
Introduction

At its core, historic preservation is a social campaign concerned with the character, condition, use, and treatment of the physical world around us. The items of concern are large and small, and found everywhere. They are in the water and in landscapes of every kind—rural, urban, suburban, and even sparsely settled forests and deserts. This social campaign enlists and engages people who are dedicated to extending the legacy and the usefulness of existing buildings, structures, and sites.

This definition reflects the Greek philosophical view that culture and nature are largely different entities, with overlapping concerns for animals and plants. The roots of historic preservation lie largely in European activities, and many are associated with a Judeo-Christian idea that distinguishes the thoughts and activities of the corporal world from the spiritual nature of things. Various rulers and religious leaders throughout history invoked the ideas and images of their predecessors to gain legitimacy, but the transformation of Western civilization that embraced Positivism as a concept with the growth of the Industrial Revolution provided new platforms for change and reactions against that change.

Contemporary American thinking has moved beyond this, just as the humanistic concept of natural rights declared during the Revolution and inscribed in the Constitution continues to be refined and expanded. Even more important, the concept of “property” is being re-defined. In 1776, most people and everything on the land fell within the description of “property.” In the early nineteenth century, some states outlawed slavery but, even after the Civil War, many people were skeptical that all African Americans should be emancipated. For advocates, social change came slowly. Federal legislation guaranteed Civil Rights only in 1964. In a similar fashion, The Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions drafted for the women’s rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York in 1848, demanded equality with men before the law, in education and employment. It was not until 1920, however, that the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution provided all women the right to vote. Growing nineteenth century recognition of the disenfranchised Native Americans led to the passage of the Indian Citizen Act in 1924. In short, the American Revolution started a process that spawned successive waves of ethical reevaluation, and they continue. Alongside the need to redefine the rights of certain groups and classes of people rose the concern for the prevention of cruelty to animals and, in time, a growing sensitivity to the need for healthy trees and plants. The rising interest in what was, at the turn of the

twentieth century, dubbed “conservation,” centered on forests and streams, evolved after World War II to become the environmentalism we know today. Forest management was not enough for those who believe that Nature has a rightful place in the cosmic order. Hence, the expanding concept of rights now includes not only concerns for the role of the person, family, tribe, race, region, and nation, but also the relationship between them and animals and plants. Although agreement upon the best the path to follow has not always been clear to everyone, in hindsight, the contributions of the federal legislation of the 1960s and early 1970s are clear. This included not only the National Historic Preservation Act, but also the National Environmental Policy Act, and closely linked legislation regulating water pollution, ocean dumping, coastal zone management, and endangered species.

In recent decades, the growing recognition of the intrinsic value of the tangible and intangible character of places and objects has continued in the United States of America (USA), so that historic preservation has flowered. More people have become involved, the total number of projects completed and programs implemented has increased, the approaches have become more thoughtful, and the general quality of the work has improved. Public advocacy has led to more legislation at the state and local levels, and preservation education has attracted more resources. In many ways this improvement and maturing is to be expected. The United States has provided the best grounds for the maturation of historic preservation, aided by a comparatively well educated population, generally well-intended government, and an interested business community. No other country has so successfully fostered and funded contemporary preservation activity. We have even linked our social agenda to the tax code, providing historic properties with some of the same financial advantages as desirable social goals such as low-income housing.

Just as the United States is continually reexamining its motivations and beliefs, it is appropriate to revisit our historical and aesthetic ideas. Like all communal, political activities, the historic preservation movement is a product of, and supported by, our changing society. Still, at the root of all historic preservation efforts is the basic belief that we should save things. The reasons follow.

First, we save things because they have immediate personal or social usefulness. If the object is found to be helpful, it is put aside for use again. In agrarian life, experience showed that the careful selection of the most prolific seeds advanced the goals of the farmer by providing the best crops. Selecting the best animals for breeding followed the same logic. In industrial production, the model that produces the best result is imitated, with immediate social impact. The act of putting aside anything often increases its value, whether an archaeological location, a landscape, structure, site, or object.

