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Advocacy for Heritage Sites
Interpreting 20th-Century Icons
The Legacy of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis
Raising Funds for Sacred Places
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Top Right: “The Revolutionary City” program. Photo courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
Bottom Left: Calvary United Methodist Church, located in West Philadelphia. Photo by Tom Crane.
The Preservation and Restoration of Conscience

Presented at the International Conference of National Trusts held in Washington, D.C., October 15-19, 2005.

I begin with this story—a man came upon a little bird, lying on its back with its feet in the air. “Little bird,” said the man, “what are you doing?” “Can’t you see,” responded the little bird, “the sky is falling, and I’m trying to hold it up with my feet.” “That’s ridiculous,” the man shot back, “You can’t hold the sky up with your little feet.” The bird looked directly at the man and said, “I do what I can.”

Today, threatened by terrorist attacks, and traumatized by natural disasters, which in the United States were recently compounded by human error and neglect, we find ourselves wondering whether there is anything we can do.

Yet many would say that concern for historic sites is peripheral to the main business and urgent concerns of our times. And to them we say, never has our work been more necessary. But, having said that, we must also admit that no more than it can be business as usual in the halls of government, can it be business as usual in our field.

If our work is to be understood as central rather than peripheral, we must challenge the status quo.

Interviewed by the New York Times, Sierra Leon storyteller/history keeper Kewulay Kamara asked rhetorically, “What is the use of telling a story if it doesn’t help people transcend?” Like Mr. Kamara, I believe history and its partner, historic preservation, have the power to help people transcend. I have seen it firsthand.

97 Orchard Street, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum’s tenement building, is the first homestead of urban, working-class and poor immigrant people to be preserved and interpreted in the United States. Inside this six-story Italianate-style apartment house, we interpret the lives of immigrants from more than 20 nations, who lived in the building between 1863 and 1935. Because we have insisted on asking not only what is the history we want to interpret but also what can this history do to improve the world, we have for many years taught English to new immigrants. These students tour the carefully re-created 325-square-feet apartments and “meet” the immigrant families who used these rooms as a base to launch their families on their American journeys. Afterward, these newcomers compare their own quests—for housing, for health care, for jobs, for schools, for a future in America—to those of immigrants of yore.

Upon learning that 19th-century immigrants were routinely met at Ellis Island by charity workers, one young woman from Bangladesh rose and shouted indignantly, “No one was there at Kennedy Airport for us. No one.” With that the class erupted. They said they wanted to be there for the next wave of newcomers. They said there should be an immigrant guide to New York City. It should, they explained, contain stories of immigrants past, for they had been inspired by those struggles and triumphs. And it should contain their own stories, for theirs is the contemporary experience. And it should contain answers to the questions immigrants have—and they knew exactly what those were; and it should feature annotated and vetted listings of places to turn for help and advice; and it should be written in many languages. We took their idea to the New York Times which had been thinking along the same lines, and together we published the first immigrant guide to New York City in English, Chinese, and Spanish. History, offered in a historic site, had provided the inspiration.
The fact is the public is looking to history and historic sites for inspiration. In 1998, prompted by the widely shared view that Americans did not care about history, the historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan determined to find out why. The results of their survey, which carefully sampled Americans of every stripe, came as a complete surprise. Far from rejecting history, Americans seek it at every turn. Their answers to the survey questions caused the scholars to conclude, “Americans feel at home with the past; day to day, hour to hour, the past is present in their lives. Encountering the past, examining it, living and reliving it, they root themselves in families—biological or constructed—and root their families in the world.” “Americans,” the authors had to conclude, “want to make a difference, to take responsibility for themselves and others. And so, they assemble their experiences into … narratives that allow them to make sense of the past, set priorities, project what might happen next and try to shape the future. By using these narratives to mark change and continuity, they chart the course of their lives.”

And lest you assume that this passion for the past is limited to people privileged by income or race, I hasten to add that the survey revealed, “the narrative of the nation state is most alive to those who feel most alienated from it.” The authors learned, for instance, that their understanding of the past helped African Americans and members of the Sioux Indian tribe to “live in an oppressive society.”

It was true, the scholars discovered, that Americans have largely rejected the history taught in our high schools, which they consistently described as “dull” and “irrelevant.” This standard-issue history, characterized by simplistic patriotic narratives, was, Americans complained, insulting to their ability as critical thinkers.

But since the public regards history as central to its well-being, it is determined to get it. Unable to get what they need in school, they turn elsewhere. More than one-third of the survey respondents had investigated the history of their family in the previous year; and two-fifths had worked on a hobby or collection related to the past. And, as it happens, they turn to historic sites and museums, which they regard as the most trustworthy sources of historical information. “They trusted history museums as much as they trusted their grandmothers,” reported Rosenzweig and Thelan. More than half the survey respondents had visited a museum or historic site during the previous year.

As preservationists, we have our marching orders. Now let us march.

The Need for Authentic Sites that Tell Authentic Stories

As the raging winds and waters of Katrina subside, Americans are peering into the foundations of our society and we are disturbed. We see a nation unprepared for disaster—whether natural or man-made. We see a nation unable to measure up when measured against its ability and its will to care for the least able among it. We see a nation where the divide between the haves and have-nots has widened since last we dared look. We see that where we stand on that divide is literally a matter of life or death. We see these things and we rail—against our leaders, against our nongovernmental rescue organizations, against ourselves.

It’s time to stop charging and to instead take charge. Historic preservationists have a role to play. Our job is to see to it that our nations are crisscrossed with networks of historic sites that tell all our people’s stories and tell them in ways that help people transcend.

In this network of places, the stories of people associated with the sites—and how they faced challenges of their day—would be given priority over the provenance of the furnishings, because the people need those stories in order to wrest meaning from these sites for their own lives. The stories must reflect the complexities and inconsistencies of the human condition and include the coward along with the brave; the greedy along with the generous; the traitor along with the patriot; the famous along with the unknown; the people who dared to speak truth to power along with the people who cowered before tyranny.

Standing at the site of the former Nazi transit camp outside Paris, French Archbishop Olivier de Berrengret declared, “Conscience is formed by memory, and no society can live in peace with itself any more than an individual can, on the basis of a false or repressed past.” Historic preservationists must accept responsibility for forming conscience by including all of a society’s important memories.
and then truthfully interpreting them in all their messiness.

Some weeks ago, I asked the international human rights advocate Aryeh Neier how he understood the linkage between historic sites and the ongoing struggle for democracy. He reminded me that nations which have been unable to demonstrate that past abuses have actually found themselves denied access to positions in places of international authority. For instance, Japan’s bid to enter the UN Security Council has been thwarted by its refusal to address atrocities committed at Nanjing. And Turkey’s application to the European Union was tarnished by its refusal to address the Armenian genocide. In each case, a nation’s current human rights record was judged by how well it confronted its human rights abuses in the past. The existence or lack of historic sites related to that record is an excellent indication as to whether or not a nation has confronted its past.

My friend Patricia Veldez understands the link. Former executive director of El Salvador’s Truth Commission, Patricia is a founding member of the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience. Members of that coalition are pledged to “assist the public in drawing connections between the history of our sites and related contemporary issues.” Founding members include the Workhouse in England and the Slave House of Senegal. Patricia Valdez now directs a coalition of human rights organizations in Argentina. These human rights activists have concluded that only by marking and interpreting former sites of torture can Argentina hope to establish a lasting culture of democracy.

Justice Albie Sachs also understands the importance of historic sites in democracy-building. In selecting a site for South Africa’s new Constitution Court, Justice Sachs and his colleagues determined to build their court adjacent to the most notorious political prison in Johannesburg. Today, a tour of the court begins with a tour of the prison. The openness, transparency, and democratic spirit of the proceedings of the court stand in direct and bold contrast to the prison’s high and impenetrable walls, its dark torture rooms, its posted directives to prison cooks to give whites one portion of meal, coloreds less, and blacks almost nothing at all. Justice Sachs and his colleagues on the court felt that by reminding the public of the abuses of the apartheid government, it would underscore the preciousness and fragility of the new democratic spirit and call the citizens to stay vigilant in its defense.

Connecting Past and Present at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum

Back to America, and to the Lower East Side of Manhattan and the Tenement Museum. From its founding 17 years ago, the museum took as its mission “to promote tolerance and historical perspective through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan’s Lower East Side.” The mission made clear the museum’s intention to use history to address social goals. After painstakingly researching the stories of individual immigrant’s families and faithfully reproducing the environments in which they lived, we opened to the public. They surged in. They loved it. They commiserated with Natalie Gumpertz, the German Jewish woman whose husband disappeared in the Depression of 1873. They rooted for the Sicilian Catholic Baldizzi family, winking at their illegal entry into the United States and expressing relief that President Roosevelt’s federal welfare program gave them a safety net when they were thrown out of work after the 1929 stock market crash. And that is what we had hoped—that by bringing poor and working-class people to life, Americans would see the connection between their forebears, contemporary immigrants, and other similarly situated people today.

