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Introduction

Byrd Wood

This past summer, my family visited Colonial Pemaquid State Historic Site in Maine. Situated where one of northern New England’s earliest communities once stood, this historic site includes a small museum, a replica of the 1692 fort, a restored 18th-century home, stone foundations of earlier buildings, and a small burial ground.

On arrival, we scattered, with children heading to the museum and fort, some of us pausing to read the interpretive markers at the archeological sites, and others just content to gaze at the view of the ocean and fishing boats.

We all enjoyed and learned something from our visit. In the museum, a small-scale model of the 17th-century settlement helped my 11-year-old nephew understand what the site might have looked like. A display of artifacts—from musket balls to fishing hooks—uncovered by recent archeological excavations helped my son comprehend the range of activities that took place on the peninsula. The ongoing work in the archeology lab, located in the Fort House, can be observed by visitors, and all of us watched as museum staff cleaned and cataloged various artifacts. The view from the stone fort, which is a replica built in 1907 on the site of two previous forts, helped us imagine what it might have been like in the 17th century to guard the waters to the Pemaquid River and beyond.

How authentic was our experience? As is often the case at many historic sites it was a mixed bag of restoration, reconstruction, rehabilitation, artifacts on exhibit, interpretive signs, and so on. The “new” fort is almost 100 years old, but is only a replica of a much earlier fort. The model of the pioneer settlement is just conjecture. The china plates and fishing hooks in the museum were certainly real enough but removed from reality by being put on display. The stone foundations give the location and size of earlier structures and interpretive signs suggest what the buildings might have looked like. And the view toward the ocean, with granite shores and circling seabirds, hasn’t changed much in 300 years.

Making a historic site real or authentic for visitors is not always simple. As the following articles will show, there are many ways of providing an authentic experience for visitors. Complete restoration of a site may be the right thing to do in some circumstances, while in others reconstruction is the correct approach. Conservation or stabilization of existing historic fabric is yet another course of action. In his article about Lincoln Cottage, National Trust architect William Dupont explains how the Trust is thinking through all of these options as it considers the best approach to preserving this national landmark.

New technologies allow architects and archeologists to discover things that they might not have been able to detect using earlier research methods, thus filling in information gaps or even rendering a prior interpretation out of date. Mark Wenger and Myron Stachiw explain how an intensive year-long investigation of Montpelier incorporated state-of-the-art technology to develop a comprehensive picture of the home of James Madison. No investigation of this type has ever been completed with such thoroughness in such a short amount of time with the research team providing unprecedented levels of intensity and concentrated brainpower.

The archeological record is often the most accurate documentation of a site, yet as Esther White points out in her article on Mount Vernon, this authentic information is sometimes subject to compromises and simplification in order to help the public understand and learn from a historic place.

For some cultures, the concept of authenticity goes further than restoring or rehabilitating buildings. Dennis Playdon describes how the preservation efforts at the Pueblo at Acoma are tied to enabling the Acoma people to preserve and practice their own cultural traditions of building, visual thinking, and language.

How we decide to care for and interpret historic sites is an important component in teaching the public about our heritage. And, according to recent tourism studies, visitors to authentic places look for an authentic experience. As Cheryl Hargrove explains in her article on heritage tourism, when authenticity is compromised, cultural heritage tourism loses credibility.

Whatever the approach, visitors should feel a sense of wonder and a connectedness with the past as they explore the rich heritage that this country’s historic sites have to offer.

Byrd Wood is the program manager for National Trust Forum. Our thanks to the staff from the National Trust’s Office of the Stewardship of Historic Properties, especially James Vaughan, William Dupont, and Mac candlish-ganey for their guidance in helping us to produce this issue.
A Place for Authenticity at Lincoln Cottage

William A. Dupont, AIA

What is authenticity at a historic place? One might speak of an authentic portrayal of society, authentic reproduction furniture, or authentic ethnic food, but these are interpretations, copies, or recipes that can be repeated any place at will. Authenticity as concerns a historic place with existing physical material is different. A place with authenticity must have some reality that has survived from a past time. A built thing, be it a car, landscape feature, or whole building, is authentic only if it retains a high percentage of material that is essentially unaltered.

Authenticity as concerns a building is a relative thing, though, because the amount of it present can be variable. Historic preservation professionals often use another term, integrity, to describe the amount of authenticity, because there is an embodied truth and honesty within a physical thing when it is authentic. Something authentic is said to have high integrity. A historic place that is authentic usually is considered to have higher cultural value than a comparable place with less integrity. Unaltered building fabric is appealing because it has unsailable integrity. For confirmation, ask a house museum professional how often visitors want to be assured that the furniture is authentic and genuine. While visitors are tolerant of reproductions, real antiques that were used by the past occupants of the house engender greater satisfaction. There is always a slight disappointment and a little skepticism if things are otherwise.

There is a little-known place within Washington, D.C., about three miles northeast of the White House and on axis with the U.S. Capitol, where several presidents of the United States resided seasonally during the second half of the 19th century. This place, which functioned something like today’s Camp David in Maryland, was purchased and developed to be a Soldiers’ Home in 1851. Now it is called the Armed Forces Retirement Home, an independent federal agency, with nearly 1,200 in residence. In the early 1860s, when the nation was engaged in the Civil War and Washington was ringed by more than 65 forts, fewer than 200 retired enlisted soldiers lived as “inmates” at the Home.

Being the third highest point in Washington, comprising 300 acres, and having a gothic revival style “cottage” on its grounds, the site attracted the interest of President Abraham Lincoln and his family. President Lincoln lived there seasonally from 1862 through 1864, commuting to work daily on horseback or by carriage. Added together, Lincoln spent nearly one quarter of his presidency working from the Soldiers’ Home.

In 2000 President Clinton designated the Cottage and immediate environs to be the President Lincoln and Soldiers’ Home National Monument. Also in 2000 the Armed Forces Retirement Home began a formal partnership with the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The partnership outlines goals for the National Trust to create one of the premier historic places in the country for education on the Lincoln presidency. This Cottage where Lincoln resided during the drafting of the Emancipation Proclamation has overwhelming significance, and is the last great, untouched Lincoln site in the country. The National Trust has completed or commissioned tremendous quantities of new research, assessments, and planning reports; led focused physical investigations; convened numerous advisory committees; and commenced a comprehensive interpretive planning process. As this process has advanced, the subject of authenticity has become a background theme to the development of the main objective—providing a transformative educational experience.

An early photograph from Mary Lincoln’s family album shows the south facade of the cottage, ca. 1862-1864. Photo courtesy of the Lincoln Museum, Ft. Wayne, Ind., #3993.
Authenticity and the President Lincoln and Soldiers’ Home National Monument

Over the years, the Cottage where President Lincoln resided has been treated with great respect, and it survives largely intact from the period of his occupancy. But layers of newer materials such as paint and flooring have built up on the interior, and some architectural features have been slightly modified or removed for the various functions the Cottage has served since Lincoln’s assassination. In most instances, these changes can be peeled back or cut away to reveal earlier, surviving material that has been encapsulated for a century or more. This layer from a past time is authentic substance from the Lincoln period, and it provides a palpable connection between the modern-day visitor and the past.

As the research and investigation has proceeded on the Lincoln Cottage, casual observations of visitors who tour through the building have provoked the National Trust to consider a new manner of preserving this historic place. Visitors’ reactions to the Cottage in its current unrestored condition—responding to it as if it were an undiscovered relic or some form of buried treasure—spurred the new thinking. Many visitors profess to a pleasant feeling, perhaps a type of wonderment, sometimes described as a “shiver.” Visitors get this feeling when genuine Lincoln-era material is noted, and especially when there is contact with certain components of the building. Features such as the fireplace mantels, handrails, stair treads, paints, and floors that survive from the mid-19th century are a source of interest and excitement for visitors.

Whatever the reasons behind this “shiver,” the value of its significance should not be overlooked or dismissed. One must remember that a historic place like the Lincoln Cottage is developed and opened to the public for educational purposes. Anything that advances the educational aspect of the mission should be retained or enhanced. This shiver, this very slight alteration of the visitors’ emotional state, can have tremendous positive effects:

• First, the visitors can realize, perhaps only unconsciously, that things built in the past are a form of evidence, a primary source that should be studied, understood, and retained for the future. This recognition fosters an appreciation of historic places as the tangible remains of history.

• Second, the visitors can experience a sense of wonderment and childlike discovery that momentarily suspends time and disbelief, in which past events and people are suddenly recognized in a more immediate manner, and the simple piece of wood or marble that lacked any significant meaning seconds ago transforms into a precious relic that “witnessed” great events.

• Third, the accretions, or layers of time, from periods before and after Lincoln’s occupancy, and the patterns of wear on those layers, can deepen visitors’ appreciation of the passage of time.