Second, we save things because it is economically prudent. Simply put, our wants often outstrip our needs. By saving what we have acquired or been given, it is possible to shift our resources and time elsewhere. Saving, rather than replacing, often leads individuals and groups to value more highly what has been put in reserve. It is axiomatic that poverty is frequently a major reason for preservation. In fact, poverty may be among the most powerful reasons for what has remained.

Third, we save things because they are important to us as remembrances

of people, events, and periods in the past. The Romans were sensitive to this. They wanted to recall the glory of the past and passed legislation that forbade using or abusing ancient temples. As more nations grew increasingly sensitive, this legislation was copied in spirit, if not in fact. Places of historic and religious significance spurred some of the most important preservation advocacy of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Western Europe. In a similar way, early historic preservation efforts in the USA were pietistic, centered on saving Independence Hall and the home of George Washington, to mark the place of the country's founders in history.

Fourth, we save things because they are aesthetically exceptional. Our society no longer insists, as de Tocqueville wrote, that democratic nations "prefer the useful to the beautiful." No longer simply the province of art connoisseurs and the privileged classes, the expanding and ever changing concepts of aesthetics and the social relevance of design ideas has challenged old interpretations of just what is artistically significant. In this regard, it is a comparatively easy step from the rise of art collections and history museums in the nineteenth century to the recognition and designation of objects and properties of merit beyond museum walls.

And fifth, we save things because they have contemporary spiritual or religious value, calling to mind the relationship of a supernatural creative or governing force. God, representing either the sole deity in a monotheism, or one of the gods in a polytheism, has held the attention of people who regard particular objects, properties, or locations as sacred. In spiritual or religious rituals, beliefs and activities may dictate that a particular location has special meaning, segregating its faith-based use from other uses.

Each of these rationales plays a role in preservation efforts today, although some are more apparent than others at any given time. It is also important to recognize that any of these arguments are useful alongside the others. Yet, the choice of what we need to save is not often ours alone. Natural disasters continue to affect our ability to save anything. Fires, floods, landslides, earthquakes, and dozens of other forces accelerate decay, and play havoc with our legacy. Although some advance notice of disasters is possible, they often strike without warning, and lives and property are lost. At the same time, the slow deterioration of our physical fabric, due to the changing climate, seasons, and elements, while not as cataclysmic, can be just as damaging with the passage of time.

Often more traumatic than the forces of Nature is human intervention. Destruction of a highly regarded object, property, district, or region can take place at a surprisingly swift pace. In some cases, there is little public reaction. While thousands of people over the globe may understand and sympathize with the rationales for saving, several billion others are not readily convinced and want to know why they should care. "New" is widely seen as better than the "old." In fact, in the USA, the urge to create and start afresh seems a constant refrain. The nation is ever changing, with cities continually rebuilt, the suburbs made over, and rural areas constantly transformed. Structures of all kinds are added at the periphery of urbanized areas, with older properties torn down and still others arising in their place. New shopping centers and malls open while others lie surprisingly vacant, and still others changed to

serve new functions. Companies announce a new headquarters while leaving aside their former location, with only a sign indicating that they have moved. Small homes on large lots fall victim to large houses or mansions, as the countryside's farms and ranches are underutilized, some only a step away from passing into history.

Who is it, then, that prefers change, while others relish the status quo? Why is it that some communities and properties are considered "historic" and apparently treated with care, while others are subjected to continual rebuilding? What is it that triggers the population in one municipality to urge the government to designate one area as special while so many others are overlooked and defenseless against change?

Historic preservation is saving and caring for the legacy we have come to call our "cultural heritage." Heritage is not synonymous with "history," nor is it simply based on "tradition." It includes both of these to various degrees, and considerably more. The physical properties of the "object," regardless of how large or small, are often the focus of initial attention, but the intangible aspects are equally important. They include the wide range of artistic practices and religious rituals that support the value a society places on the property. Culture is composed of the pattern of ways of thinking, feeling, reacting, and acquiring associations, beliefs, attitudes, and values. These are shared and learned among people who, in turn, create and shape objects and places that symbolize their common understandings.