But soon it became clear that it wasn’t enough to tell the story. All too often, once out on the streets, we’d hear our visitors say something like, “The people who lived in that tenement were good immigrants. Today, those people are just coming for the welfare. They don’t care about working or learning the language. They don’t want to be Americans.”

How could we challenge this perspective, a perspective our hands-on experience with hundreds of immigrants made us aware was flawed?

We decided to invite our public to join us after their tours for what we call “Kitchen Conversations.” Sitting around the table with a trained dialogue facilitator, visitors begin by describing their reaction to their tours,
Visitors to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum learn about the lives of former residents of 97 Orchard Street through guided tours of carefully reconstructed apartments from different time periods.

In “Kitchen Conversations” offered after some tours, guests explore the continuing challenges faced by immigrants today.

Photo by Alan Batt.

In “Kitchen Conversations” from different time periods. Visitors to the Lower East Side, guided tours of carefully reconstructed apartments through Orchard Street learn about the lives of former residents of 97 and continuing challenges.

In “Kitchen Conversations” the facilitator asked if anyone could imagine why the immigrants congregating in Chinatown and the grandparents of the visitors who had spoken might have elected to live and work in foreign-language enclaves. “They needed to be able to get down to business right away,” reasoned one visitor. “You know, to shop and to negotiate and to work in their own language. Their children were going to learn English in school, but the parents needed to support the family.” Suddenly it became clear that it was possible to view the Chinese settlement not as a slap in the face to America but rather as a strategy employed not only by these immigrants but by earlier waves as well.

The delighted response of visitors over this experience has convinced us to add “Kitchen Conversations” after increasing numbers of tours, hoping to make it an integral part of the visitor experience. Today, the Tenement Museum is on the verge of mounting an all-out campaign to obtain landmark designation for an area of the Lower East Side. If successful, this will be the first landmark district in the U.S. to commemorate the urban, immigrant, working-class, and poor experience. But, because we reside in an area that continues as an immigrant portal and where affordable housing is increasingly scarce, we decided to couple our campaign with a simultaneous effort to offer low-interest loans to any landlords who agreed to rehabilitate their buildings’ interior flats and make them available at affordable rents. We believe that any plan to preserve our area’s architectural heritage simply had to include a plan to preserve the neighborhood’s traditional role as a home for immigrants and other low- and moderate-income families.

Preservation and the Molding of Conscience

As historic preservationists, as keepers of the public memory, as molders of conscience, preservationists must be sure that our collection of sites tells all of our nation’s stories and tells them in such a way as to support the people in their desire to make sense of their situation, to decide on their positions, and to engage in finding solutions. And further, we must explore what other problems existing in our community might be addressed through our preservation efforts. The great 20th-century librarian John Cotton Dana advised, “Learn what aid the community needs and fit the museum to those needs.”

We are all aware that, as of this moment, the historic preservation movement has not yet realized these goals. But it can. It can do it by starting with the properties we have—properties by and large associated with the rich and the famous.

But we need not despair or be ashamed. The properties we now possess can be turned to the task of forming conscience. Woodrow Wilson dreamed of a League of Nations. What better place to lay out the rationale behind that dream and to debate whether and to what extent it has been realized than his home in Washington, D.C. Similarly, from his mansion overlooking the Hudson River, the robber baron Jay Gould crushed the striking railroad workers who rose up against him. Today, as organized labor finds itself on shaky ground, what better time and place than Lyndhurst for the

[We] must explore what other problems existing in our community might be addressed through our preservation efforts.
Sustainability: The Ongoing Challenge for Historic Sites

Colin G. Campbell

Presented at the International Conference of National Trusts held in Washington, D.C., October 15-19, 2005.

The timing of this gathering is fortuitous; it convenes at a moment when leaders of the worldwide preservation community have a great deal to discuss. The range of pressures—we optimistically often refer to pressures as “opportunities”—the pressures that presently bear upon global preservation efforts are daunting. While I suspect that this is hardly a room full of pessimists, still the urgency for clear-headed, creative thinking in our field has become all too apparent.

Obviously, this conference brings together a highly diverse assembly of organizations and institutions, representing preservation and heritage trust efforts that are, by definition, an expression of their particular cultures. Yet we face issues, with few exceptions, that are common to us all. Finances come to mind. Our future rests upon the generosity of others—both public and private sources.

The (British) National Trust, for instance, works to preserve and protect the coastline, countryside, and buildings of England, Wales, and Northern Ireland and declares that it is “rich only in liabilities.” You know what that means. They’re trying to look after great spaces, precious objects, and irreplaceable buildings, but it’s like the announcement in the London Underground: “Mind the gap.” There always seems to be a gap between your responsibilities and the resources available to fulfill those responsibilities.

So we find ourselves in the position of constantly creating new ways to inspire people about old things. You’ve saved it—whatever “it” may be. You’ve protected it...so far. But continuing to do so, over an indefinite period—ideally even over an infinite period—is a formidable task.

How to sustain the effort? More to the point, how to sustain the effort in a world where the assumptions about what is
important and valuable, about what should be saved, about what is worthy of investment are not carved in stone. How does heritage preservation endure in the face of shifting public interests and inclinations? How do we plan for a future that remains uncertain and unsure?

The horrific earthquake along the India-Pakistan border, the destruction wrought by hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the southern gulf region of the United States, the tsunami in Southeast Asia are disasters of the first order. The hurricanes are, of course, closest to home for us Americans, but the destruction of the cultural heritage, whether in Indonesia or New Orleans, is a frightening thought, particularly to those of us working to preserve our cultural heritage.

Such events, often unexpected, test us in a variety of ways. The human tragedy is almost unfathomable. Property damage and personal losses are enormous. Daily survival is a more apt term than long-term sustainability in this context. And there is another very real concern. For nonprofits and public agencies devoted to preservation, a resource base (perhaps taken for granted) can abruptly decline, as an urgent need for emergency funding enters the equation. Relief efforts demand huge sums. Government responds, as it should; so do some of the private funders upon which the preservation community must depend.

As if these developments were not a sufficient threat to our sustainability, there is fear of terrorism and runaway gasoline prices. The list is long. I won’t recite it. Suffice to say I was taught that the familiar Chinese proverb—”May you live in interesting times”—has a sinister meaning. Clearly these are “interesting times.”

Preparing for Natural Calamity

Let me begin by briefly discussing the subject of natural calamity and its impact on preservation and then move on to the broader issue of sustainability.

The other day a network news reporter raised the question of whether the world was coming to an end. After a series of severe natural disasters, it was a reasonable question. A geologist reassured the reporter that the earth is doing what it’s always been doing. That only gives me minimal comfort; we clearly need better ways to cope with natural events, large and small, to help people urgently in need of medical attention and shelter, and to address the longer-term impacts on communities, institutions, and, of course, historic sites. In fact, acts of God do not have to be so dramatic in order to be very expensive. Several years ago, a single ice storm cost Colonial Williamsburg more than $4 million, primarily in tree loss and business interruption. And in 2003, Hurricane Isabel swept up the east coast in Virginia and did some $6 million worth of damage in Williamsburg alone.

These experiences taught us some lessons. We found that there are measures that can be taken at a historic site, both before and after such an event, that are practical and useful. For instance, in terms of best practices, a previously organized center of command, a disaster plan, relieves you from scrambling to create one in a crisis atmosphere. That way you know who will make decisions about what... as well as who will implement them. In fact, the more you can do before a crisis strikes, the better your chances for minimizing the pain. Much of this is simple common sense, but when there are blue skies, it is easy to put it off.

Following any calamity that is likely to destroy property, there’s the inevitable rush for contractors. There were residents in the Williamsburg area still looking for people to repair damage a year or more after Isabel blew through.

Maintaining an ongoing relationship with a range of contractors of the type required whenever there is tree or building damage can be very beneficial. There is a tremendous advantage in having key service providers committed to you so that they will heed your call when you need them.

Then, there are the insurance companies...they tend to address your concerns at varying rates of speed. They get overwhelmed too. Doing your own initial assessment, for
Reenactments of everyday life in Colonial Williamsburg can appeal to the diverse types of visitors identified by researchers as sharing an "interest in human culture." Photo courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Obviously, in a calamity, national trusts have a special responsibility to pay attention to the threat to historic sites. Meeting that obligation requires a careful balancing act to avoid seeming indifferent to human tragedy. But it also requires a quick and ready response, particularly since the instinct of those involved in the initial cleanup is to bulldoze...often indiscriminately.

Planning for Long-Term Sustainability

Natural disasters may be the most top-of-mind sustainability issue at the moment, given recent events. As horrible as these disasters are, however, they cannot and should not be permitted to obscure the multiple challenges facing global preservation efforts—challenges largely invoking resource availability and the closely related issue of earned income from visitors. Challenges affecting all preservation efforts, not just those in a storm-ravaged area.

Moreover, as we consider the question of sustainability, keep in mind that if the icons of our cultural heritage are to endure—as they must—the answer may not be found in the margins. An adjustment here, an alteration there, may not suffice to protect their future. Yet, when under financial pressure, there is an understandable tendency to take the traditional steps: defer major maintenance projects, cut staff, reduce operating hours, offer only partial openings, close facilities.