• And finally, the exposure of authentic material can add depth and weight to the visitors’ learning experience because it fosters a direct connection to the past without mediation or interpretation.

Restoration Reconsidered

Due to the nature of the historic preservation field over the past few decades, there is a natural tendency to consider thorough restoration of a site like the Lincoln Cottage as the best and most appropriate treatment. A restoration that turns the hands on the clock of time back to the way things were during Lincoln’s occupancy would be technically difficult, but perhaps feasible, and could offer a wonderful representation of architectural finishes in the pristine condition they likely would have been in when Lincoln lived there. But there would be missed opportunities and certain downsides to this approach. A restoration conceals earlier paint under fresh coats; fills in missing gaps with new, sometimes conjectural, material; and creates an overall appearance that lacks patina or any sense of age. In the process, the relic, our buried treasure in a perpetual state of discovery, is given up to a clean and neat version of what we suppose Lincoln would have seen.

The pristine condition creates a potentially “inauthentic” visitor experience because it is so fresh and new. Almost any restoration treatment has an inherent aspect of conjecture, in part because it usually obscures and sometimes destroys authentic substance in an effort to “lock in” on one particular moment in time. The feeling of age is often removed by restoration because the intent is to look
The south facade of the cottage as it appeared in 2001. The architectural form of the cottage is unchanged from the period of Lincoln’s occupancy (1862-64), with the exception of a porch expansion completed in the 1890s. Photo: Robert C. Lautman Photography.

The benefits of good restoration must not be too quickly dismissed either. Although always imbued with some guesswork, restoration can be a good and appropriate treatment under the right circumstances. The first and most important criterion of good restoration is knowledge. Conjecture is bad in restoration, and past a certain point, completely unacceptable. Stewards of historic places, like all teachers of history, have an obligation to be truthful. We can fill in minor, missing gaps here and there, but broad fabrication would run counter to the principles of good scholarship and proper education in a free society. There is nothing wrong with historical fiction when openly acknowledged, but it cannot be the basis for physical changes at a historic site that bills itself as a place where real history happened.

Accurate knowledge based on primary sources coupled with solid physical evidence can result in a high degree of certainty about how something appeared at an earlier time. Photos and drawings are better evidence than narrative accounts, but when missing material or finishes must be recreated, absolute certainty is never possible no matter how good the primary sources. With good knowledge a restoration can be deemed technically feasible, but not necessarily desirable or appropriate. There are more things to consider because no restoration can be attained without penalty. The gains require losses, because the later periods must be physically removed or otherwise expunged from the record.

To be desirable, the restored thing must offer something which the existing condition cannot achieve. Posed as a question, the would-be restorers of historic sites should ask themselves if they could achieve their educational objectives without restoration. If the answer is yes, stop the process here and save yourself any further aggravation and expense. If the answer is no, because the thing requires restoration to be properly understood or appreciated, then the more tricky issue of appropriateness must be addressed.

This is a subjective zone, but basically one must weigh the loss of the later fabric against the gain of the period to be restored. As the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards remind us, the later fabric has likely gained historical significance in its own right. The record of change over time, the diachronic value of historic places as historian David Lowenthal describes it, is a powerful thing that merits proper consideration and treatment.

At Lincoln Cottage, there are good reasons to restore some interior rooms that might pass the test for restoration treatment described above. Although the investigation is still in progress, we can safely assume for this article that we will have sufficient knowledge in some rooms for a restoration to be technically feasible without excessive conjecture. Certainly visitors would gain much educational value if they could understand a little more about how the place really looked when Lincoln was present.

We will never have furnishings, we don’t know what was kept there, and wallpaper scraps have not yet been (and may never be) found, so a full interior restoration, with all the trappings, cannot be achieved. But the architecture of some rooms could be restored. Period, reproduction furniture could be installed in a few rooms as a sample of how things might have looked in the 1860s. Yes, this would be conjectural, but perhaps successful as part of an interpretive exhibit if honestly presented. Reproductions are nice because visitors can touch and sit on things, plus the climate management approach does not have to accommodate priceless, antique objects.

As to the question of overall appropriateness for restoration, there may be some cause for concern. Several
other presidents used the site after Lincoln, and removal of all the layers in all the rooms would deny the story of historical progression that connects today to a chain of yesterdays.

The National Trust could justifiably push forward in the direction of a restoration at Lincoln Cottage. But maybe we should not be so hasty to make what appears to be a simple choice. A full interior restoration, if deemed feasible, desirable, and appropriate could always be done at a later date anyway. The authentic stuff is here now, and could never again be brought back to its current state after a restoration. So why not take the opportunity to deliberately explore an innovative philosophy for the treatment of a historic site?

But if not a total restoration of the interior, then what physical treatment is appropriate as well as comprehensible? A 100 percent exposure (without restoration) of all that survives from the Lincoln period and complete removal of material from all subsequent periods is neither feasible nor desirable. The result at Lincoln Cottage would display too many gaps and holes, plus swaths of missing material including such essential items as the steps that carry one from the entrance door up to the first floor. From the visitors’ perspective, the appearance would probably be incomprehensible. Plus, a removal of subsequent layers would destroy the context and deny the meaning that can be derived from viewing the layers of change that so eloquently demonstrate the passage of time.

**Top Layer Conservation at Drayton Hall**

The standard range of treatments for historic museum properties in the U.S. does not include selective exposure of authentic substance. The closest conventional treatment would be “preservation,” as defined by The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (rev. 1995).

A frequently cited example of this treatment is at Drayton Hall in South Carolina where the objective is purely to preserve the existing condition (the top layer of history) with as little modification as possible, as it was donated to the National Trust in 1975. This approach works brilliantly at Drayton Hall because it is an authentic survivor. This is perhaps its single greatest attribute and may account for its stunning appeal as a historic site. Earthquakes, hurricanes, the Civil War, and seven generations of Drayton family occupation have caused some changes, but none that diminish its meaning or cultural value. The main house has been maintained in its near original condition (first built 1738-42) without electricity, plumbing, or any other modern mechanical systems or utilities. With the building left unfurnished, the architecture has the strength to stand alone as a resource. The house is the primary artifact on the site.

Back in 1975, scholars and preservation professionals convened to establish an appropriate philosophy that would guide the National Trust in the care and stewardship of this unusual site. They came up with the term “sensitive stabilization.” By this they meant that there should be no restoration, only conservation of the building in the basic condition it was received by the National Trust. Today the staff conference room at the site contains a framed poster on which are written the words: “We choose to preserve Drayton Hall as it has come down to us through seven generations of Draytons rather than to restore it to any particular period in time.” This treatment philosophy fits the Secretary’s Standards for Preservation almost perfectly.

The preservation philosophy as practiced at Drayton Hall is not without minor complications and contradictions. One must remember that no treatment is ever 100 percent pure and true. Little, necessary evils creep in to accommodate the public use, for instance. Rugs cover portions of the floor to protect it from abrasion. Mud daubers (a type of flying insect) occasionally build nests on the interior.
qualities of the interior. And a true preservation treatment as practiced at Drayton Hall would mean leaving the building with these modern intrusions and without any exposure of earlier material covered by subsequent paints and finishes. So the traditionally accepted restoration treatment is acceptable and perhaps feasible, but is not desirable or appropriate for the whole interior. And the preservation treatment as practiced at Drayton Hall is not appropriate for Lincoln Cottage. An innovative treatment is in order, and authenticity may hold the key to a workable approach. If a new line of thinking is to develop around the premise that authentic substance can be selectively exposed and conserved (but not restored to an earlier appearance), several questions must be answered.

• How to give visitors access to authentic substance, so that all may enjoy the benefits of its exposure, yet protect it from excessive wear? Historic sites like the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City struggle with this dilemma on a daily basis, as visitor traffic grinds down authentic stairs, wall finishes, and floors.

• How to treat the post-Lincoln-period layers with respect and yet not allow them to detract from the more significant Lincoln period? Although we put a much higher value on the Lincoln period of occupancy, all the layers have historic significance.

• How to rationalize the appearance of the interior, which will deviate from accepted preservation norms by exposing layers “that never existed together historically” (from Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Restoration, #7)? Or, put another way, how to determine the extent and location of exposures to reveal meaningful fabric in a purposeful manner? The areas revealed must be carefully chosen in full acknowledgement that the objectives are to maximize the educational value and potential for a transforming experience.

Authenticity and a New Type of Preservation Treatment

Unlike at Drayton Hall, a decision to conserve Lincoln Cottage as it was when the National Trust, in partnership with the Armed Forces Retirement Home, commenced plans to make it a public resource would bring quite a disappointing result. The existing fluorescent light fixtures, vinyl tile floors, and exposed plumbing all combine to detract from the more important historic

With Drayton Hall left unfurnished, its architecture has the strength to stand alone as a historic resource.