The growing awareness of Americans to the fast pace of change, spurred on by technological improvements such as the telephone, television, and internet, has led many to take action to modify the definition of "progress." In addition to this increasing awareness, proposed changes may disrupt familiar patterns of life. It is for these reasons that the need for this book is clear: to guide students of preservation—professional or amateur—so they may extend our legacy to all those who will follow us.

To address these problems, this text draws on a wide range of scholarship, experience, and information, concentrating on the last 50 years. As such, this work is only secondarily an historical study, only briefly reviewing the history of the historic preservation movement before World War II. This chronological history is deliberately restrained to allow attention to be paid to a broad range of contemporary topics. This is needed because the boom in preservation activities throughout the country during the last several decades almost defies description, let alone analysis and direction. Yet, the challenges continue.

The reader who is familiar with any one of these topics may find that only a few case studies are included. This is deliberate because specific examples are used to exemplify a theoretical position, illustrate a program, and provoke thought, rather than address all of the concepts and questions that arise. This text, like any introduction to the field, can only be suggestive. This is not a how-to manual that can be followed step-by-step, resulting in a pre-determined outcome. References to the most helpful material of that kind, including online government publications, are available in the footnotes and references. In addition, this work is neither an explicit call for government action, nor a demand for increased funding, although admittedly both are

implied. Instead the purpose is to redefine historic preservation activity as a course of action, incorporating more explicitly the socially progressive goals that have come to characterize the movement.

This text is unusual because it deliberately embraces almost all of the disciplines involved in the field of historic preservation.¹ It includes, but is not limited to, topics ranging from American studies to urban affairs. Indeed, a number of fields that have not previously been included in preservation discussions will spur greater consideration. For example, faith-based initiatives and their role in rebuilding communities to save properties are all but completely absent in previous preservation works. They are examined closely in this text.

In addition, by re-thinking past and current ideas in preservation, this is a more contemporary view of the field. It challenges readers to see not only how each of the related disciplines is connected, but also how preservation influenced each of them. Ideally, anyone who reads this text will be able to find included some aspect of their own interests and be able to see how he or she can contribute their knowledge, and learn more. Students of all ages will see this book not simply as a starting point and handy reference, but as a document open to discussion and critical examination. It should help everyone understand what previous generations have held important, and see how he or she can connect that to our contemporary ideas.

Other caveats are in order. Natural curiosity leads to speculation about how the historic preservation in this country compares to efforts outside of the United States, particularly with the policies, programs, and projects that seem similar in other parts of the English-speaking world. This text is not attempting to draw these comparisons. Although mention of examples from other countries are included in some instances, to do justice to efforts in other countries would require extended discussions about the people, history, and customs in these locations to reach a parallel level of understanding. Given the differences in the societies and the variations in governments, legal frameworks, political structure, economics, financing, and common practices around the world, this is simply not possible within this work.

One of the unusual aspects of this book is that it deliberately moves away

¹ The history and conservation of building materials has been omitted in the interests of space and so as not to compete with texts by other authors. These include: Martin E. Weaver and Frank G. Matero, *Conserving Buildings: A Guide to Techniques and Materials*, New York: John Wiley, 1993; Theodore H.M. Prudon, *Preservation of Modern Architecture*, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2008; and Robert A. Young, *Historic Preservation Technology*, New York: John Wiley, 2008. Also important are: Frederick A. Stahl, *A Guide to the Maintenance, Repair and Alteration of Historic Buildings*, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1984; and Swanke Hayden Connell Architects, *Historic Preservation: Project Planning & Estimating*, New York: R. S. Means, 2000. Comparable texts in Great Britain include: Bernard M. Feilden, *Conservation of Historic Buildings*, London: Butterworth Heinemann, 1982, 1994; and the series edited by Michael Forsyth, including: *Materials and Skills for Historic Building Conservation*, Oxford, UK and Malden, MA, Blackwell Pub., 2008; and *Structures & Construction in Historic Buildings Conservation*, Oxford, UK and Malden, MA, Blackwell Pub., 2007. Some of my own contributions to this area are contained in: Thomas C. Jester, (Ed.), *Twentieth-Century Building Materials. History and Conservation*, New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 1995.

