field of preservation education.

The NCPE standards also outline a series of "specialized components" including architectural design, building materials technology, economics, law, planning, and curatorial issues. Each of these has grown in importance over the years, with most preservation degree programs requiring building materials technology, law, and planning. Real estate economics has recently become a much more important aspect of preservation curricula. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) introduced an elective course in Real Estate Economics six years ago and it has been one of our most successful electives.

Arguably the "specialized components" of preservation degrees have become de rigeur, at least in the full-time preservation degree programs.

Preservation Education Programs Expand to Meet New Needs

The number of educational programs offering historic preservation degrees—or certificates of emphasis in related degrees such as history, architecture, or planning—boomed through the 1980s and 1990s, from the initial 8 to more than 50. Perhaps the surprising aspect of this expansion was that it reflected a complete reversal of what the 1960s generation had envisioned. Rather than expanding, the federal role in historic preservation diminished in the wake of the Reagan Revolution. Even though more local communities adopted preservation ordinances and, many of which required trained preservation professionals, the expansion of the professional preservation field was driven by two non-governmental factors.

The first was the growth of the private sector in preservation. Preservation by the 1990s was no longer a movement promoted by a marginalized minority but a goal supported by the bulk of society. Lots of people were restoring older homes, patronizing Main Street businesses, and visiting heritage areas. Some 2,000 local communities had enacted preservation ordinances and, most importantly, old buildings had acquired economic cachet. A year ago the Wall Street Journal reported: "As the real-estate market begins to cool, a growing number of homeowners are seeking to boost their property values by getting their neighborhoods designated as historic districts. But the desire for historic designation has some communities touting characteristics with questionable preservation value."

Part of the economic cachet of historic buildings came from a shift in popular taste. Thanks to the efforts of preservation pioneers in the 1960s and 1970s, the picturesque forms of Victorian architecture became attractive again, and by the mid-1990s almost every architectural style was making a comeback. Complexity and contradiction were back in vogue. Not only that, but the preservation movement itself had driven architectural historians into
programs, who had the knowledge to list buildings in the National Register, apply for tax credits through state historic preservation offices, and secure local landmark designation or state or county tax incentives. Architectural offices, developers, and new consultancies began to employ historic preservation graduates. My experience in recent years is that at least half of our Master of Science in Historic Preservation alumni from SAIC work for private companies.

The second factor driving the growth of new preservation degrees in the 1990s was the growth in the educational market itself. Schools expanded and added programs as more people required or sought retraining for the new service economy. Graduate degree programs regularly prepare people for second or third careers. Historic preservation had the added attraction of being a self-rewarding career choice in the minds of many. People who became involved in preservation as volunteers and advocates determined that they should make their avocation their vocation. It was “something they always wanted to do.”

As the number of programs expanded in the late 20th century, the nature of those programs expanded as well. New preservation projects such as the emergence of the heritage area movement in the mid-1980s led to more courses dealing with cultural landscapes and diverse, non-traditional resources. Students were no longer content to learn the HABS traditions of architectural documentation but also needed to understand community planning, advocacy, and the interrelationships between buildings, people, and the environment. Archeology, landscape design, and industrial heritage assumed a more prominent role in preservation curricula, just as they did in preservation practice.

A Generational Shift Brings New Focus

Preservation education also pushed the preservation movement into new arenas. “The Recent Past” appeared in academia before making significant inroads into the preservation movement as a whole.1 I recall a moment in 1999 when I informed staff of a statewide preservation group that the course From Lustron to Neon: Preserving the Recent Past was our most popular elective and they responded that their membership ranked the recent past near the bottom of the priority list. Clearly, a generational shift was taking place.

This shift may explain the growth of undergraduate preservation programs, which responded both to the interests of preservation educators and to a new generation of students for whom historic preservation was an intriguing way to explore the liberal arts at a baccalaureate level. And it is. Historical research, forensic science, street-level experience, and the fundamentals of drawing and design make preservation the ideal interdisciplinary educational model—one that has even been employed at the elementary and high school levels. Ursuline College in Ohio recently developed a program that takes the basic NCPE requirements for degree programs and uses them as a “bridge” between their undergraduate and graduate preservation programs.

What many of the educators, including myself, did not foresee was the sudden growth of non-degree programs, usually called “certificates.” The terminology is confusing because many “traditional” preservation programs—like those at the University of Virginia or University of Cincinnati—are called “certificates” and awarded along with a degree in architecture. The new certificates are just that—they aren’t enough credits for a degree, but they do offer important opportunities, especially for professionals or other adults who don’t have the time or need to complete a full degree program. For the local landmarks commissioner who is learning preservation “on the job” or the contractor who wants to have a marketing edge in a historic town, these new certificates respond to the continuing interest in the rehabilitation of historic buildings.