Photo by Ron Blunt/courtesy of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
tigation and a lot of documentation will need to precede any restoration.

As part of the “authentic substance” treatment the vast majority of the house can be retained almost “as is,” except with selective exposures left open to show all the authentic layers of the past. In these zones, the educational story would not be about architecture or living style but about people, events, and ideas. When completed, the National Trust hopes the President Lincoln and Soldiers’ Home National Monument will be highly innovative and unlike any standard house museum in operation.

Due to the overwhelming significance and national monument status of this site, an open process of decision-making needs to be followed. This article is one of several efforts in this direction. The National Trust has already hosted numerous planning meetings with a wide variety of experts in the fields of history, preservation, and museum management. The inclusion of outside advisors will continue as we focus on plans for the physical treatment of the interior. An advisory committee on authenticity at historic places will be formed, and if time and funding allow, the work of this group will include a broader exploration of the topic which will spark discussion across all the related fields. If creativity and innovative thought can result in historic places that are presented in more meaningful and relevant ways, that would be a welcome side effect to our work at Lincoln Cottage.

This 2003 photo of the Lincoln Cottage interior shows areas of floor disassembly executed to reveal the existence and condition of “first build” floors, as well as the chronology of construction. With the exception of two walls added and one removed in the 1920s, the floor plan is unaltered from the 1862-64 period. Photo: Robert C. Lautman Photography.
Recent Investigations at Montpelier

Mark R. Wenger and Myron O. Stachiw

The following article describes one of the most exciting periods in the stewardship of a historic home, the unraveling of the mysteries that time and change bind up in its fabric. Montpelier has been fortunate to have the consummate professionalism of Mark Wenger as chief sleuth for this job, seconded by Myron Stachiw. Mark and Myron’s unyielding drive for excellence, their meticulous approach to research and physical investigation, and their experience and inspired speculation have led our research team to conduct an investigation that stands as a model for stewards of all historic homes, whether public or private. The Montpelier Foundation is grateful that this project was so generously supported by the estate of Mr. Paul Mellon. And we are very pleased that the excellence of the Montpelier investigation has been recognized by the Vernacular Architecture Forum with its prestigious Paul E. Buchanan award.

This type of investigation is the most critical step in planning for the future of a historic home. No proper decision about a historic building can be made in the absence of a fact-based understanding of its construction history.

Montpelier is already benefiting from the investigation. The knowledge it provides has reshaped our interpretation for visitors and altered some of the routine jobs of maintenance and repair. Most importantly, the investigation has given confidence to our long-range planning, as the fact that the Madison home survives and can be authentically restored enables the foundation and the National Trust to tackle the task of envisioning Montpelier’s future.

Michael C. Quinn, president, The Montpelier Foundation

On the morning of September 30, 2002, a weary band of sleuths clambered into the back of a pickup truck, heading for the office of Montpelier Foundation president Michael Quinn. They had just completed an 11-month survey of James and Dolley Madison’s celebrated house in Virginia, funded through a grant from the estate of Paul Mellon. The mood in the truck was festive, for now the fruits of that study—more than 2,500 pages in 15 bound volumes—were to be deposited on Mike Quinn’s sofa.

The declared goal of this report fully warranted its bulk and cost. Our charge was to characterize James Madison’s house and to assess whether the information was sufficient to support its full restoration. To conduct the necessary investigations, the Montpelier Foundation enlisted the assistance of architectural historians at Colonial Williamsburg. In November of 2001 staff members from both organizations began the enormous task of detailing Montpelier’s physical history. On the Colonial Williamsburg side, consultant Myron Stachiw and CW historian Mark R. Wenger co-directed the probe, while Montpelier staffers Maya Berrera, Felicity Blundon, Jeff Carey, Misty Eppard, Todd Gordon, John Jeanes, Alfredo Maul, and Maggie Wilson completed the survey team.

The investigation undertaken by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation was the fourth major effort to trace the story of Montpelier’s evolution and continued the foundation’s episodic investigations conducted between 1997 and 2001. The findings of these earlier scholars greatly informed our investigations and were incorporated into the final interpretation. These included research and an exhibition by Conover Hunt-Jones in 1977 that identified the three major phases of construction and developed plans of those phases by Frederick D. Nichols and Nicholas A. Pappas; a survey of the building’s fabric by Winston-Salem architects Charles Phillips and Joe Opperman, together with Colonial Williamsburg’s retired director of architectural research, Paul Buchanan; and a historic structure report (1990) by historian Ann L. Miller that compiled documentary evidence regarding Montpelier, followed by physical investigations of the building between 1990 and 1993 by Miller and Larry Dermody, an archeologist with the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The most recent investigations involved methods that have come to be known as “building archeology.” While traditional archeological excavations occur primarily in the ground, building archeology treats the entire building—floor, walls, and ceilings—as an archeological site. Princi-
While traditional archeological excavations occur primarily in the ground, building archeology treats the entire building—floor, walls, and ceilings—as an archeological site.

Because of the limited goals of the project and the challenging schedule for its completion, our study focused on a 27-year period between 1809 and 1836. Post-Madison alterations (including extensive ones by William duPont and later his daughter Marion duPont Scott, the owners from 1901 to 1983) were considered only to the degree that was necessary to disentangle them from the other, earlier periods of construction. Thus, the resulting report cannot portray to be a complete history. Yet it has answered many important questions about the appearance and character of Montpelier during the years before and after James Madison’s ownership.

Although the report focuses on James Madison’s era, a brief summary of the history of the house will help put the research efforts in context. The earliest part of Montpelier was a simple eight-room, brick house built around 1760. Over the years it has gone through many changes. In 1797 a four-room addition was added. Between 1809 and 1812 (the time period that was the main focus of research), James Madison renovated the house and added one-story wings at each end. Dolley Madison sold the house in 1844 and subsequent owners made numerous additions and renovations to it. The property was purchased in 1901 by William duPont, Sr., and over the next couple of years, the home was nearly doubled in size. Thus researchers had the challenge of untangling 250 years of additions and alterations.

Summary Findings on the Exterior

Like the studies that preceded it, this investigation produced numerous exciting discoveries. Many aspects of Montpelier’s external appearance now come into sharper focus. The roof coverings employed on all portions of the house are now known—that of the main house and portico consisted of round-butt wooden shingles, judging from examples recovered in the attic. Most gratifying, however, was new information concerning the “flat” roofs that originally covered the north and south wings. Previously known through graphic (paintings and drawings) and documentary evidence, the exact character of these roofs had long been a matter of speculation. Now physical evidence has revealed their precise height and slope, the thickness of their sheet-metal coverings, the height and slope of the decking applied over them, and the profile of the cornice that dressed their edges—despite the fact that the original roofs have long since been replaced. Equally important, it was determined that these roofs remained in place throughout Madison’s lifetime. The character of Montpelier’s early windows and doorways has also been clarified. Virtually all Madison-era doors and windows have been located precisely and their place in Montpelier’s architectural chronology established, including a number of long-vanished openings. Heretofore unknown was James Madison’s reconstruc-

Visitors to Montpelier today see a home that has doubled in size from when the Madisons lived there. Photo by Carol Highsmith.
Early Periods of Montpelier Construction

Period I – c. 1760, James Madison, Sr.

Period II – 1797-1800, James Madison, Jr.

Period III – 1809-1812, James Madison, Jr.

Researchers have divided early periods of Montpelier's construction into three periods. Period III, up until the time of James Madison's death in 1836, is the target period for the restoration effort. Madison was the 4th president of the United States, 1809-1817. Drawing courtesy of the Montpelier Foundation.

Period I front windows that preceded these openings have been located and their positions precisely recorded. By 1811 most of the windows were protected by louvered or "Venetian" shutters. Analysis of the 1809-12 building accounts revealed that builders James Dinsmore and John Neilson built shutters for nearly all first- and second-floor windows except those shaded by the front portico. Of the doors, only the "Venetian doorway" above the colonnade was afforded this protection. Physical and graphic evidence reveals that these shutters were not hung in double tiers as at Monticello. Rather, a single, louvered blind hung on each side of every window.

Judging from an unaltered example under the portico, the original windows were much smaller than those we see today. In the cellar of the main house these windows had no provision for a sash—lunette windows were fitted with an operable glazed sash. Still on the front of the house, investigations in the attic have shown that the lunette window on the front of the portico is not original. It seems to have been added between 1818 and 1836 when the earliest dated view to depict the window was published. Investigations of the exterior may further narrow the period in which it was installed.