from historic preservation as an “artifact-centered” discussion. This text considers the importance of “what” is significant only after considering “who” is involved, which begins to answer the question of “why” anyone should care. After considering “who,” “why,” and “what,” it is suitable to address the questions of “when” and “how” to proceed. The discussion begins with the view that historic preservation is a social activity first, and proceeds to examine the organization of the movement and its accomplishments, and the particulars of the government response. Only after that does it become clear how to go forward.

In the opening chapter, “who we are” and why it matters is at the center of the discussion. It is understood that the people who become involved in any social movement make deliberate decisions about—and influence—what they believe is important. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the men and women who held high pietistic ideals and aesthetic concerns were secure and well educated by comparison to most Americans. They were different because, as advocates, they began to organize in societies that would not accept the continuous change around them as “progress.” The early preservationists had a larger vision of improvement, of which historic properties were a part. To accomplish their goals they gained additional financial and political support. By the end of the nineteenth century, a wave of romanticism gave rise to a host of new organizations in historic preservation, embracing archaeology, museology, and scenic conservation. In succeeding decades, the people who become involved were not only amateurs but also an increasing number of professionals, exploring how science and better management could make a difference. In many cases, their decisions become very pragmatic in order to gain maximum advantage as the role of the state and federal government slowly increased.

The second chapter extends the historical review through the mid-1980s to provide a basis for discussion in the seven other chapters of the book, which are thematic. After World War II, historic preservation efforts across the country were stimulated in reaction to the widespread destruction caused by federally sponsored urban renewal and highway improvement. As the number of objections to these ill-planned initiatives rose during the late 1950s, widespread local advocacy struggled to create what became the national preservation movement. Influenced by the Modern movement in architecture and planning, preservation became part of the ferment in the 1960s that characterized the environmental movement. Civil Rights reform also affected the preservation movement, as it did many social movements of the period. Then, the Bicentennial and tax reform initiatives strengthened both the historical and economic rationales for historic preservation in a way that the framers of the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act had envisioned.

Chapter 3 lays out the broad intellectual basis and the fundamental legal framework at the federal, state, and local levels. It also provides an overview of the role that chief executives play as leaders, setting out goals in a variety of directives affecting the treatment of government property. The third part of this chapter deals with the important judicial decisions that have influenced historic preservation practice. Key is the famous *Penn Central* case of 1978, in which the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the applicability of local

landmarks legislation. Granted, the balance between individual rights and responsibilities and the concerns for the larger community in the treatment of property seems to be a never-ending source of controversy and tension. This text views this ongoing discussion as a healthy dialogue. Included in this section is consideration of the separation of church and state, sometimes a hot-button issue in urban areas, where the future use of historic religious buildings are at issue.

Chapter 4 investigates the economic factors that influence the continued use of all properties. This begins with a discussion of the major demographic changes taking place in the USA, focusing on the economic and social characteristics that have given rise to the country's population relocation. The shift from a largely agrarian economy, through the twentieth century's industrialization, into the twenty-first century's dependence on the service sector carries with it tremendous implications, and directly affects extending the legacy in all areas of the country. Arguments about obsolescence used to support demolition are rarely justified, particularly when the economic contribution made by rehabilitation projects clearly boost local public revenues. Programs to revive main streets, heritage areas, and housing complexes also play a key role in meeting some of the disinvestment that leads to the threat of demolition. Additionally, heritage tourism activities provide an often-needed economic boost, leading to the consideration of the "multiplier effects" of preservation initiatives.