Sometimes those steps are unavoidable. When Colonial Williamsburg began to face visitation challenges of the sort plaguing most historic sites in this country, we did reduce staff and take some seldom-visited buildings offline at least during those times of the year when crowds are down. We resisted others, however, such as deferring maintenance; our stewardship obligations with respect to the site have always remained a priority.

But you must be careful not to participate in your own demise. To simply cut back on what you’re doing is still to act only upon existing assumptions. You’re not reevaluating, just simply doing less. Yes, it helps to reduce costs. But to be sustainable over the longer term, it is critical to ask more fundamental questions.

Some years ago, in America, a film was produced called Field of Dreams. It’s a story of an Iowa farmer who hears a voice. The voice says, “If you build it, he will come.” So the young man cuts down his cornfield and constructs a baseball diamond. Sure enough, the players do come. The film has a happy ending.

I mention this because, as organizations have been created to protect and preserve our cultural heritage, a working assumption appears to have been that history is important and they will come not only to learn from and enjoy the sites but also to help pay the costs.

And, for a long time, that seemed to be a reasonable assumption.

A few years ago, however, it became increasingly clear that assumptions about visitation were off the mark. It wasn’t just 9/11. Actually, the declines at long-established sites began a decade earlier. They were modest, but the trend was clear.

At Colonial Williamsburg we realized a few years ago that we needed to grapple with this development in a more fundamental way. Were we, in fact, facing new public attitudes toward history, toward how and when we take vacations, toward family activity?

Instinctively, we knew the answers were yes, yes, and yes. But we also knew that our understanding was limited.
So we engaged in a systematic, not anecdotal, inquiry, making use of our own staff and outside professionals.

What we found was encouraging and fascinating, intriguing and illuminating.

Let me run a few concepts by you: a belief in institutions, educational and moral elitism, small community values, history for the sake of history, Anglo-Saxon heritage...

These concepts are regarded, by those who study public attitudes, as representing the mindset of fewer and fewer people in today’s world. One researcher placed the people who favor these concepts in what she called the circle of diminishing relevance. And she warned, if you rely on such concepts to guide your programs and marketing, you may effectively part company with the enthusiasm of the larger population.

She told us that some of Colonial Williamsburg’s most loyal patrons are “souls of another century” who use “history as a means for escape”... whereas, the rest of the population is hurdling forward, in pursuit of the next big opportunity.

But she did not just leave us with that troubling message. Rather, she urged us to consider another list of concepts: interest in human culture, passion, civic commitment, social idealism, a preference for quality.

These are aspirational concepts that appeal to the mindset of a much larger group of Americans today (five times as large); a group she placed in a circle of ascending relevance, people seeking the leading edge.

The good news is that people in both groups, the diminishing group and the aspirational group, identified Colonial Williamsburg as a place that speaks to their interests and preferences. But it became quite clear that in developing our programming for the future, and in articulating why people should come to our site, we need to address the mindset of those in the larger circle, the aspirational group, to assure our sustainability. We were relieved, of course, to learn that we are not confronting a fundamental challenge to the core values of our mission, but we understood, quite clearly, that we do need to rethink how our message is presented on site and in our marketing.

To put it another way, the challenge is not to general purposes. The challenge is to the specific means of getting there. Although the research focused on Colonial Williamsburg, it was so comprehensive and thorough that I am comfortable stating that its conclusions are generally applicable to historic sites in this country at least, and perhaps further afield.

In another component of our research effort, we learned that Americans tend to view history, and by implication, visiting historic sites, as distinctly separate from entertainment. And we learned that it is entertainment that wins the battle for limited discretionary time. Unlike the baby boomers, so-called Generation X parents—parents in their 20s and 30s—more often than their own parents did, try to arrange work around their family needs and look for opportunities to use leisure time to strengthen and build family relationships. They look for experiences that are fun and appealing to the whole family. And all family members have a vote, said one of our trustees. She should know. She is the mother of a 10-year-old and a 14-year-old.

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She acknowledged that they have veto power when it comes to vacations.

Apparently emerging generations view visiting historic sites and entertainment... as occupying two separate realms.

Another challenge then is to convince the next generation that historic sites can, and should be, engaging and enjoyable, that they can satisfy the desire for entertainment and family fun as well as be instructional.

Finally, in addition to appealing to those who have an aspirational mindset rather than a diminishing mindset, in addition to persuading families that history can be engaging and fun, the researchers suggest that our offerings need to be relevant to people’s contemporary lives, that our sites need to make a personal, emotional connection with adults and children alike.

As stewards of our cul-

A new two-hour scripted program—“The Revolutionary City”—will place visitors in the midst of dramatic events that show the high emotions, ideological clashes, and personal challenges people experienced during America’s formative years. Photo courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
tural heritage we tend to have a baseline of commitment, a firm determination, not to trivialize our past. While there may need to be changes in program offerings and marketing messages in order to attract the public, as the research clearly suggests, any steps that have the effect of undermining the mission of the site will be rejected.

New Programming to Apply these Lessons

At Colonial Williamsburg, keeping that commitment to our mission very much in mind, but instructed by a deeper understanding of current public preferences and attitudes, we are embarking on a completely revised living history experience for visitors. I want to describe the core of that experience to demonstrate how we are responding to the research rather than letting it gather dust.

We call it “The Revolutionary City.” It will occupy about a third of the core historic area. Beginning in spring 2006, for two hours each day, the carefully scripted program in “The Revolutionary City” will play out against the bustling backdrop of everyday life and drama: debates, talk on the streets, runaways, jailing, stump speeches, household activities, repairing, mending, voting, singing, and more.

One day the years portrayed will be 1774 to 1776 when the royal government collapsed in the colonies and independence was declared; on the other day it will be 1776 to 1783, Williamsburg at war, ending with victory at Yorktown.

For these two hours, we will look into the lives of individual community members—black and white, Indian and English, enslaved and free, urban and rural—during the most significant period in our nation’s early history.

Our guests will experience and engage with each aspect of the city’s evolution. They will witness protests against British imperial policies concerning, for example, westward expansion and who had the right to authorize taxes. They will hear the debate that played out on the streets of Williamsburg, in taverns, at court meetings, and in sessions of the legislature.

They will be in the midst of the dramatic events that helped shape the nation. They will learn about the human costs involved during the war years, the choices people faced, the uncertainty of the times. They will learn people’s fears, as well as hopes for a better future.

They will realize that the people themselves played the key role in obtaining their independence and in creating the republic. It was these 18th-century men and women—virtually overnight transformed from subjects to citizens—who began the great American experiment.

In the Revolutionary City, we believe that guests will discover new insights into their republic—its formative years and its challenges and opportunities. We also believe we can pass the researcher’s test, that this program will be fascinating, lively, engaging, and fun for the whole family. But it will, it must, also be instructive. And it will reflect our continued commitment to authenticity in all that we do.

Williamsburg was a crossroads for political activity in colonial America, for revolutionary ferment and for subsequent nation-building. We believe that we can connect those days to ours in a way that will allow people to better understand what it means to be an American then and now.

It cannot be said too often: Our historic sites are learning institutions. We preserve. We study. We research. We teach. But a learning institution with insufficient enrollment is not fulfilling its purpose, nor will it be sustainable for the benefit of future generations. We must connect with and engage the general public. We must be immediate to their lives, hopes, and aspirations.

To achieve this, we must understand their attitudes and expectations.

At Colonial Williamsburg, we have devoted a lot of time and considerable resources to understand better these attitudes and expectations, and we are now designing and implementing our programming and marketing in response.

I do not offer up the specifics of Colonial Williamsburg’s actions as a model for others. But I do commend to you the results of our research. More important, the spirit of that effort to see ourselves as others see us, is a spirit that may well be sound advice for all of us here today.

Colin Campbell is the chairman and president of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
Advocacy for Heritage Sites

Fiona Reynolds

Presented at the International Conference of National Trusts held in Washington, D.C., October 15-19, 2005.

Is advocacy for heritage sites needed? In some ways it’s a rhetorical question. We care about what we do, and it’s obvious we should want to persuade others of its importance.

Most of us—indeed all of us in this room—live and breathe heritage and spend most of our time talking about and trying to convert others to our cause. Our organizations were founded by passionate advocates and most of us continue that tradition today.

Yet I don’t think that many of us would describe ourselves as having “won” the heritage battle. Every day we hear about new challenges:
• unsympathetic governments, even uninterested governments;
• inadequate resources;
• lack of media interest, or the wrong kind;
• official or public apathy, or lack of support.

So I’m not going to say much about whether advocacy matters, but about why it matters, who we are trying to persuade, and what we are trying to say.

Why Heritage Matters

So why does heritage matter?

To our founders, it was quite simple. They looked around them in 1895 and saw much that they valued being swept away in the name of progress. Industrialization, intense development pressures, noise and dirt, pollution—and aesthetic values being overrun by rampant materialism. They believed beauty was as important to people’s lives as food and shelter—and they saw it being destroyed. In their eyes, what was beautiful was very broadly defined—and has continued to be so right up to today.

They established the National Trust for England, Wales and Northern Ireland “for the purpose of promoting the permanent preservation for the benefit of the nation of lands and tenements (including buildings) of beauty or historic interest...”