At the base of the portico, excavations located remains of a base for giant Tuscan columns. (Originally, these bases stood just above the deck of the portico.) Fixing the height of this point has allowed the architects to locate the bottom of the original column base, thus fixing the original height of the porch deck. Viewed in concert with the building accounts, this dimension numbers the number of risers from the deck to the ground and so allows us to approximate the elevation for exterior grade during Madison's lifetime.

On the rear facade, the Madison-era colonnade remains essentially intact, retaining most of its original framing on both levels—a breath-taking survival given the highly vulnerable location of this appendage. The doorways and windows opening onto the lower level and a "Venetian doorway" opening onto the upper deck were all confirmed as early features (though the present exterior trim of the upper doorway is modern).

Above and to the north of the Venetian doorway two dormers—previously unassigned in the Montpelier chronology—may date as early as 1860 judging from their construction and from the evidence offered by an early photograph.

Perhaps the most dramatic discovery on the exterior was that concerning the stucco finish of the dwelling—it post-dates James Madison's lifetime. Physical evidence ties it to a mid-19th-century building campaign that included the closing of many windows and doorways, revision of the portico, rehabilitation of the cellar, construction of new hipped roofs on the wings, and covering of the entire house with a standing-seam metal roof. To a degree we had not fully appreciated, Thomas and Frank Carson of Baltimore transformed Montpelier's outward aspect around 1860.

Archeology has been a nearly continuous source of revelation about the larger setting in which James Madison's house stood—lawns, gardens, outbuildings, work areas, fencing, paths, ravines—even a moat! (actually an areaway that ran across the rear of the house). This part of the investigation was planned and conducted by Montpelier's director of archeology, Dr. Matthew Reeves. Based on an intensive survey in the vicinity of the dwelling, coupled with carefully targeted excavations and the discovery of an early insurance plat, the archeology team has begun to explain where things were, how the site evolved, and how these changes affected the dwelling. Inside the house, excavations in the cellar uncovered important new evidence concerning that neglected space and its relationship to the rooms above.

Interior investigations were equally fruitful in other areas of the house. The disposition of all rooms and the circulation between them has been determined—virtually every doorway, window, wall, chimney, and hearth has been located and its original size worked out. The need for precise dimensional information in advance of potential restoration drove our investigation and set it apart from earlier studies. Where early features had disappeared, it was important to establish locations, widths, and heights as exactly as the evidence allowed.

Where physical evidence failed us, James Dinsmore's remarkable building accounts, based on his own careful meas-
urement of the work, often provided the answers we sought. Researchers analyzed these records, comparing the quantities of moldings and other components called for in the accounts with those actually present. In James Madison’s chamber (M-104 now used as a stair hall). This comparison revealed that the embrasure of a vanished rear window had extended to the floor, rather than stopping at a window seat. In the same space, Dinsmore’s measurements showed that the window beside the chimney stopped at the sill, and that it was only two lights wide—an arrangement that correlated with astonishing accuracy to the available space between the chimney and the corner of the room. In the room directly above, it became clear that the corresponding second-floor window was three lights wide—a consequence of the narrower chimney mass on the upper floor.

Sometimes graphic evidence allowed us to interpret the documents correctly. Near the end of the project, an early photo of Madison’s chamber, which was heretofore unknown to us, showed a doorway that we had missed, and thus accounted for surplus door trim in the Dinsmore account—a problem that had tormented us for months.

Two major stairways, formerly black holes in our understanding of the house, can now be reconstructed spatially, and some aspects of their finish determined. The tread and riser of the Period I stair (M-110) have been fixed within a narrow margin, and the character of its finishes (exclusive of the newel and rails at the second floor) have been worked out. Evidence for wainscoting at the bottom of this stair and for a skirt around the second floor aperture has been exposed and recorded. It now seems that the stair ascended from a raised landing between the south passage (M-109) and the chamber (M-111) and that this landing was accessible from both rooms. In addition, what we believe to be the Period I frames for those doorways have been identified—both having been reused in the cellar.

On James and Dolley’s end of the house, evidence for the north stair is equally remarkable (M-106). From the cellar one can see a remnant of the lower newel post, showing the width of the lower flight and fixing the point where its ascent began. Over the rear doorway is clear evidence for the stair landing, which spanned the entire width of the north passage. On the upper floor, the truncated remnant of an upper newel established the size of the stairwell and the alignment of the railings, while a plugged opening in the south wall revealed their height. The removal of duPont-era flooring in this area supplied the last pieces of the puzzle—the configuration of the second-floor landing and the method of supporting it.

Undetected in earlier studies was a bank of closets contained between the passage and the large front bedchamber. On the surface of the flooring was evidence for the extent of the closets, for a door to the passage, and for the
direction of its swing. The removal of plaster from the masonry front wall revealed that the closet had been whitewashed rather than plastered. Reused studs bearing much whitewash are still trapped inside a late-19th-century partition nearby. When liberated, these will provide additional information.

Among the most surprising and pleasing discoveries was the extent to which James Madison’s Montpelier is still present—more of its early fabric survives than any of us had supposed. At least 37 of 52 Madison-era doors survive, more than half of which found their way to the duPont additions in 1901-2. Through the study of measurements, moldings, and hardware evidence, it has been possible to put most of the errant doors “back in their holes.”

As in the case of the doors, more of the 1809-11 window frames survive than anyone suspected. Some had been relocated to the duPont wings during the 1901-2 alterations. Others were cut down and reused in a mid-19th-century rehabilitation of the cellar.

Upstairs, researchers spotted reused sills and keystones from the arched doorways that once adorned the first-floor vestibule by James Madison’s front door (M-107). Downstairs in the drawing room (M-108), researchers found still more components from these arched doorways, including the original impost, paneled jambs, and plinths. These exciting discoveries tie the Madison doorways to other examples of James Dinsmore’s work and thus provide a basis for detailing the few unrecoverable elements.

Elsewhere, Madison-era finishes have been more elusive, yet persistent pursuit of these items has yielded some important successes. Physical evidence for surbases or chair rails has now been located in virtually all of the dwelling’s major rooms. At the same time, the early date of the existing drawing room (M-108) cornice was verified, while the existence of such trim was ruled out in Dolley’s chamber, and in most other spaces as well.

Just as James Dinsmore’s accounts were useful in divining the size and configuration of windows, they offered an important guide to the character of other finishes. In the wings we learned that some doors were adorned with full architraves while others received only a backband molding. In the drawing room, James Dinsmore’s mention of “1 Pediment over Door” led to the spectacular discovery of an overdoor treatment for the Madison opening that once served the south passage (M-109). The picture of this vanished doorway treatment was completed when we realized that the original door and the paneled jambs for this opening now stand in Marion duPont’s Art Deco “Red Room” (M-118).

Paint data revealed that the woodwork, inside and out, was generally painted an off-white color, with gray baseboards inside. Contrary to expectation, none of the doors appears to have been grained in this period. A remnant of red, flocked wallpaper from atop the middle drawing room window provided important evidence for the treatment of James Madison’s walls. This appears to be a Madison-era paper, judging from the red wool flocking, the red-lead pigment of the painted ground, and the flux fibers in the paper substrate. In concert with this discovery, it was noted that the drawing room paper had been applied directly to the brown-coat of plaster—a common 18th-century practice.

The survival of original flooring is extensive, especially upstairs, where it provided important evidence of change. The survival of numerous Madison hearths and fireplaces was equally surprising. Early chimneypieces are now associated with several of these fireplaces and some appear to stand in their original locations. Where chimneypieces have disappeared, remaining finishes or remnants provided remarkable evidence for the vanished features, including indications of width, height, and even molding profiles. Such evidence is available for Dolley’s chamber (M-100), the dining room (M-105), and the drawing room (M-108).

The results of the investigation have been plentiful, but that is not to say the work is done—many questions remain. In the event of a restoration of Madison’s home, it will be possible to pursue these issues. Meanwhile, the Montpelier staff continues to record, collate, and interpret the physical evidence bearing on Montpelier’s development.
Exploring the Boundary: Archeological Authenticity vs. Pragmatic Accuracy at Mount Vernon

Esther C. White

With 15 surviving 18th-century buildings, Mount Vernon comprises an exceptional number of authentic structures dating from George and Martha Washington’s tenure at their Potomac River plantation in Virginia. Today almost a million visitors each year tour this historic house museum that presents and interprets the plantation as it was in 1799, the year of Washington’s death.

Since its establishment in 1853, the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association (MVLA) has maintained the pretext that the plantation has changed little since Washington’s death. Yet, as with all historic properties, Mount Vernon was, and is, an ever evolving, fluid landscape. Today the Mount Vernon experience is such that visitors are not always aware of this evolution, or of changes to the plantation that shape the presentation of this site.