More and more historic preservation programs are offering summer field schools, both in the United States and abroad. Field schools offer a student hands-on opportunities to actually restore or rehabilitate a historic building. Some programs specialize in this sort of skill training, including most notably Belmont Technical College in Ohio. Still, most preservation programs are professional degrees and while hands-on experience is a vital part of learning, most graduates don’t become craftspeople. From an educational point of view, however, there is no substitute for actually building—or unbuilding—something if you want to understand it.
Future Opportunities and Challenges

What about the future? The current housing slump may have taken the luster off of a real estate market that has been an engine for preservation education for the past 30 years, but there is still huge room for growth. For one thing, the market penetration of preservation professionals has been miniscule; the market could continue to slump while preservation could register double-digit annual gains—akin to the phenomenon of microbreweries, which have expanded exponentially even as the total beer market flattens or falls.

More importantly, preservation is uniquely poised to benefit from the latest trend in architecture and building—sustainability. With the biggest portion of landfills coming from construction debris, the preservation of existing buildings is inherently the most sustainable option, especially if one retains not just the shell of a landmark but the old-growth wood windows, brick cavity-walls, hardwood floors, and sound-absorbing plaster of pre-1940 buildings. New construction will always have a greater “carbon footprint” impact on the environment than a building built in 1890 or 1920.

This reality is doubtless one of several factors that led the American Institute of Architects’ Historic Resources Committee to undertake a new initiative in 2003 to highlight the role of preservation in architectural education. This impressive initiative includes the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA), National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (NCPTT), American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS), National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB), and National Council for Preservation Education (NCPE). According to many, the effort has already had an impact on architectural education in this country. Despite many longtime preservation programs in architecture schools, most architectural training does not deal with preservation, even though a large proportion of all architectural commissions are for existing buildings. As AIA Historic Resources Committee Chair Jack Pyburn, FAIA, has written, “architecture was, at best, largely ambivalent toward the existing built fabric and the values of historic preservation.” Conversely, preservation degree programs generally did not deal with the design process.

The mutual lack of understanding between preservationists and architects created a gulf in the design review process. Design review is the heart of preservation at the local, state, and national level, but too often the results are architecturally bland interventions and additions that mimic historic detailing. The age-old battle between the art of architecture and the fashion of style has played out in this gulf of misunderstanding. As Pyburn wrote: “Before we can move forward we must acknowledge that, generally, architects have a limited understanding of and respect for historically significant resources, and preservationists have an inadequate underpinning in design and aesthetics.”

Pyburn has called for a “bigger intellectual platform” that is shared across the many professions that make up preservation practice.

The practical challenge for preservationists is to allow for architectural projects that are not slavish imitators of the past but genuinely contemporary expressions, which in fact is what Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation #9 says. The practical challenge for architects is to accept existing buildings as environmentally and culturally sustainable resources that are considered at the beginning of the design process, not as a tangent or afterthought.

The answer for architectural education is to integrate preservation into the design studio portion of a very packed curriculum, and the answer for preservation degrees is to bring an understanding of design into the interdisciplinary preservation curriculum.

The preservation movement has had a sustained and positive impact on these trends, as more and more architects and architectural educators develop an appreciation of preservation not embraced by an earlier generation.

Last fall I participated in a National Trust symposium in Milwaukee on the issue of additions to historic buildings that laid bare many of the subcutaneous fissures between the architecture and preservation communities. In the case study I presented, the Milton House in Milton, Wis.—the earliest concrete structure in the nation (1844), an Underground Railroad site and National Historic Landmark—a modern addition was planned where a portion of the building had collapsed in the 1940s. The Milton Historical Society and state historic preservation office fought over the addition design and the result was reviled by all. The gulf of misunderstanding and miscommunication between preservation officials, architects, and museum professionals was huge. Preservation officers failed to understand design issues; museum professionals failed to comprehend visual

For many students, historic preservation—which involves historical research, forensic science, street-level experience, and drawing and design—offers an intriguing way to explore the liberal arts. Photo by Don Linebaugh, University of Maryland.
issues; and the architects were following a different set of guidelines than the reviewers. A shared intellectual platform was sadly lacking. The Milton House management was alienated from a preservation review it saw as insensitive, bureaucratic, and mechanical.

The biggest challenge to preservation education, and to the preservation movement, is how to occupy the center stage after two generations in the wings. Preservationists and preservation educators must let go of the model of preservation as an arcane regulatory practice and accept what we have in fact created in our schools and in our communities: preservation as a fundamental liberal art and a shared value in civil society.

The cultural and aesthetic substance of historic preservation is a value held by most Americans, not a minority. It is a physical manifestation of our culture and thus should be central to professional architectural, landscape architectural, and planning education and practice, not tangential. It is not “related” to architecture and zoning and real estate economics and public history; it is integral to architecture and zoning and real estate economics and public history. Now 40 years after the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act and 25 years after the founding of the National Council for Preservation Education it is time to acknowledge our success and accept the AIA’s challenge to make preservation an integrated aspect of architecture and the dynamic of the built environment.

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NOTES


3 Jack Pyburn notes that the international organization DOCOMOMO (which now stands for Documentation and Conservation of buildings, sites, and neighborhoods of the Modern Movement) started in Holland—in academia—in the late 1980s.


5 Pyburn, “Historic Preservation in Architectural Education.”