Chapter 5 addresses financial challenges by examining three sources of revenue. First are income tax credits. These include the federal and state historic rehabilitation tax credit programs, which are recognized as a powerful incentive for investors interested in income-producing properties. Low-income housing tax credits are considered because they are also used in commercial housing ventures. Second are the New Market Tax Credits, introduced by federal legislation in 2000, also targeted to low-income communities. Third is a wide range of supports dedicated to historic preservation projects, including property-tax reduction, tax-increment financing, special bonds, and the funding made available for transportation improvement and enhancement. It is important to point out that, although private support by individuals, groups, foundations, and corporations continues to provide a sizable lift to preservation efforts, charitable gifts are by no means the only manner in which projects are made financially viable.

Chapter 6 focuses on the importance of providing a vision that respects the history of the property and the existing character of the place. This begins with seeing and recording, and then organizing and interpreting information, respecting the value of the context. Designing successful alternatives requires information from community members. Design review boards, historic district commissions, and conservation advisory groups all have a role to play. The renewed interest in "sustainability" presents special questions, because not all "green" alternatives are preservation-friendly. Likewise, special care must be taken to understand the preservation "treatments," specifically restoration, reconstruction, and rehabilitation. The exciting projects that have reused former train stations have led to re-conceiving entire rail beds, including the warehouses alongside them. Transit corridors and transportation

facilities have, in some cases, gone underground. In other cases, baseball stadia, military bases, and naval yards have been re-purposed and integrated into their surroundings, suggesting even greater successes are possible in the future.

Ethics and advocacy are the subjects of Chapter 7. Given that historic preservation is a social campaign that concerns the future of our cultural heritage, it is important to set out a clear definition of just what encompasses those patterns of thinking, feeling, and reacting, with its beliefs, attitudes, and shared values. Taking care to be ethically coherent, yet being alert to the need to enlist the public and build a stronger constituency with sound professional guidance, is essential. After these introductory sections, a series of cases provide more insight, because conflicts arise within preservation organizations, between preservation organizations, and with other powerful social groups, often leading to the loss of the cultural landscape, historic district, property, archaeological site, object, or artifact. In short, the preservation rationales—*aesthetic, social, historic, spiritual, and economic*—come up against other goals of society, and the questions of how to best proceed becomes troubling for policy makers and local officials who sit in judgment.

Chapter 8 considers the importance of religion, arguably our most important intangible values as they relate to historic preservation activities. It addresses the long-held arms-length distance between preservation activities and faith-based ideas, and spells out how more people are becoming aware of the need to bridge this gap. Unlike most other nations, the USA reacted against adopting or preferring any specific religion. This country holds firmly to the positivist view that no single faith should hold sway over others, preferring to put its faith in the accumulation of knowledge and the proper application of science. Social and economic change would therefore follow. Yet, the urban gospel movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century formed the platform for social reform that led to Civil Rights and Womens' Rights initiatives, and a range of reforms in sanitation, housing, and recreation. True, fundamentalism rose in the twentieth century at several points, and mid-century federalism attempted to take on the tasks of organized religion. Since the late 1970s, however, decentralization in government has led to a reevaluation of faith-based initiatives, with a number of new preservation partnerships. In addition, while this country is becoming less Protestant and more Catholic, it also continues to attract immigrants from abroad who often hold faiths that influence our collective sense of values.

The conclusion briefly evaluates some of the key accomplishments of the recent historic preservation movement. It also provides a synthesis that draws on the lessons of each of the chapters, sketching out some of the hurdles that remain and are likely to occupy the agendas of preservationists in the decades ahead. The development of the historic preservation movement is, in itself, evidence of our particular American culture, as it changes. All of the evidence strongly suggests, however, that this social campaign will continue and our legacy will extend to future generations.

Historic Preservation

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