Given the remarkably complete condition of the authentic plantation, the mode of presentation chosen by the MVLA is full three-dimensional reconstruction of missing elements, and demolition of structures and features post-dating 1799. This method of interpretation creates a site that is easy to comprehend; yet the plantation’s story is more complex than can be understood from a single point in time. Likewise, while facilitating interpretation, reconstruction often destroys authentic fabric. Evidence derived from the archeological record, which is sometimes the best document of a property’s evolution as well as the authentic element of a site, is often subjected to compromises and simplified in the quest for an accessible historic site. And even with the best of evidence, reconstructions are never authentic.1

Changing Boundaries at the South Lane

One place that illustrates the complexity of the landscape and the choices made during restoration is the boundary between the south lane and the south grove. By the fourth quarter of the 18th century, Washington created the lane as a street housing many of the plantation’s utilitarian outbuildings. As he established this service space, he also transformed the yard next to the lane into a refined grove, planting “clever” or flowering trees south of his mansion. He fastened many of the plantings to a post-and-rail fence that ran south from the kitchen. This fence was probably constructed about 1775 when the kitchen was built. It bounded the eastern edge of the lane, separating the utilitarian from the refined. Period images suggest this fence was constructed of four planks between square posts and painted white. He used this type of fence to bound both the north lane and grove in addition to the south lane and grove, separating landscape elements without adding visual impediment.2

When the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association purchased the property, the ruins of a brick wall were visible along the lane. The above-ground remains of this wall were removed about 1860. The records suggest that the Association believed the wall was from Washington’s era, constructed presumably during the fourth quarter of the 18th century to replace the fence. In 1910 the MVLA secured funding and rebuilt the brick wall, using the ruins of the wall below grade as evidence and incorporating old bricks where possible into the new cement foundation.3

The Ladies believed they had accurately reconstructed the Washington-era boundary along the lane. Recent research suggests they reconstructed a first-quarter 19th-century fence-line. The property the Ladies purchased in 1858 was not as George Washington had left it. The three 19th-century Washington-family owners made numerous changes to both the house and plantation, especially Washington’s nephew
Archeological Research at Mount Vernon

The MVLA has utilized archeological research as a facet of its permanent research program since 1987. The Association relies on a combination of archeology, documentary research, and structural inquiries to document, conserve, and restore the plantation, creating an experience for visitors as close as possible to the target interpretation of 1799.

Prior to 1987 archeological research was sporadic but has had a long history of providing evidence for physical reconstructions as well as a significant contribution toward understanding just how much the plantation has evolved. Since 1894, when a coach house on the south lane was reconstructed, and continuing through the 1951 reconstruction of the greenhouse/slave quarter, excavation was merely a tool to define the footprint of missing buildings or features. Speaking of the 1894 coach house reconstruction, Mount Vernon’s director Colonel H. H. Dodge reported, “Enough of the original brick foundation remained to indicate clearly the ground plan of the old building.”

Today the archeology department is charged with carrying out research about the plantation and its inhabitants. It does not engage solely in providing evidence for reconstructions. Through careful and systematic excavation at specific sites, a greater understanding of the landscape is emerging. One of the benefits the MVLA is reaping from investing in this permanent program is this increased command of their property. Rather than rebuild solitary buildings or lone features, greater emphasis is now placed on comprehending, restoring, and interpreting whole portions of the plantation based on multiple lines of evidence.

The Restoration of the South Lane

The restoration of the fence along the south lane is part of one of these larger projects to rehabilitate the entire southern core of the historic area. Since 1987 six major excavations have occurred between the mansion and the fruit garden and nursery to the south. Excavation was designed to address the evidence and feasibility should a case for reconstruction be made in the future, but had at its core a desire for greater understanding of the plantation landscape, both pre- and post-1799, as well as a mandate to explore the human interactions that created the sites.

As a result of these projects, a number of physical changes to the landscape have...
occurred. The fruit garden and nursery were replanted based on both archeological and historical evidence. The space is now a more accurate reflection of Washington’s passion for agricultural experimentation and his endeavor to nurture young plants. Likewise, the repository for dung was rebuilt in 2001. This hybrid structure for making fertilizer combines both masonry and post-in-ground construction and was an important part of the agricultural life of the 1799 plan- tation. It is the companion to

the blacksmith shop—a structure that was blocked from reconstruction by a former director who felt, despite documentary and archeological evidence, that a post structure for such a utilitarian craft would not be within site of Washington’s 1799 mansion. The reconstruction of the dung repository, along with the proposed reconstruction of the blacksmith shop, is a testimony to the evolving interpretation of Washington and his role as working farmer. At least one of the recent projects in the area, the exploration of the trash midden located in the south grove, is not conceived as being a candidate for reconstruction—while visitors may ask about garbage disposal, there is no interest in recreating the landscape that accurately for the public.

The Search for Postholes

The excavation of the south lane boundary began unexpectedly in 1992. That summer a small excavation was opened inside the confines of the kitchen yard to assess the function of this space through time and to evaluate a well house, thought to be Victorian in nature. The archeologists discovered that during the 18th century the courtyard was dirt with just a small haphazard paving of bricks close to the well; they confirmed the Victorian nature of the extant structure; and they found four postholes (the holes dug to place a post into the ground). These features were partially covered over by the 1910 brick wall. The associated postmolds (the dark soil showing the placement of the original posts) were under the wall foundation.

With the knowledge that postholes and postmolds survived below the wall foundation, the wall and well house were removed in the spring of 2001. Excavations commenced to assess the archeological evidence for the fence line and any remnants of the pre-1860 wall and to better understand the evolution of this boundary through time.

The Evidence for the Reconstruction

Excavation did not uncover any evidence for the original 19th-century wall. It is thought construction of the wall in 1910 destroyed all evidence for this feature. The excavations, which ended in June 2003, did discover intricate details about the 18th-century fenceline.

Each posthole has a six-inch-square postmold. Since a postmold is the soil stain of the actual fence post, this provides the size of the wooden posts. The placement of the postmolds under the wall reveals that the boundary separating the utilitarian lane and kitchen yard from the refined pleasure grove has remained exactly the same for more than 200 years and for at least three generations of boundary features. The artifacts recovered confirmed the circa 1775 construction date of the fence, and nothing suggested the fence was dismantled prior to 1799.

The excavation discovered the fence did not begin flush with the kitchen, which was the terminus of the 1910 brick wall. Instead, the fence-
line began at the southeast corner of the well. This left a narrow gap between the kitchen and the well, presumably for slaves to pass from utilitarian space to refined space surreptitiously. Likewise, the excavation did not find evidence for any other gates or openings in the fence. There was little need for movement between these two areas during Washington’s time.

The Compromises

The excavation revealed much more information than simply the presence of the fence. To accommodate the modern historic house visitor, as well as to preserve the remaining unexcavated features that represent the authentic remains of the fenceline, a number of changes are incorporated into the design of the reconstruction. The fence will start at the southeast corner of the kitchen, rather than at the well. Today we prefer visitors not walk between the well and the kitchen due to the narrow dimension. There will be an opening directly south of the kitchen door, a break in the boundary that has existed for almost 100 years. Unlike in the 18th century, today visitors are encouraged to walk between the east lawn with its magnificent view of the Potomac, the south grove, and the south lane where the outbuildings’ functions are interpreted. The fence’s southern terminus is also dictated by modern convenience. A break in the fence will maintain vehicle access to the lawn immediately before the repository for dung.

Finally, the spacing of the fenceline will be offset. The two short paths of fence behind the kitchen were completely excavated but the longest run of the fenceline, the section parallel with the lane, was not. By offsetting the posts slightly, fewer of the remaining authentic 18th-century postholes and postmolds will be disturbed.

Conclusion

The reconstruction of the fenceline joins a number of recent projects along the south lane designed to make this space more accurate. The replanting of the fruit garden and nursery, rebuilding of the repository for dung, removal of a 19th-century well house, and addition of a pump over the well all provide the visitor with a visual impression similar to what George Washington experienced.

These reconstructions should not however be confused with making the space more authentic. With the exception of the repository for dung, which incorporates an authentic 1786 cobblestone floor and sections of masonry walls within the modern reconstruction, the other projects destroyed authentic features, from multiple time periods, to facilitate education and experience. In the attempt to interpret for almost a million annual visitors, Mount Vernon uses reconstruction to return the plantation to a single point in time. Thus, Mount Vernon sacrifices authenticity—the remains of postholes and postmolds—for accuracy—a reconstructed fence.

By its very nature archeological excavation destroys, albeit after meticulous note taking, authentic soils and features. To visually interpret the authentic George Washington-era fenceline the soil stains representing the postholes and postmolds would be left visible, not excavated or buried. But no matter how intriguing soil stains are to the trained professional, they are incomprehensible to the average historic site visitor. Interpreting ruins or soil is as difficult as interpreting multiple time periods within one site.