Note those words: Promote—using advocacy; after all that’s all our founders had! There was no money, no staff. Permanent—the unique strength of our Act was its provision for declaring land and property inalienable, enabling us truly to protect it forever. For the benefit of the nation—for everyone, not just our members. And, places of beauty and historic interest—giving a wide canvas for the Trust’s work.

These words, written nearly 100 years ago, have amazing resonance today. Indeed, many of the pressures that gave rise to the National Trust are still with us today; some would argue more intensively than ever.

But important though heritage is for its own sake, today we have to find new arguments to support our cause. In particular we need to make our case in terms that connect with policy makers’ agendas, such as social and economic benefits. This is even more important now in the light of pressures on the environment and challenges such as climate change.

Two years ago at the International National Trusts’ meeting in Edinburgh I shared with you our analysis of the social and economic benefits of what we do, which we have since published in our leaflet Not just a pretty place. This shows how we make an important contribution to:
• job creation
• income generation in rural areas
• benefits to local communities
• sustainable tourism as a source of benefit to the economy.

This is important, but we need to do more than this. To get across why heritage matters we need to demonstrate that it matters to people, and to encourage them to express their support for it.

Sheer numbers help of course, and we are lucky to have a very large membership. But numbers alone are not enough; and whether you have a small or a large membership we will need to show that these people are engaged in as well as consumers of heritage.

Who Are We Trying to Convince?

For many years, our advocacy has been focused largely on governments—to give more money for heritage, to stop adverse development, and to make the right decisions.

What we campaign for... needs to reflect what society wants to be like in the future as well as what we were like in the past; and we need to find solutions to problems that will engage people, not divide them.
These challenges are important and will always remain so, but there can be a rhetorical element to them of which we should beware. It can look like the heritage movement believes it knows all the answers and is simply telling governments what to do. There is more than a hint of arrogance about this and it does not always work.

Today, it’s clear that it’s more complex than this. Governments—and indeed all those with a stake in the issues, whether they are developers or land managers—need solutions, not rhetoric; and they need to know that the ideas that are being promoted are practical and will work.

So we need an element of humility as well as passion, and we need to be ready to try things out and work ideas through, or base our proposals on practical experience, not just high-minded ideals.

What Are Our Messages?

Our heritage matters to us in a deep, almost visceral way. It’s as much about the way we feel about ourselves as about places, objects, or things.

What we campaign for therefore needs to reflect what society wants to be like in the future as well as what we were like in the past; and we need to find solutions to problems that will engage people, not divide them.

It follows that we mustn’t isolate heritage from the real world, creating a little bubble within which our heritage is protected, but ensure that respect and care for heritage imbues decisions that are made for all sorts of other reasons. In other words, heritage must be a key contributor to the lives we want to lead in the future, not an isolated strand of policy operating in isolation from everything else. It is in this way that we can, as we so often say, draw on the past to help shape the future.

Most of all, to achieve this we need the public behind us—not just as members, though having lots of members certainly helps, but as people participating in and expressing a view about the kind of environment we want to live in in the future.

Let me give a few examples of some of the things we are trying to do, to illustrate this approach.

First, the future of the countryside.

In Europe it has long been clear that we need a new Common Agricultural Policy. After years of campaigning we have got one—not a perfect one, but much better than what went before. In the future, farmers will be paid for looking after the countryside, not growing food. This is a good thing.

But as the new policies are being applied in England, the new support system threatens to undermine the viability of farming in some of our most precious hill areas, in the Lake District, Yorkshire, and Northumberland.

The new policies are right but—as ever—the devil is in the detail of implementation, and there are problems with the method of implementation that has been selected. In particular, small farmers in hill areas will be hit hard by the new system. The Trust, with our great knowledge of and responsibility for upland farming, is able to speak from practical knowledge about what is needed to put this right.

But it’s not just about policy and the implementation of policy. The new farming system will only work if consumers start to behave differently—to buy local food, and to seek out food products that have come from sustainable farming systems. In other words, we have to get the public behind us, not just in words but in their actions.

Second, issues facing the coast.

The Trust owns more than 700 miles of coastline, enabling us to protect and manage it for public benefit.

But if ever there was an example of a place that is not susceptible to being kept as it is, it is the coastline. It is mobile, with coastal material being eroded, flooded, and constantly moved by the force of the sea. And as we understand more about climate change, it is clear that those forces are going to become stronger and more unpredictable.

The Trust’s approach is to be very open about the challenges of managing the coastline in these new circumstances, and to be honest that we cannot hold the sea back,
It is an iconic monument of international importance, heavily compromised by a highway thundering past the stones. For 25 years the Trust and English Heritage have been working together with other conservation and heritage bodies to find a solution to this problem.

A solution was found—a tunnel to take the sight, smell, and sound of traffic out of the landscape. A public inquiry was held and, subject to differences of view about the length of the tunnel, a solution appeared to be in sight.

But in July this year the government announced that the whole project was under review, because the cost of the tunnel had leapt from about £200 million to more than £400 million. “Review” in these circumstances may be a euphemism for cancellation, and few expect the tunnel to be built.

So it may be back to the drawing board for Stonehenge, with the sobering knowledge that the government is not prepared to pay what it takes to find the right heritage solution for the stones and their precious landscape.

We are therefore exploring the potential for a public campaign for our heritage, whose aim will be to find ways of enabling the millions of people who care about our heritage to express their support for it in a positive way.

Education

This is a different sort of advocacy, because it’s not about decision-makers or even the wider public but about reaching out to the next generation, who need to be tomorrow’s heritage supporters.

If we can inspire young people to care about our heritage—win their hearts and minds and engage them—not only will their own lives be enhanced but they will go on to become a generation who cares about our heritage.

More Examples of Advocacy

There are many, many examples of successful advocacy that delivers positive results for heritage. Let me mention a few from other countries:

In Cushenden in Northern Ireland, the National Trust in combination with the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society has developed a scheme, called HEARTH, to rescue 150 historic buildings and create new homes for local people from those buildings.

The Dampier Rock Art Precinct in Western Australia is threatened by industrial development, and a campaign to protect it has won the support of the World Monuments Fund, which has placed it on its Most Endangered Places list.

And finally, Din l’Art Helwa, Malta’s National Trust, fights an unceasing battle against inappropriate and insensitive tourist development in that tiny, precious, crowded island.

Common Ingredients of Success

The common ingredients of success are clear—vision, passion, yes. But also the engagement of people to support the cause and show that they care.

We are pioneering at Tyntesfield, a Victorian house and estate near Bristol where the public is being given the chance to take part in, not just look at the ongoing conservation work.

Above all, it means bringing heritage into the mainstream, making it integral to all that matters in our lives, not a separate element.

This requires not only the passion and determination that we are all used to demonstrating but also a degree of humility; to listen to what people are telling us about what matters and what is important.

If we achieve this goal, our advocacy and our capacity to deliver will be greatly enhanced.

Fiona Reynolds has been director-general of the National Trust since January 2001. Before taking up the post she was director of the Women’s Unit in the Cabinet Office and was previously director of the Council for the Protection of Rural England and Secretary to the Council for National Parks.

Getting the public—including young people—directly involved in preservation projects is a sure way to build their concern and support for heritage causes. Here volunteers from the Prince’s Trust work in the grounds of Tyntesfield, a National Trust property in Somerset. © NTPL/David Levenson.
Visionaries vs. Pragmatists: The Debate over How to Interpret 20th-Century Icons

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's house for Edith Farnsworth in Plano, Ill., completed in 1951, and Philip Johnson's Glass House, completed in 1949, are linked in many ways. The obvious connections that scholars and critics have explored over the years concern architectural history. Johnson (1906–2005) was influenced by the work of Mies, studied his work, sought to accommodate the visitors, and saw the design for the Farnsworth House (as yet unbuilt) before designing the Glass House for himself in New Canaan, Conn. Mies (1886–1969) was, in the 1940s, a very significant architect teaching and practicing in Chicago. He was already widely known for his 1928-29 Barcelona Pavilion and work as director of the Bauhaus School in Germany in the 1930s.

Breaking the houses down to their basic elements, both are rectilinear boxes constructed with glass and steel as the predominant materials, having four glass "walls" running floor to ceiling, and without interior partitions touching any exterior surface. The similarities begin to fade after that, as each house has its own distinct qualities and character, along with dramatically different interactions with the surrounding landscape. Of all that has been said and written about these houses, though, the most noteworthy connection is likely the immeasurably large impact that they have had upon architecture students around the world over the past five decades. Both sites are listed as National Historic Landmarks.

And now these two icons of 20th-century architecture are connected in a new and somewhat unexpected way. Both have recently become National Trust historic sites as house museums and will be open to the public for education on the history of architecture. The Farnsworth House is operated by the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois (LPCI) and was opened for public tours in May 2004. Preparations are underway at Johnson's Glass House property for an anticipated public opening in spring 2007. The transition from private ownership to public resource is not as easy as it might seem. Many choices must be made regarding improvements required to accommodate the visitors, as well as treatment for conservation projects and ongoing maintenance. All these decisions require a rigorous philosophical framework to hold everything together in a consistent, logical, rational manner. Conservation philosophy statements have been drafted for both houses with assistance from numerous advisors.

