

Education to Preserve Bridges and Dams as Capstones of Our Engineering Legacy

This article identifies the difficulties that many teachers, students, and consultants encounter when attempting to understand, describe, and assess the significance of engineering structures. By the time these structures are old enough to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, many are reaching the end of their planned existence and are being replaced. They are therefore among our most endangered historical resources, and the field of historic preservation must learn to treat them with the same proficiency we apply to buildings, landscapes, and archaeological resources. This article suggests methods by which non-engineers may attain competence in assessing engineering structures, especially bridges and dams. It describes sources that are generally available and suggests strategies by which historic preservation programs may strengthen their resources for understanding engineering and for placing the work of engineers in an appropriate context. By strengthening the skills of preservationists, these strategies should improve the quality of National Register nominations, historic structure reports, and Historic American Engineering Record reports.

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