Through a complete understanding of the landscape, a fence, even with modifications for the modern visitor, becomes part of the whole rather than an isolated feature. After reconstruction, this component is joined with dozens of other pieces and together a comprehensive snapshot of the past is achieved. The reconstruction of elements such as this fence, when so much of a site is authentic, is even viewed by some as a restoration rather than a reconstruction, since it restores missing elements.

Given the educational and preservation mission of the MVLA, the site’s holistic approach to presenting the past creates a comprehensible, successful, and meaningful visitor experience. The role of archeology at historic sites such as Mount Vernon is to document the details, provide the evidence, and propose the most accurate representation possible. Through archeological research the site’s evolution is understood and the necessary decisions are well informed, intelligent choices that serve to provide the most accurate educational experience for the public.

Notes


4 Minutes of Council, Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association (Mount Vernon, Va. 1894), p. 28. The reconstruction of the coach house is thought to be the first reconstruction based on archeological evidence in the eastern U.S.

Recent Work at Acoma: Partnerships for Preservation

Known as Sky City, the ancient Pueblo of Acoma is located 60 miles west of Albuquerque, N.M. The 70-acre village together with its famed San Esteban del Rey Mission is located on top of a high sandstone mesa and inhabited year-round by fewer than 50 of the approximately 3,000 people who occupy tribal lands. Most Acoma families maintain houses in the old village. The site is a National Historic Landmark and is owned by the Acoma people. The mission, unoccupied and used only on feast days for traditional dances and Masses, is owned by the tribe. As many as 500,000 people per year visit the site. A new Acoma Pueblo Cultural Center is currently being constructed at the base of the mesa to hold an archive of significant Acoma artifacts and documents. The center will also house cultural programs and a museum and provide information to visitors.

With support from Save America’s Treasures and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Acoma Historic Preservation Office and Cornerstones Community Partnerships have collaborated in an effort to restore the San Esteban del Rey mission. This year, in a singly important recognition of the success of this partnership, the New Mexico Office of Cultural Affairs awarded the individuals within the two groups a New Mexico Heritage Preservation Award. This award stems from the significant conservation work presently being carried out at the mission and, in the words of the award, the “continued attention to the maintenance of the structure by the Acoma people throughout its long life span.”

In 1999 the Acoma Historic Preservation Office was created by the Pueblo of Acoma Tribal Council in the interest of preserving the traditions and culture of the Acoma people. The office has three full-time staff members and is overseen by an official advisory board composed of tribal elders. The office has responsibility for the conservation and restoration of the San Esteban del Rey mission. Partly funded by tribal funds, grants, and most recently a National Endowment for the Arts grant to Cornerstones, the office is constructing a photographic and document archive dedicated to the maintenance and survival of the tribe’s ancient traditions. It has responsibility, under the NAGPRA laws of the United States, to repatriate objects of cultural importance to the tribe. The office also directs a San Esteban del Rey Restoration group, which is engaged as a full-time traditional building crew in the restoration efforts at the mission and other significant structures. Perhaps the most important responsibility of the office is to lead the community toward recapturing the traditions of building that have been ritualized for centuries.

For the past 17 years Cornerstones Community Partnerships has worked with more than 200 communities throughout New Mexico and the Southwest to plan, organize, and implement community-driven preservation projects. In doing so this nonprofit group has earned a national and international reputation. Now considered to be a foremost authority on earth construction, Cornerstones has been recognized by Save America’s Treasures and the National Trust as a guardian of some of the region’s most fragile buildings. Cornerstones’ mission to partner with communities in their efforts to restore their historic buildings has led to a revitalization of traditional building practices within these communities, while developing skills and leadership among the younger generation. The importance of the Cornerstones mission lies in its recognition of the significance of cultural traditions for the future.

Acoma

Their departures were orderly. Not all occurred at the very same instant, but all took place late in the thirteenth century and early in the fourteenth, and all gave evidence of having been agreed upon. Their houses were left standing…. The cities, one by one at the point of their highest development, were left to time and the amber preservative of dry sunlit air. (Paul Horgan, Great River, Minerva Press, 1954, chapter 3.)

The Pueblo of Acoma in New Mexico is among the oldest urban settlements in the United States. Recent excavations suggest the mesa has been occupied from at least A.D. 1200. Photo by Dennis Playdon.
The main effort of the construction crew at Acoma has focused on stabilizing San Esteban del Rey, one of the largest adobe structures in the United States. Photo by Dennis Playdon.

Sky" (7,000 feet above sea level) retains an architecture that can be traced back to the early 17th century, built on a high mesa, isolated and defensible in its magnificent arid landscape. The ruins of the original village, destroyed in 1599 by Spanish soldiers, are known to exist beneath the present village and its mission of San Esteban del Rey. Archaeological excavations have shown that Acoma was inhabited before the time of Christ.

The contiguous formed settlement was constructed of materials from the surrounding lands. The earliest European contact with Acoma in the 16th century provided descriptions of a rock called Acaco. The Europeans reported seeing “a village of about 200 houses, from two to four stories high: with cornfields and cisterns on the summit; with cotton, deer-skin and buffalo hide garments; with domesticated turkeys, quantities of turquoise, etc.” The stepped houses were set in continuous rows facing slightly east of south. In 1599, in an act of vengeance following a clash between the Spanish soldiers and the Acomas, the Spanish razed the village using cannon fire.

The rebuilding of the village took place after 1640, guided by Fray Juan Ramirez of Oaxaca. The southern part of the original village was buried by the new mission, begun in 1629. The buried archeology is occasionally visible after heavy rains or wind. The exact location of the entire village has not been established. Within the present-day village can be discerned the 17th-century stepped houses incorporating also the kivas (ceremonial chambers), three stories high, facing east of south. These are remarkable examples of an “energy efficient” architecture.” Food crops of corn, squash, and beans were grown in the fields below. Water cisterns are located in the open on top of the mesa. No other source of water, or electrical power, exists here.

The history of Acoma is told by stories that are passed from grandfathers to children. These histories are known only to the people of Acoma and are cherished as intimate knowledge. The written histories of this settlement are always told by outsiders from the perspective of outsiders and usually begin with the arrival of the Spanish from the south in the 16th century. These histories and all those told of Acoma originate from a point of view not held by the Acoma people and are built on values that are frequently foreign to them. The conflict generated by the two viewpoints is similar to the conflicts that have arisen over time with the interest of the outside world in the Acoma settlement.

The magnificent San Esteban del Rey, one of the largest adobe structures in the United States and also one of the architecturally most significant, has attracted much-needed restoration efforts, especially over the last century. Much of the work has been carried out from the outside, with outsiders’ knowledge and expertise applied. The Acoma people have an enduring commitment to this work, having had in place the Gagashiti, or men designated “church caretakers,” since the construction of the mission. Members of this highly respected group have lifetime appointments and have traditionally received little remuneration for the work. Little understood by the outside world, this “dedication” by the Acoma people to their church has less to do with a commitment to the institution of the church and more to do with a wholly different attitude about labor and place. For the Acoma people, labor is not separated from ceremony or ritual but is rather an integral part of a spiritual world. The conflict in modern tribal environments between the outside world and tradition arises, specifically, from this difference of world view.

San Esteban del Rey
As one of the first Pueblo churches of New Mexico, San Esteban remains one of the largest and, some would argue, the most architecturally perfect of the single-nave fortress churches. Considering its1629 beginning, the enormity of the task of construction can only amaze the modern builder. The 21,000-square-foot mission complex with church, convento (priest’s living quarters), and campo santo (graveyard in front of the church) was constructed over a period of about 14
The unparalleled beauty of Acoma pottery is evidence of a people with a highly developed spatial sense, ability to finely craft materials, and an unerring visual acuity.

years. All materials—clays, stone, wood, nails, grasses, yucca, water, and selenite (a form of gypsum that is translucent)—were manually carried to the top of the 350-foot-high mesa by the Acoma builders; some materials, such as the 35-foot-long vigas (log roof beams) were transported, without touching the ground, from Mount Taylor, 30 miles away.1 Legend has it that the sacred logs, if accidentally dropped, were replaced by fresh ones. These vigas were hand carved and pigmented. Only fragments of the vigas now exist, and they have been replaced by round vigas and a modern boarded ceiling. The original roof was insulated in the traditional manner by deep layers of clay. (In the 1920s the church received a reinforced concrete roof, now removed.)