Visionaries and Pragmatists

Among those who are actively engaged in the preservation of modern, 20th-century architecture, there is a camp of intellectuals forming who would argue that these buildings require a new type of thinking about preservation. These new preservationists are keenly intrigued with the idea that authenticity is found in the purity of the vision. The Visionary believes that the authentic idea that existed in the mind of the creative genius at a certain point never have been fully realized in a tangible form. In this approach there is great historical interest in the facts of construction chronology, but these facts are secondary to the purity of the vision.

In a different camp exists the vast majority of preservationists who view the preservation of modern architecture as no different than the preservation of any other architectural style. This group follows accepted methodologies espoused by the four treatments identified in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties—preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction. Members of this camp are Pragmatists, and...
Applying These Approaches

In the case of the Farnsworth House, a Visionary treatment would create or restore the architect’s original vision had the house been designed and built without certain elements. Edith Farnsworth (the client who hired Mies) introduced into the design process, or elements added subsequently by Lord Peter Palumbo, owner of the house from 1972 to 2003. Architectural historians often note that Mies disliked the screened upper terrace and free-standing wardrobe apparently required by Edith Farnsworth. A Visionary approach would deny restoration of the screens and call for removal of the wardrobe. Palumbo, being part Visionary, removed the screen decades ago but retained the wardrobe.

Similar treatment would befall other elements added or modified by Palumbo that are not consistent with Mies’ design idea. These conflicting Palumbo elements would include such things as the fireplace modification, interior lighting above the core, HVAC noise, exterior lighting around the house, the boat house added rather close to the house, the swimming pool, and landscape modifications. But Palumbo’s furniture (in the house now because it was conveyed with the sale of the property to the National Trust in December 2003) is appropriate because it is consistent with what Mies might have done. Palumbo purchased furniture designed by Mies, which is still commercially available, and commissioned other pieces by architect Dirk Lohan (grandson of Mies) which fit very well in the space. Edith Farnsworth’s furniture, though, of which there are ample photographs to support a good restoration, would be inappropriate to the Visionary because it is at odds with what Mies might have wanted. Farnsworth’s furniture was not designed by Mies, was not Mies-inspired, and was not even International Style modern.

The Pragmatist camp would note that Mies is no longer alive to tell us his original vision, and since he never did any final set of architectural construction drawings, there is no way to be sure about how his design might have been different had he not accommodated the interests of his client. After all, a building is an amalgam of design inspiration, client wishes/functions, and budget. A Pragmatist would note that Mies successfully sued Farnsworth to recover the cost of construction which listed the screening and the wardrobe, among many other things, so we know Mies was paid to install them (Mies was both architect and builder for Farnsworth), and they were both in place when Farnsworth moved in. A Visionary blend that would create the full force of Mies’ original intent would also be something that never existed in physical fact and thus is unacceptable to the Pragmatist. The Pragmatist is deeply concerned about excess speculation involved with preservation treatments, and cannot abide creation of a scene that is historically inaccurate in any way. Pragmatists would also argue that the greatness of the Farnsworth House is fully apparent as it now exists.

Concerning Johnson’s Glass House, similar Visionary vs. Pragmatist arguments come into play, but the differences are subtle and difficult to distinguish. Philip Johnson lived on the estate until his death in January 2005, so the entire historic place is very close to what one might call a time capsule, just not a very old one. On the day that Johnson died, the place was 100 percent authentic as his home.

A Visionary blend that would create the full force of Mies’ original intent would also be something that never existed in physical fact and thus is unacceptable to the Pragmatist.
Johnson said of his Glass House property: "Good or bad, small or big, this is the purest time that I ever had in my life to do architecture. Everything else is tainted with three problems: clients, function, and money. Here I had none of the three."

because Johnson had lived there continuously since 1949. So, unlike the Farnsworth House where architect and client needed to interact, Johnson was his own client. Historians have noted that Mies made this observation regarding Johnson’s Glass House, perhaps lamenting his own lack of personal wealth to pursue what Johnson achieved, but also belittling Johnson’s efforts for failing to show the flexibility needed to overcome the challenge of dealing with a client. Johnson said of his Glass House property: "Good or bad, small or big, this is the purest time that I ever had in my life to do architecture. Everything else is tainted with three problems: clients, function, and money. Here I had none of the three."

Naturally, numerous elements were added to Johnson’s property over the years; they aged and were maintained, transformed, or removed according to the design goals of the residents. After construction of the Glass House and Brick House, other buildings were added. These include the Painting Gallery (completed 1965), Sculpture Gallery (completed 1970), Library (completed 1980), and Visitor Center (a.k.a. Monsta, completed 1995). The size of the property greatly increased with the purchase of additional acres which included three more houses, two of which were extensively modified and furnished by Johnson and his partner David Whitney. The development of the landscape is especially interesting in this regard, as it appears to have been a continuous work in progress and has a historical significance inseparable from the buildings. The landscape includes paths, roads, bridges, seating, stone walls, ruins, open fields, formal gardens, wooded areas, and many pieces of sculpture all carefully laid out and manipulated for different effects. Views to and from landscape elements and buildings open and close as one moves through the different indoor and outdoor zones.

In the case of Johnson’s Glass House, the Visionary would have the place appear as Johnson would have wanted the public to see it, with each element treated and maintained in a manner consistent with the designer’s intentions. Buildings, systems, materials, and other architectural components are now in disrepair because Johnson deferred maintenance in his years of declining health, secure in the knowledge that the National Trust would eventually take care of things. The Visionary would restore all in the manner that Johnson would have pursued. This would mean that each restoration act or repair would be executed with great care for the quality of final appearance. Fortunately for the Pragmatists, the most recent designs can be restored to maintain consistent historical accuracy across the site. Designs or other features that were abandoned or demolished do not need to be restored or reconstructed because they were changes made by the architect during his lifetime of design on the property.

The Evolving Debate
As decisions are made concerning the preservation philosophy of these two magnificent properties, the National Trust as owner sits at the nexus of a debate over the treatment of modern masterpieces. Because the National Trust is the nation’s leading nonprofit preservation organization and committed to upholding exemplary practices concerning the care of historic places, it is logical that the National Trust will lean decidedly toward the Pragmatist’s position. However, there is great value, as well as intellectual delight, in exploring the Visionary approach. One must not forget that the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards were written by mortals (really smart ones), not gods, so the day may come when something akin to the Visionary approach could be the norm for modern architectural icons. Fortunately for all, the Pragmatic approach need not preclude the possibility of future treatments that could be quite different philosophically, so long as the basic approach is one of preservation and avoids aggressive alterations or removals. In the two cases cited above, the treatment known as Preservation will be the guiding principle, and the

Philip Johnson was greatly influenced by Mies, and his plans for the Farnsworth House, when he designed his own Modernist house in New Canaan, Conn. The Glass House was Johnson’s home from its completion in 1949 until his death in 2005. Preparations are now underway to open this new National Trust historic site to the public. Photo courtesy of the National Trust.
alterations required for public visitation will be as minimal and unobtrusive as possible.

**Statements of Preservation Philosophy**

The working draft statements regarding the preservation philosophy for the two sites appear below. These were created in collaboration with many experts in the preservation field. Keep in mind that they are still drafts, and may be subsequently modified or revised.

**DRAFT Farnsworth House Preservation Philosophy:**

The National Trust and LPCI resolve to treat the entire Farnsworth House property in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, specifically the “Standards for Preservation.” The objective is to conserve the December 2003 appearance to the greatest extent possible. Preservation treatment to the December 2003 appearance (the date when the house ceased to be privately owned) is the best approach for the historical interpretation of the Farnsworth House because it allows the history of the site, including stories of the two owners, Farnsworth and Palumbo, to be told with clarity and accuracy. The treatment approach recognizes that the whole history of the property prior to December 2003 has significance, while at the same time the approach allows the period of greatest historical significance—Mies van der Rohe’s involvement with the project that culminated in 1951—to be fully interpreted. The historical significance of the Farnsworth House is quite broad (see the National Register nomination form) and preservation of it in its current form does not limit significance to any single date in time.

**DRAFT Glass House Preservation Philosophy:**

The National Trust resolves to treat the entire Glass House property in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, specifically the “Standards for Preservation.” The objective is to restore and conserve the property as it appeared during the final years of Philip Johnson’s life as an active architect. This period is defined as the time when Mr. Johnson was still going into his New York office on a regular basis, approximately 2000–2003, and before his years of declining health when he stopped playing an active role in the design and maintenance decisions at the Glass House Estate. The overall intent of the conservation philosophy is to allow the full history of the site, including all the numerous additions and modifications designed by Philip Johnson or his partner David Whitney, to be experienced with clarity and historical accuracy. The philosophy recognizes that the whole history of the property from 1949–2005 has value and historic significance. Over this 56-year period the appearance of the site changed dramatically as property holdings were expanded, new buildings added, sculptures installed and removed, and landscape decisions managed with utmost care and attention to every detail. The choice to display the physical appearance of the site to the 2000–2003 period recognizes that the design grew over time, always attaining a higher level of perfection with each change.

