

Historic Preservation I: The Roots of Historic Preservation Questions

Review the difference between preservation, conservation, and restoration.

Generally Europeans use the word conservation and preservation essentially to mean the same thing. The conservation is the word used in Europe while in the United States we use the word preservation.

According to The American Heritage Dictionary, Second College Edition, the word restore means to bring back into existence or use; to bring back to an original condition. Used in the context of historic buildings the word restoration is understood to mean putting back some architectural feature that no longer exists. The act of restoring some aspect of a building for example requires a determination as to what period of history the building in question is to be restored because buildings, over their lifetime, are altered in several ways, i.e., through additions either vertically or horizontally, by fire as when a building may lose an upper story, by the loss of architectural defining features as its original windows, entrance doors, verandas, and so on.

The act of restoration will require that the question, “What past period of the existence of this building should be restored?” is posed and answered. A careful structural survey must be undertaken which requires knowledge of traditional building construction and a familiarity with architectural styles. Restoration could require the removal or demolition of an addition, or of an architectural feature which has, in its own right, accrued historic significance. For example, an 18th century Georgian Revival Style residence may have had a veranda constructed in during the late 19th century. Restoring the building back to its original Georgian Revival Style would require the demolition of the veranda. Hence, there is considerable controversy as to this approach as I indicated in my Webinar lecture.

The contrasting approaches of Eugene Violet le Duc and those of John Ruskin exemplify this controversy which is nearly 150 years old.

What about traditional cultural properties?

The Hague Convention definition of Cultural Properties

Article 1. Definition of cultural property

For the purposes of the present Convention, the term "cultural property" shall cover, irrespective of origin or ownership:

(a)

movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people, such as monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular; archaeological sites; groups of buildings which, as a whole, are of historical or artistic interest; works of art; manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or

archaeological interest; as well as scientific collections and important collections of books or archives or of reproductions of the property defined above;

(b) buildings whose main and effective purpose is to preserve or exhibit the movable cultural property defined in sub-paragraph (a) such as museums, large libraries and depositories of archives, and refuges intended to shelter, in the event of armed conflict, the movable cultural property defined in subparagraph (a);

(c) centers containing a large amount of cultural property as defined in subparagraphs (a) and (b), to be known as "centers containing monuments."

Your question is not clear to me as "cultural properties" entails such a broad definition I am not sure what, in effect, you are referencing. If you meant historic buildings, what to do about them is both a philosophical and economic question which cannot be answered in any simplistic way.

How do you feel about the preservation in Cape May, New Jersey?

The City of Cape May has been administering historic preservation regulations for several decades. The result of this policy has been the preservation of an outstanding seaside resort with beautifully preserved, restored and rehabilitated commercial and residential buildings predominantly from the mid 19th and early 20th century. My personal opinion is that the city has marketed its historic heritage which has benefited it economically and culturally.

Please provide a citation for the Ada Louise Huxtable quotes.

The quotes referred to were comments I made about Williamsburg, which were taken from *The Unreal America: Architecture and Illusion*.

What are the some examples of the preservation of American Indian structures?

Native American Architecture is not my area of expertise, I suggest you refer to Tribal Historic Preservation Officers. See below:

What are Tribal Historic Preservation Officers?


Tribal Historic Preservation Officers are officially designated by a federally-recognized Indian tribe to direct a program approved by the National Park Service and the THPO must have assumed some or all of the functions of State Historic Preservation Officers on Tribal lands. This program was made possible by the provisions of Section 101(d)(2) of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Before a Tribe may assume the functions of a State Historic Preservation Officer, the National Historic Preservation Act requires Tribes to submit a formal plan to the National Park Service describing how the proposed Tribal Historic Preservation Officer functions will be carried out.

Tribal historic preservation plans have emphasized the importance of the oral tradition, as well as consulting Tribal elders and spiritual leaders with special knowledge of the Tribe's traditions. They also have given emphasis to the importance of protecting "traditional cultural properties," places that are eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places because of their association with cultural practices and beliefs that are:

- (1) rooted in the history of the community; and
- (2) are important to maintaining the continuity of that community's traditional beliefs and practices

Incorporating Tribal cultural values into the historic preservation program has been consistently cited as a priority. Finally, the need for assuming the responsibility for reviewing Federal undertakings that may affect historical properties and the importance of archaeological survey work was consistently mentioned as essential. Tribal Historic Preservation Officers advise Federal agencies on the management of Tribal historic properties and strive to preserve their Tribes' cultural heritage and preservation programs.

THPOs perform a variety of important functions in their communities. [Click here for examples of what THPOs do in their communities](#) 

What Are Tribal Historic Preservation Plans?

The THPOs and NATHPO (provides support to the individual THPOs) are committed to implementing tribal and Federal preservation laws on Tribal lands, including Federally-mandated archaeological clearances and evaluation and management of Tribal historic properties. NATHPO provides technical assistance to Tribes seeking approval of Tribal Historic Preservation Programs and develops and provides technical training in all aspects of historic and cultural heritage preservation, maintenance and revitalization, including:

- Directing and conducting a comprehensive reservation-wide survey of historic properties and maintaining inventories of those properties
- Identifying and nominating eligible properties to the National Register and administering applications for listing historic properties on the National Register
- Preparing and implementing a comprehensive Tribal historic preservation plan
- Administering the Tribal program of Federal assistance for historic preservation at the reservation (when funds are appropriated by the U S Congress)
- Advising and assisting, when appropriate, Federal and State agencies and local governments in carrying out their historic preservation responsibilities

- Cooperating with the Secretary of Interior, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and other Federal and State agencies, local governments, and organizations and individuals to ensure that historic properties are taken into consideration at all levels of planning and development
- Providing public information, education and training, and technical assistance in historic preservation
- Cooperating with local governments in developing local historic preservation programs and assisting local governments in certification (when feasible)
- Consulting with the appropriate Federal agencies in accordance with the Act on Federal undertakings that may affect historic properties and the content and sufficiency of any plans developed to protect, manage, or to reduce or mitigate harm to such properties
- Advising and assisting in evaluating proposals for rehabilitation projects that may qualify for Federal assistance

Wasn't New Orleans the first to pass a historic preservation ordinance?

No, Charleston, South Carolina was the first municipality in the nation to pass a historic district ordinance in 1932. New Orleans, Louisiana, passed its historic district ordinance for the Vieux Carré in 1936.

Do you think there will be funding for restoration of historic resources as part of a future economic stimulus act (if there is another one?)

I am hopeful that there will be but that might be the side of me that suffers from the Polly Anna Syndrome. The answer is I just don't know. This is question which should be directed to your congress person. I do not know whether the present administration has made the connection between historic preservation and economic development. Historic preservation is generally thought to be labor intensive which translates into jobs.

What was significant about 12,000 buildings with regards to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards?

I mentioned the loss of these buildings in reference to the illustrated book *Lost America: From the Atlantic to the Mississippi*, by Constance M. Greiff, published in 1971. James Biddle, the Executive Director of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the foreword to the book states: In 1966 [the year the National Historic Preservation Act was signed into law] it was established that one-half of the 12,000 buildings recorded since 1934 by the American Historic Buildings Survey had been destroyed."

The significance of this statement is that 1966 was when the National Historic Preservation Act was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Lyndon Baines Johnson.