San Esteban was built as a mission compound comprising a church building and adjoining convento. It was situated on the south side of the mesa, facing due east, separated in both position and orientation from the rows of stepped houses on the north side. Its architecture, now typical of the New Mexico region and Mexico, is clearly traceable to its European origins. The church itself is an adobe structure consisting, typically, of a single-nave space, choir and sanctuary, sacristy, and baptistery. In some places the walls were constructed more than 7 feet thick (now up to 10 feet thick due to the addition of the stone “veneer”), rising 34 feet vertically and diminishing to 4 feet thick under the corbels. Flanked by two adobe-and-stone towers, rising another 15 feet above the parapets, the east facade belongs to a typology imported from Renaissance Rome. The raised altar, reredos (painted altar screen), and painted altar canopy were lit by a clerestory window. Two small windows on the south wall (glazed with selenite) lit the main interior. The adjoining convento was a cloister with a predominantly closed ambulatory, priests’ rooms, and later, a schoolroom/mirador (belvedere or lookout) on the second floor. Significantly, the interior of the courtyard was used for the planting of corn and fruit. Archeology in the 1970s revealed a children’s graveyard in the southeast corner.

Almost in contrast to the perceived imprecise character of the adobe buildings lies a highly precise mathematical system for their design. In the case of San Esteban, studies7 have shown a faithful application of harmonic proportional systems to the volumetric composition of the spaces and exterior forms. The seemingly perfect proportional equilibrium arising from these harmonic systems became the objective of all church design in the early Renaissance. That this architecture flourished in New Spain in the 17th century, while it was superseded in Europe by later architectural developments, highlights San Esteban as a highly significant building in the United States and the world.

The question of how the design of this structure was achieved is largely unanswered. It is clear that the Acoma people have always embraced this building as a natural part of their lives. The unparalleled beauty of Acoma pottery is evidence of a people with a highly developed spatial sense, ability to finely craft materials, and an unerr- ing visual acuity. Perhaps little recognized today are the ancient building forms that predate European systems brought to Acoma, whose orderly architectural systems formed the basis for an easy assimilation of the mathematically perfect orthogonal architecture.8

Preservation Efforts at San Esteban del Rey

The mission achieved World Monument Watch listing for 2002, monitored by the National Park Service and the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Division (HPD), the preservation work at the mission follows the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

The restoration work has been carried out by the Acoma crew. The aim within the partnership has been to reinforce all preservation initiatives from within the tribe and to reduce the impact of “expert” opinion. (In the past, most preservation work has been designed and directed by outsiders.) The authentic-
Within the past three years, the main effort of the construction crew has been focused on stabilization. With the award of a Save America’s Treasures grant to the tribe, a preservation plan describing far-reaching work went into effect and has led to the start of a re-roofing effort for the cloister. Many changes from the original were made in the 1970s. This roof is now being returned to its original earthen condition. In the process, many historic changes within the priests’ room were found. In excavating for foundation inspection, several old plastered walls were discovered beneath the earthen floors. Our first analysis shows that these may be the original walls of the destroyed village. No further excavation or analysis will be done at this time due to the sensitive nature of the area.

During the process of stabilization, new information continually comes to light. For example, the north wall of the nave, monitored for cracks for more than a year, began to show signs of severe stress under the applied load of a stone veneer built on to the nave exterior walls in the 1970s and ’80s. Workers followed the cracks which revealed evidence of delaminating (vertical separation of wall materials) within the 8-foot-thick adobe wall at the sacristy door, to find evidence of other walls (with finish plaster) within what had been thought to be a single thick wall. These discoveries may verify descriptions of an older, smaller church having existed on the site and point to the value of pairing oral history with documented information.

Training
First efforts in training took place in 2000-2001 and centered on a complete restoration of the Meeting House, an important civic building at Old Acoma. The work done to restore this building, which was funded by grants from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the McCune Foundation, set the standards for the major work on the mission. It also cemented the relationships within the partnerships and clearly established a highly qualified team of traditional builders.

Efforts to widen the revival of traditional building at Acoma have taken the form of new training for young people (16-20 years). Funded by a grant from the Educational Foundation of America, Cornerstones is guiding a program that focuses on eventually forming a new crew of traditional builders. Central to the present effort is recognizing the relationship between traditional building and the Keres language. Acoma is known to the Acoma people through its naming of its places. Acoma’s identity is established through language, not written, but oral. A single most important aspect of the new endeavor is reinforcing the connection between the traditions of building, visual thinking, and language.

The Learning Process
Great learning has taken place among those who have worked at Acoma. While the young people of Acoma are rediscovering their tradition, all of us are exploring how the Acoma’s intertwined heritage of language, visual thinking, and spirituality infuse buildings, and the construction process, with deeper cultural meaning. Thus, “authentic” restoration is not just a matter of accurately applying traditional building forms, materials, and methods. It also means respecting why and how the Acoma themselves have val-
ued and cared for these places over the centuries.

The settlement that took place almost a thousand years ago established a culture that can, if heard, teach many lessons. Acoma, indeed, offers lessons not to be forgotten by the modern world. Preservation efforts at Acoma are rooted in this belief.


Notes
1 William Sarracino, Mario Chavez, Chris Garcia, Edmond Sarracino, Cornell Torivio, Edward Valley of Acoma; Dennis Playdon of Cornerstones; and Kate Wingert-Playdon of Cornerstones; and Dennis Playdon worked at Acoma as root
2 Captain Alvarado, dispatched from Zuni in 1540.
5 Acoma oral history.
7 D. G. Playdon; based on current proportional studies connecting the New Mexico missions with the mathematical ideals of the Italian Renaissance in architecture.
8 D. Crouch, “Santa Fe,” Spanish Borderlands Sourcebooks, D. Garr, ed. (Garland Publishing Inc., 1991) (ref. J. Kubler, 1972), p. 399. “At Santa Fe as elsewhere in Spanish America, Italian Renaissance ideas of city layout, expressed as early as 1554 in the rebuilt urban fabric of Mexico City, were imposed upon an ‘Indian Civic armature which was found to be highly suitable’ and in fact more easily acceptable to these ideals than contemporary European models.”
9 As an example of the convergence of knowledge from different sources, the discussion of the content of the white plasters found on the walls of the church and convento produced a clear idea not only of composition but also of the location of the materials and the method of combining and applying the material. It also allowed us to know who the participants had been in the making and application of the plasters.

Authenticity in Cultural Heritage Tourism

Cheryl Hargrove

What a difference a decade makes. Think of all the events that have shaped our lives over the past 10 years. Some are landmark events and some are less known, but all had a profound impact on what we value, what we desire, and what we know as truth. One event in particular has shaped my direction in the last decade—the National Trust Heritage Tourism Initiative. It’s hard to believe that the definition of “cultural heritage tourism” has only been around in this country formally since the mid-1990s.

To understand how the heritage tourism segment has grown, understand some of its current challenges, and identify some of its opportunities, I talked with several industry professionals who were interviewed several years ago for the Forum Journal Summer 1999 issue on heritage tourism. I found one key theme connecting current research and trends in cultural heritage tourism—the importance of authenticity.

State of U.S. Cultural Heritage Tourism

A 2003 Travel Industry Association of America (TIA)/Smithsonian magazine study reports that 81 percent of all Americans taking a trip last year included a visit to a cultural heritage site or event. Further, the updated TIA Profile of Cultural & Historic Travelers underscores the importance of that industry segment to our nation’s overall travel industry. While many cultural heritage tourism leaders talk about the industry segment positively—and applaud the distance we’ve journeyed in the past decade—the consensus is also that we have a lot of work still to do to ensure future sustainable growth. Like all industries, cultural heritage tourism is constantly evolving. One of our unique challenges is to manage the external demands that place pressure on fragile assets.

More products, more experiences, more sophisticated travelers, and more com-
more important than destination. People are seeking experiences and getaways that combine a number of activities. Further, travelers desire drive-to destinations with year-round experiences. These combine to make visiting cultural heritage sites and events attractive activities for all ages. Managers must appropriately develop sites to accommodate various audiences.

Trend 2: Sites serve as educators for history. Cultural heritage sites are perceived as experts and are trusted to impart a credible presentation of history. Since September 11, certainly, interest in America’s cultural heritage has grown. American consumers—the domestic market—are seeking new ways to connect with their roots and become educated. The international market seeks out authentic American experiences to learn about our country. Both markets look to site managers and curators to provide an education that is missing from the classroom or long since forgotten. This means learning experiences must be developed for all ages.

Trend 3: Increased competition requires cultural heritage sites and events to provide high quality, authentic experiences. An abundance of new cultural heritage sites and activities, along with manufactured and other non-industry related activities, creates a host of options for travelers. The internet brings a whole new world to cultural heritage tourism. Strategic marketing and consistent experiences are necessary to maintain market share. The new product is thematic, easily purchased, and easily experienced. Above all, the messages must be based on fact.

Recognize Authenticity

Webster’s dictionary defines authenticity as “being actually and precisely what is claimed.” For professionals engaged in historic site management and cultural heritage tourism, the responsibility lies in preservation, maintenance, interpretation, and marketing of distinctive experiences founded on documented history.