*William Dupont, AIA, is chief architect for the National Trust.*

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**The Historic Preservation Legacy of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis**

Later this year we mark the 40th anniversary of the enactment of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Much will be written about the changes in national public policy that this law has effected. Likely little will be written about the critical role played by one individual, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, who as first lady recognized and promoted historic preservation as an achievable goal.

With the benefit of 40 years of history, we can now more fully appreciate the pioneering contribution that Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis made to historic preservation in this country. Her role in bringing historic preservation from Pennsylvania Avenue to the Main Street of every town across America has been mostly undocumented. It is discussed in a paragraph here, maybe a chapter there, but nowhere is the impact of her historic preservation work viewed in its totality. Rarely is she recognized outside of Washington, D.C., for the pivotal role she played in making historic preservation a consideration in the formulation of national public policy.

Americans who came of age with the Kennedys had fought on European soil and witnessed the rebuilding of Old World cities under Truman’s Marshall Plan (1948-1952). Later in the 1950s, urban renewal became America’s version of the Marshall Plan. While intended to save our declining cities, in actuality it brought displacement and destruction. Whole neighborhoods and ways of life were loaded into dump trucks and carted away. An unsettling viewpoint was evolving. Americans were conflicted between their desire for progress and their comfort with the past.

**White House Restoration as a Stimulus**

In the midst of this, Jacqueline Kennedy came on the scene. She knew the significance of preserving Washington, D.C., for future generations. She focused our attention on one of the most
important and visible buildings in American history, the White House, and built her historic preservation legacy on its foundations. Americans, as well, were ready to take historic preservation beyond tea room conversations and weave it into the fabric of American society. She found a receptive audience as historic preservation played center stage at the White House.

Plans for the White House project actually began during the presidential campaign in 1960, well before Inauguration Day. “The minute I knew that Jack was going to run for president,” she recalled in a 1961 interview by Hugh Sidey for Life, “I knew that the White House would be one of my main projects if he won.” Her approach to this project was scholarly, undertaken with a great sense of history. She did her homework. Following the birth of her son, John F. Kennedy, Jr., on November 25, 1960, she gathered an extensive collection of books and articles on the White House, some from the Library of Congress, and began her study. Her perspective became that of a historian, not that of a decorator.

Most Americans in the 1960s remember her for restoring splendor and history back to the White House because they witnessed it first-hand on the television sets in their own homes. Early in 1962, while spearheading the White House restoration, the first lady prepared for the CBS televised broadcast A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy, which aired February 14. In 1962 television was just making its way into every home and an appearance by America’s young and beautiful first lady was unprecedented. Conservative estimates claimed almost 56 million Americans watched the hour-long program. The first lady had succeeded in bringing the history of the White House and historic preservation into the homes of one-third of the nation.

By bringing us into her home and speaking about it so knowledgeably, Americans were captivated by the history of the White House. By basing her approach to the White House restoration on “scholarship,” she established her credibility with the Washington establishment as well as with the American people.

While not planned as such, the historically sensitive restoration of the White House served as the catalyst for her more significant historic preservation work which resulted in saving the historic character of Lafayette Square and—ultimately—in the enactment of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

Saving Lafayette Square

Once the White House restoration was fully underway, Mrs. Kennedy looked across Pennsylvania Avenue and set her course on preserving her neighborhood—an action many of us take today if certain buildings or landscapes that contribute to the ambiance of our neighborhoods are threatened. Perhaps her year of work on the White House restoration is what prompted her to bring historic preservation to the front yard of the White House. Perhaps she experienced the same concerns we all have when the character of our neighborhood is threatened. Perhaps as a young mother she dreaded having the sun blocked off from her children by government-issue skyscrapers. Perhaps, as architect John Carl Warnecke speculates, she “became quite concerned when she learned of the proposed destruction of the Renwick building.”

“Activist” may be an uncharacteristic way to describe this first lady, but it is more accurate than we realize. Her efforts to save the historic character of Lafayette Square empowered Americans to save the historic character of their own neighborhoods.

Without waiting even a day after her Emmy Award-winning White House telecast, she walked Lafayette Park on February 15, 1962, with David E. Finley, then chairman of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts. During the preceding decade, plans for razing much of the Lafayette Square neighborhood had been underway in order to make way for construction of a new Courts Building and a new Executive Office Building.

To Finley she expressed her and the president’s concerns that the design plans for the proposed buildings to surround Lafayette Park were “out of line with the other buildings on the Square.” During this walk, Finley informed the first lady that the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts had already approved these design plans. In fact, the design plans had already been signed off on by the president and the General Services Administration (GSA).

The destruction of the historic residential character of the White House neighbor-
hood seemed inevitable to everyone. Yet Jacqueline Kennedy apparently was not convinced this was a done deal. She asked if the Commission could give further consideration “to retaining the houses on Jackson Place, using them for small agencies with gardens.” In remarks to the Society of Architectural Historians on January 29, 1970, William Walton, special advisor to President Kennedy, quoted the first lady as saying to Finley: “Mr. Finley, these buildings can be preserved. And they must.”

She also took this opportunity to discuss with Finley her philosophy of historic preservation and in so doing put into motion the process that contributed to the enactment of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966. She told Finley that she “would like to have Congress pass a law establishing something on the order of Monuments Historiques in France” to protect buildings of historical or architectural significance from being destroyed. At that meeting, Finley said that he “would talk with Mr. Conrad Wirth of the Park Service and ask that he give consideration to strengthening the existing law.” Finley documented this meeting and their discussion in his “Memorandum for the Files dated February 19, 1962.”

Subsequently in a letter to J.B. West (chief usher at the White House) dated February 21, 1962, Mr. Finley wrote: “Would you also tell Mrs. Kennedy that I will talk as soon as possible with Mr. Conrad Wirth, Director of the National Park Service, with reference to her idea that further efforts should be made toward the preservation of buildings of historic and architectural importance throughout the country.” The significant developments these communications set in motion will be discussed later.

As a follow up to their February 15th meeting, Finley sent a Confidential Memo to Mrs. Kennedy dated February 21, 1962, in which he outlined the actions taken by the Commission of Fine Arts at its February 20, 1962, meeting. During that meeting, the majority reaffirmed its earlier decision favoring demolition on Jackson Place and replacing the Renwick building with a park. (Finley dissented from the decision of the Commission.)

Correspondence was exchanged between Finley and Jacqueline Kennedy in March 1962. The first lady expressed her views and those of the president regarding preservation of the character of the Square and the Renwick building. Finley wrote on March 5, 1962, and suggested that she or the president contact the administrator of GSA, Bernard L. Boutin, to convey their concerns and to request that the architects submit another design “more in keeping with the 19th century architecture of the Square.” Undeterred by the fact that even her husband had tried unsuccessfully to change the designs for the new construction, she followed Finley’s suggestion and wrote to Boutin.

This March 6, 1962, letter to Boutin may have been the most significant action she took as first lady and the one with the most lasting effect on historic preservation. It brought the issue of historic preservation to the desk of one of Washington’s most powerful decision-makers. She pleaded her case for preserving “the 19th Century feeling of Lafayette Square” and asked that Boutin “write to the architects and tell them to submit...a design which is more in keeping with the 19th Century bank on the corner.” Jacqueline Kennedy went on to enunciate the White House philosophy: “I so strongly feel that the White House should give the example in preserving our nation’s past.” By stating at the outset of this letter that she was speaking on behalf of the president and herself, what stronger argument could she make? Jacqueline Kennedy wrote that she was not prepared to sit quietly by while the nation’s heritage was “ripped down and horrible things put up in their place. I simply panic at the thought of this and decided to make a last-ditch appeal.”

The response to her letter was nothing short of miraculous. By March 9th, Boutin had sent a memorandum to the GSA assistant commissioner for design and construction requesting a meeting with the architects for the Lafayette Square project. He quoted
The first lady attended the unveiling of the Lafayette Square plans at the General Services Administration building auditorium. L-R Bernard L. Boutin, Administrator of the GSA; Mrs. Kennedy; architect John Carl Warnecke. Photo by Abbie Rowe, White House/John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.

free from the first lady’s letter to him without disclosing the source, but stated rather that there had been a “tremendous amount of public interest” in the Square. GSA records show that by March 15, 1962, Boutin was meeting with Shepley, Hepburn, Perry & Dean, one of the Boston architecture firms involved.

In her April 18, 1962, letter to Finley after her return from a cultural goodwill visit to India she expressed her excitement at the developments: “all our wildest dreams came true.” The design plans for Lafayette Square would be 19th century in feeling. Demolition of the 19th-century buildings and the Renwick building was canceled. The houses on the Decatur House side (Jackson Place) would be restored and the vacant lots filled in with houses in a 19th-century style.

By this time, the architects who had been on board bowed out. New plans were being developed by the architect the president had consulted while the first lady was in India. This was John Carl Warnecke of San Francisco who believed that the “function of building a building in an historic place was to express the context and the continuity of that symbolic and historic place.” Warnecke’s innovative design for Lafayette Square represented a marriage of modern architecture and historic preservation that maintained the historic character of this residential square, more than fulfilling the expressed wishes of the president and the first lady.