A 2002 Heritage Tourism Study produced for St. Augustine, Ponte Vedre & The Beaches by the University of Florida’s Center for Tourism Research & Development includes some significant information on how visitors define and value authenticity. In exit polls, visitors were asked about the importance of heritage experiences. More than 95 percent of the visitors said that it was “somewhat” to “very important” to experience authentic elements on their trip; 38.9 percent of visitors polled ranked “experiencing authentic elements” as very important. To “experience the region’s historic character” ranked highest among the respondents (44 percent). Historic architecture, museums, and historic objects rated very high in authenticity (4.1 mean score out of possible 5), while souvenirs ranked very low (3).

When authenticity is compromised, cultural heritage tourism loses credibility. Moreover, when authenticity is compromised cultural heritage tourism loses what differentiates it from sanitized theme park adventures and recreated (rather than real) attractions. In some respects, the popularity of cultural heritage tourism has led imitators to our customer’s door. It is our responsibility to ensure that visitors continue to understand—and value—authentic sites and experiences. Only by ensuring that authenticity is not compromised can our industry earn the trust and confidence of current and future visitors.
Preserve and Develop the Authentic Product

Anne Tyler’s novel The Accidental Tourist lauded the merits of traveling without ever leaving the armchair. Think of all the books—from contemporary best-sellers to the classics—that bring a place to life through words and stories. Yet, as aptly conveyed in America’s Challenge, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation’s 2001 report, “we revel in the genuine article—the truly memorable experience that only the actual place can provide.” For preservationists, the task of saving and conserving our heritage must extend past the built environment to include the landscapes, the culture, and the traditions of the native peoples.

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To assist cultural heritage travelers in their quest for authentic experiences, numerous destinations are establishing “authenticity criteria.” Lancaster County, Pa., formed one of the first planning groups to create specific criteria for use in identifying and developing heritage sites, events, and services. UNESCO has also attempted to apply authenticity criteria to evaluation of World Heritage Sites. While debate looms about how to judge authenticity, we must be mindful that the expectation of the customer is that sites will provide truth and integrity in regard to preservation and presentation. We must not be mired by political boundaries or mandates when establishing an authentic experience; we must serve the customer with integrity.

Interpret with Integrity

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges today is to reach a wide range of audiences with compelling information so that the experience exceeds preconceptions. Communication with the customer begins with the first browse on the internet or reading of the lure brochure and doesn’t end until after the visit. So how do we deliver an engaging message that can affect a child of 10, a teen, an adult of 40, or a senior at 60? The curatorial obligation is to tell the story of the people and places with fact using engaging practices of delivery. Making it appeal to the masses, says Mitch Bowman does not mean “dumbing down” the story. Instead, it means getting to the heart and soul of the story—to portray the human drama, the relevance—to people today.

Marian DePietro, president of TOURCO and board member of Plimoth Plantation, shares a couple of ways historic site and destination managers can foster growth in cultural heritage tourism. First, develop more interactive activities, rather than traditional static museum exhibits. For example, Plimoth Plantation has introduced a series of programs that tell the story of early settlers to New England. The “Eat like a Pilgrim” tour features a foodways interpreter to explain what the fare was in 1620. It expands the imagination and education—whatever the existing level of interest or knowledge of history the customer has—in a fun and engaging way. Second, heritage sites managers must make touring easy to purchase and easy to experience. Eight museums in New England joined together to offer a $30 collective rate of admission. The perceived value makes the ticket attractive, and this joint pricing is fast becoming an industry standard. It is especially attractive to tour operators or international visitors wanting to pre-purchase activities. The price also helps establish the sites as on par with other gated theme parks and attractions. Nonprofit organizations must understand that customers will pay for experiences if they are perceived as desirable and good value.

Marketing guru Leo Bur-Nett once said, “If you are writing about baloney, don’t try to make it a Cornish hen,
because that is the worst kind of baloney there is. Just make it darned good baloney.” Too often we try to mask the truth about our site or destination with flowery adjectives or bland descriptions rather than telling the distinctive, unique story that sets one place apart from another. Yes, it is work to uncover those stories, but they provide the rich, authentic foundation that is the reason to visit, to preserve, and to connect with our past.

Market Authenticity

Fundamentally, the product creates the market. If we provide a consistent, quality “authentic” experience every day—whether it is accommodations at a historic hotel, a local dish served up at a neighborhood diner, craft demonstrations at a gallery, or an interpreted tour program at a house museum—the positive word of mouth generated from existing customers becomes the most powerful marketing tool available. We must combine a strong product with quality messages and communication tools—internet sites, brochures, trade shows, and sales missions—to create a distinctive marketing strategy that tells our unique stories to desired audiences.

Rene Campbell, executive director of the Convention & Visitors Bureau for Columbus, Ind., recognizes successful marketing is built on understanding who and what Columbus is. Columbus is a town where corporate leaders focused on quality architecture for public buildings to create a distinctive sense of place. While many people traditionally consider cultural heritage tourism in terms of 18th- and 19th-century features, Columbus focuses on 20th-century history and design to promote the spirit of their community. Local leaders keep architecture and marketing in context. They pay attention to maintenance, safety, and resident quality of life. Has it worked? The town is ranked sixth in innovation and design by the American Institute of Architects; the poet Maya Angelou says “this is the way a community ought to be”; and Rand McNally included the Indiana town in its 2003 “Best of the Road” award-winning travel routes. Praise indeed.

Measuring the market is critical for cultural heritage tourism management. Research and hard data are vital to understanding what current customers think of our products, what the desired customer wants in an experience, and what is most appropriate for us to deliver. Sometimes the research results confirm our instincts. Other times the findings highlight new opportunities. For example, Tamarack, West Virginia’s craft center, recently conducted market research that uncovered some surprising statistics: Canadians make up only a small percent of its market; in December 38 percent of sales come from West Virginia; and Ohio is the biggest buyer. Having hosted their three millionth visitor last year, the research shows that many of Tamarack’s customers are repeat visitors—and buyers. Signage is critical to creating awareness; but there are other factors at work: 30 percent of guests walking through the doors are visiting friends and relatives in West Virginia.

Market research can also help in planning for the future. A June 2003 study by Marshall University on the economic impact of the craft industry in West Virginia states that Tamarack directly contributes over $3 million annually in sales yet provides greater value through its ability to keep a high profile for craft with its quality brand presence. Since opening its doors, Tamarack has contributed $44.4 million to the economy and $2.4 million in sales tax. With the new Kentucky Craft and Cultural Center in Berea now open, Tamarack envisions a more regional approach to marketing—with collaborations from neighboring states to foster a corridor of craft through Appalachia.

Noted author and scholar Philip Kotler said, “authentic marketing is not the art of selling what you make but knowing what to make. It is the art of identifying and understanding customer needs and creating solutions that deliver satisfaction to the customers, profits to the producers and benefits for the stakeholders.” Working with the tourism industry, historic site and heritage tourism man-
agers can develop and deliver the appropriate and authentic messages that draw the desired results. To maintain credibility and grow the segment appropriately, heritage tourism professionals must join together to fund or partner with the travel industry to ensure that measuring the economic and social impact of cultural heritage sites and events is included in market research studies conducted locally, regionally, and nationally.

Find the Appropriate Balance

Cultural heritage tourism is the new creative economy for many communities, and as such the investment and philosophical support must be in place to net the desired benefits. As cultural heritage tourism gains popularity, it also attracts the attention of elected officials and business leaders. While this notice is critical to the growth of this industry segment, the real focus must be on balancing the needs of three assets: the resource, the resident, and the visitor. All must benefit from cultural heritage tourism development for sustainable success.

If the resource is not protected then the very opportunity to attract visitors with authentic experiences vanishes. For cultural heritage tourism, the authentic resource is defined by an entire “sense of place”—inclusive of the gateway, the built environment, the landscape, the cuisine and cultural traditions, and the souvenirs to purchase. If the resident is not considered in the development, marketing, and management of the destination, then the benefits are often lost. Community tourism has evolved as a new industry segment to ensure that “community” values are respected, that there are local economic and social benefits, and that messages marketed to attract visitors authentically represent the stories of peoples past and present. Finally, visitors will only continue to be lured to cultural heritage destinations if they find value in the authentic experience—either through education or a nostalgic experience that has meaning and meets expectations.

According to Mitch Bowman, when you have authenticity everything else falls into place. Interpretation is easier and more powerful. Marketing is much more effective because people value “the real thing”—and the real thing doesn’t have to be the best, first, largest, or most important to have meaning. Maintenance is ensured because the community finds it worthwhile and valuable to sustain and nurture its singular, irreplaceable cultural assets.

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