The president and the first lady worked closely with the architect—and all three should be jointly credited with saving Lafayette Square. The visual success of the Lafayette Square project must clearly be attributed to the architect, John Carl Warnecke, who had been brought into the process by President Kennedy himself. Through his design, Warnecke was able to demonstrate the viability of his belief that an architect could “save the best of the old and create all of the required new in the context of the historic surroundings.” President Kennedy expressed how keenly interested he was in the outcome of Lafayette Square in an October 15, 1962, letter to Boutin: “I am particularly pleased that in this case you and the architects were able to express in the new buildings the architecture of our times in a contemporary manner that harmonizes with the historic buildings.” But unless the first lady had spoken out and taken action when she did, the Lafayette Square buildings would have become a pile of rubble.

By drawing attention to Lafayette Square, Jacqueline Kennedy was in a unique position to focus the national spotlight on historic preservation. Saving Lafayette Square served an important end because it was a very visible example of historic buildings that were saved as a group. In this instance it was a park in a “square” of buildings, making a fine urban composition. Directly across the street from the White House, what more prominent location could there be for such an innovative project?

After construction of the new Executive Office Building and the new Courts Building was completed and the 19th-century houses restored, the National Park Service nominated the Lafayette Square Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places on March 10, 1970. This district was placed in the National Register on August 29, 1970, and granted the status of a National Historic Landmark. Receiving designation as a National Historic Landmark underscored how historically significant and visionary the actions undertaken by the first lady were when she embarked upon saving her neighborhood.

Today Lafayette Square is celebrated by a consortium of properties in the neighborhood known as “Neighbors to the President.” Started in 1987 by Decatur House, Octagon House, Daughters of the American Revolution, the White House Visitor’s Center, and the Curator of the White House, the “Neighbors” published the booklet Salute the Square in 1995 which recognized the preservation effort undertaken by Jacqueline Kennedy in the saving the Lafayette Square neighborhood as “the cornerstone of the 1966 Historic Preservation
Act and a symbol in the preservation field for years to come.”

The National Context: Genesis of the National Historic Preservation Act

When she embarked upon saving the residential and historic character of Lafayette Square, Jacqueline Kennedy did not act in a vacuum. Successful efforts at preserving historic neighborhoods had been undertaken years earlier in places such as Charleston, S.C., and the Vieux Carré in New Orleans. She had been exposed to successful preservation and restoration when she studied abroad in Paris and during the time she and her husband lived in the historic Georgetown neighborhood of Washington, D.C. She drew upon these successes of the past when faced with the proposed destruction of Lafayette Square. Even her discussion with Finley when she suggested utilizing the Monuments Historiques law as a model for an American law which would enable us to save America’s neighborhoods and older buildings.

James R. Ketchum, curator of the White House, believes that she made us feel that “we could all share in America’s heritage.” She set the stage for proactive historic preservation and empowered us to get involved. Saving a historic or architecturally significant building now seemed possible.

In discussing the climate of the times in the early 1960s, William Murtagh, first Keeper of the National Register, in an interview with this author placed Jacqueline Kennedy’s preservation activities in the context of the ongoing development of the interstate highway system and the ensuing urban renewal that cut through communities destroying local orientation points and historic properties. She was in a position to gain national attention not only because of who she was, but more importantly because preserving our neighborhoods resonated with everyone. Her actions sensitized us to how important it was to save America’s neighborhoods and older buildings.

Bernard Meyer, Esq., who served in the Office of the Solicitor for the Department of the Interior during the 1960s, believes that “Mrs. Kennedy had the kernel of the idea which became the Historic Preservation Act of 1966.” On this subject, George B. Hartzog, Jr., (whose appointment as director of the National Park Service was delayed until the early days of the Johnson Administration because it was being considered at the time of President Kennedy’s death) says: “There is no question in my mind that Mrs. Kennedy’s White House restoration work and her success in Lafayette Square resulted in a tidal wave of preservation activity that cascaded across the country culminating in the enactment of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966.”

The responsibility for shepherding this legislation through Congress rested with Gordon Gray, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and with Mr. Hartzog. Mr. Hartzog recalls that throughout the debates and testimony on Capitol Hill, the spirit of Mrs. Kennedy was ever present based upon her success with...
Lafayette Square and the White House restoration. In Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Historic Preservation in America, William Murtagh states: “The progressive programs of the Lyndon Johnson Administration...had their basis in the idealism of the short-lived Kennedy presidency.”

In Appreciation—Long Overdue

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis could never have predicted how her historically sensitive restoration of the White House, how the Warnecke design for Lafayette Square, and how her conversations with David E. Finley would affect the course of historic preservation. Her role in historic preservation was written in her own free-form script from the letters she wrote to her work in saving Lafayette Square, she replied: “I have never been thanked.”

In speaking about what she achieved, Lady Bird Johnson said: “She was a worker, which I don’t think was always quite recognized.” In discussing Jacqueline Kennedy’s impact, William Murtagh reflects: “In terms of historic preservation what Jackie did was seminal in the 20th century. She had the right mindset and was in a position of power to do something.”

Shortly after her death in 1994, Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and Washington attorney Leonard A. Zax published an article in the Washington Post relaying how when David McCullough, the historian, thanked her for her work in saving Lafayette Square, she replied: “I have never been thanked.”

The time for personally thanking Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis has passed. But in this year, as we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the enactment of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, it is timely indeed to recognize the contribution that she made in her own way to historic preservation in this country.

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Research was conducted at the John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Mass.; the Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas; Archives and Files of the Renwick Gallery of The Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Archives and Files at the National Gallery of Art of The Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Archives and Files at the White House Historical Association, Washington, D.C.; The Papers of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; and Government Document Depository at Drew University, Madison, N.J.

The author also conducted personal interviews with the following: William Murtagh; George B. Hartzog, Jr., Esq.; Bernard Meyer, Esq.; John Carl Warnecke; Nash Gavino; Charles Abertson; James R. Ketchum; and William Scale.

Connecting the Dots to Build a Fund for Sacred Places

Preserving historic properties is all about building relationships. That’s what they say at Partners for Sacred Places, the nation’s leading provider of information, resources, and advocacy to save America’s diverse houses of worship and strengthen its communities. When the national organization (headquartered in Philadelphia) began developing the Philadelphia Regional Fund for Sacred Places two years ago, it put that mantra to the test. Envisioning a fund that would grant $7 million to 75 historic churches, synagogues, and meetinghouses over the next ten years took ambition. Building a constituency to raise that kind of money was going to require Partners to take its relationship-building to a whole new level.

The Fund was started with a $1.2 million challenge grant from the William Penn Foundation in Philadelphia. The purpose of the challenge grant was threefold: raise public awareness about endangered sacred places in the region; build a broad base of support for the issue among policy makers, faith leaders, philanthropists, and nonprofit organizations; and develop a model fund for historic sacred places that could be replicated in other parts of the country.

To help Partners lay the groundwork, the foundation awarded $275,000 up front to develop a plan for the Fund, set up an advisory committee, hire a Fund coordinator, compile a database of historic churches and synagogues that were potential Fund grantees and meet with them, and launch a public awareness campaign in the print and electronic media.

To meet the financial challenge of the grant, Partners met with foundations, individuals, and public agencies, expecting that most of the matching funds would come from foundations. But in less than a year and with no previous experience navigating the legislative and executive branches of state government, Partners secured $575,000 in state funds (with another $375,000 in the pipeline), including major grants from the state’s historical and museum commission and governor’s office, and

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A recent survey conducted by Partners in one of the poorest areas of North Philadelphia found that historic religious buildings there need $1–2 million to stay standing and in active use.

A Model Fund

The Philadelphia Regional Fund for Sacred Places provides major capital grants to help endangered, historically significant sacred places in Southeastern Pennsylvania make urgently needed structural repairs, and supplements those grants with technical assistance and in-depth training on project management and fundraising. This intensive level of support ensures that congregations develop long-term funding plans to stabilize their building for the future. It also guarantees that investments in the Fund are leveraged with other funding. Through a rigorous selection process, the Fund makes awards to endangered sacred places that demonstrate: 1) architectural and historical significance; 2) a major role in community service provision and neighborhood stabilization; 3) high congregational capacity, including stable and committed leadership; and 4) a comprehensive plan to address urgent repair needs.

Developing a Strong Case

In developing its case for the Fund, Partners drew on 16 years of experience providing advocacy and direct assistance to congregations, historic preservation groups, and other community-based organizations. In the mid 1990s, Partners sponsored the groundbreaking study Sacred Places at Risk, which documented the significant contributions urban congregations make to communities around the country. The study showed that 90 percent of congregations host community services ranging from day care to job training to cultural events, and that 80 percent of the people who benefit from these programs are not members of the congregation.

A recent survey conducted by Partners in one of the poorest areas of North Philadelphia found that historic religious buildings there need $1–2 million to stay standing and in active use. Factoring this survey into the range of buildings in disrepair across the region, Partners estimated that the average congregation served by the Fund will need $500,000 in repairs within the next few years.

In making its case for the Fund, Partners also pointed to the region’s unique architectural and cultural heritage. The religious tolerance espoused by Pennsylvania’s founder William Penn led to the birth of “mother churches” from many denominations in Philadelphia, and the city’s long history of architectural and artistic excellence is most notable in its religious buildings.

Building Relationships

The first, and most critical, relationship Partners forged at the state level was with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), the commonwealth’s official history agency, which manages historic museums and provides grants to preserve historic landmarks. In October 2004 Partners Executive Director Bob Jaeger met PHMC Executive Director and State Historic Preservation Officer Barbara Franco at a Pennsylvania Law Institute conference about preserving religious properties. Jaeger made a presentation on Partners’ newest program—New Dollars/New Partners, which teaches congregations with older buildings how to broaden their base of support. He also introduced the Fund, which would expand resources for historic religious properties by providing capital grants as well as the New Dollars training.

Like a growing number of state historic agencies around the country (more than 20 to date), PHMC provides capital grants for preservation-related projects at historically significant churches and synagogues through its Keystone Grants program. Partners had recently learned that PHMC’s latest five-year strategic plan emphasized developing partnerships with nonprofits at the local

Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church, founded by Richard Allen, is considered the “mother church” for the African American Episcopal denomination. The church received a $100,000 grant to restore its bell tower. In addition, it received more than $400,000 from Save America’s Treasures. Photo courtesy of Partners for Sacred Places.
PHMC supported Partners’ Fund with a $250,000 grant, its money would be matched by Partners and provide grants of $100,000 each to these five Philadelphia area churches—doubling PHMC’s money—and the congregations would also receive New Dollars training and project oversight from Partners.

So PHMC joined the Fund, and in November 2005, the Fund awarded its first round of grants to the five Philadelphia-area congregations that had submitted exemplary proposals to the Keystone Grants program: Christ Church Episcopal (Old City), Old Saint Joseph’s Catholic Church (Old City), Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church (Society Hill), Calvary United Methodist Church (West Philadelphia), and Shiloh Baptist Church (South Philadelphia).

The Partners-PHMC partnership is highly innovative: While many state historic commissions provide money to nonprofit groups that is re-granted for historic preservation projects, this collaboration is unique because it focuses on historic religious properties and includes an intensive training program. PHMC’s Franco notes: “Grantees of the Fund will receive strong technical training that will enhance their ability to manage a preservation project. Preservation projects are challenging undertakings and often congregations don’t have the capacity to manage them. Partners proved through its New Dollars training program that it can provide that kind of technical assistance. This ensures PHMC’s financial support of the Regional Fund will result in the successful rehabilitation of numerous important sacred places in the state.”

Partner’s relationship with PHMC was critical in several ways. While Partners had received several mid-size grants from foundations, the PHMC grant became the lead contribution toward the challenge grant. It created momentum and helped establish Partner’s credibility with state government. Additionally, PHMC staff provided extensive guidance and support. PHMC Historic Preservation Grant Program Manager Scott Doyle served on Partner’s advisory committee for the Fund, guiding the development of everything from application forms and eligibility requirements to invoicing, reimbursement structure, and evaluation criteria. Doyle invited Partners’ Fund Coordinator Erin Coryell to serve on PHMC’s Keystone Grant review panel, which provided an invaluable insider’s view into the granting process. Finally, by funding Partners to provide bricks-and-mortar grants to religious properties, PHMC set a state precedent that would prove extremely important later on.

Getting Support from the Executive and Legislative Branches

The William Penn challenge grant lent credibility to Partners as it courted funders around the state. But perhaps more importantly, the December 2005 deadline for matching funds created an urgency that forced Partners to explore every funding possibility. Partners formed an advisory committee and hired fundraising counsel to strategize ways to garner support from foundations, individuals, businesses, and the public sector. With little knowledge of the funding streams at the state level, Partners sought an insider at the state capitol in Harrisburg to provide direction.

They found that guidance in Donna Cooper, secretary of planning and policy in Governor Edward G. Rendell’s cabinet. Cooper has a long history of working with religious groups and community organizations. While serving as Rendell’s deputy mayor in Philadelphia in the mid 1990s, she participated in a roundtable hosted by Partners to explore the local impact of its national study, Sacred Places at Risk. Partners reconnected with Cooper, who became a generous ally.

Partners also sought to approach key state legislators to request discretionary grants for community improvements which are administered through the state’s Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). Partners learned that while it would be fairly simple to find a single legislator to support a small discretionary grant, a larger grant would require bipartisan support from all four caucuses—House Republicans, House Democrats, Senate Republicans, and Senate Democrats. A single caucus would be reluctant to support a large discretionary grant on its own.

Partners honed in on four state legislative caucus leaders with constituencies in Philadelphia: Sen. Robert Thompson (recently deceased), a Republican and former chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee; Rep. John Perzel, a Republican and Speaker of
Partners staff conferred with board and advisory committee members, denominational leaders, and supporters from around the Philadelphia region in the search for people who could open doors in the legislature.

In spring 2005, Partners staff conferred with board and advisory committee members, denominational leaders, and supporters from around the Philadelphia region in the search for people who could open doors in the legislature. An early meeting with The Reverend Roy G. Almquist, bishop of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, was fortuitous. Almquist was a personal friend of Sen. Thompson and a long-time supporter of Partners’ work. He called the senator, and joined Partners staff at a meeting to make a case for how the Fund would benefit the senator’s constituency. Sen. Thompson agreed to support a discretionary grant from his caucus with the caveat that Partners secure support from the other caucuses.

Partners used a similar strategy to reach the three other legislative leaders. For example, the pastor of a prominent African American church helped connect Partners to Rep. Dwight Evans, and Partners’ staff met Sen. Vincent Fumo at a lunch sponsored by a business group.

Partners worked not only peer-to-peer but also from the ground up. They identified churches or synagogues in each legislator’s district that could benefit from the Fund and asked several congregation members to contact the legislator through letters of support, e-mails, and phone calls.

To keep the Fund on the legislators’ radar, Partners asked contacts to call or e-mail legislators repeatedly over the next several months and to contact other legislators they knew to garner their support as well. Partners staff continued to follow up with each legislator’s staff, which required persistence and patience, given the staffers’ hectic schedules.

Bumps in the Road

In August 2005, after requesting support from the four caucus leaders, Partners began developing a single application to DCED, the state agency that administers the discretionary grants. Partners was already working on an application for the governor’s discretionary grant, which would also be administered through DCED. As Partners staff worked with legislative staff to complete the complex web-based application, they hit a major snag. An aid to Rep. Dwight Evans discovered that DCED had concerns about directing funds to bricks-and-mortar projects for religious properties with active congregations.

Partners acted quickly. With assistance from the governor’s office, the legislative caucuses, and PHMC, Partners secured a meeting with staff from DCED and PHMC to work out guidelines under which DCED could process the funds. DCED staff conferred with their colleagues at PHMC and established that a statewide precedent for funding historic preservation of religious properties already existed. DCED used PHMC’s grant-making guidelines to ensure that the funds were directed exclusively to the rehabilitation and restoration of character-defining features that contribute toward a building’s architectural or historical significance.

In November 2005, Partners was approved by DCED for a discretionary grant under its Community Revitalization Program. Partners recently received the first check for $125,000, and more is expected to follow. In December 2005, Partners was approved for a $200,000 governor’s discretionary grant.

Building on its early success with state funding, Part-
nners is setting its sights on developing similar relationships at the local and federal level in the coming year. “Working at the state level like this was completely new to us and we couldn’t have done it without our colleagues at PHMC and the new friends we made along the way,” Jaeger reflects. “We will take the lessons learned this year and apply them to building relationships with local and federal policy makers in the future.”

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For further information about the Philadelphia Regional Fund for Historic Places visit www.sacredplaces.org or contact Erin Coryell, fund coordinator, at (215) 567-3234, ext 18 or ecoryell@sacredplaces.org.

Hints for Navigating State Funding Streams

Seek out an insider who can provide guidance about state funding streams.

- Ask friends of the cause with ties to legislative leaders and other key public officials to make calls for meetings. Cast a wide net—you’ll be surprised who knows whom.
- Don’t be discouraged when one source doesn’t bear fruit. Keep trying to make contact.
- Be persistent. Try to get face time with the legislator, even if for just a 30-second pitch.
- Look for opportunities to come in contact with legislators and public officials at events.
- Do your homework—check legislators’ websites for public appearances.

Find the match between what you want to accomplish and what the official cares about.

- Link the issue to the legislator’s constituency—identify a group that will benefit and ask members to contact the legislator on your behalf.
- Develop a clear, concise case statement that you can articulate to a public official in a 30-second “elevator speech.”
- Once you’ve got the support of legislators, you’ll do most of your work with their staff. However, you should continue to follow up with legislators so you remain on their radar.

Develop a relationship with key legislative staff.

- Don’t wait for staff to call you back. They are far too busy to return phone calls on a regular basis. You’ll need to keep on top of the communication.
- If problems arise, act quickly and seek help from those who already support you at the state level.