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INTRODUCTION

IMPLEMENTING DIVERSITY: SIGNIFICANCE BEYOND THE AESTHETIC

As preservationists, we know the central role that human activities play in the creation of places we value and that in many cases, those activities are ongoing. The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 declared that “the historical and cultural foundations of the Nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people.”¹

In this fiftieth anniversary year of the NHPA, the heritage profession is reflecting on its origins, assessing progress and defining strategies for improvement, and identifying future directions. Maintaining support in the public sector for heritage preservation activities requires a base of community support for heritage conservation and the value of place. These are needed to maintain a broadly focused understanding of America’s diverse cultural landscape. Valuing this rich heritage and accessing it from all relevant perspectives is a first step for practitioners in this field to engage a wider constituency.

Despite good intentions, the NHPA contains biases that have been the subject of considerable reappraisal. Expertise for interpreting cultural significance, as defined by the NHPA was framed by the values of four disciplines: history, planning, archaeology, and architectural history. As Michael Ann Williams and Virginia Siegel note in their presentation at the “Learning from the Reservation” conference, folklorists were among those who early in the NHPA’s history recognized the need to preserve places associated with ordinary people through the inclusion of material culture and vernacular architecture in comprehensive surveys, National Register of Historic Places nominations, and other forms of documentation (Williams and Siegel 2015). Folklorists made an unsuccessful attempt to include places associated with intangible aspects of culture in the 1980 amendment to the NHPA.

Folklorists were also among the groups optimistic that the publication of National Register Bulletin 38, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties (Bulletin 38)* (Parker and King 1991), with its emphasis on properties that “derive significance from cultural practices or beliefs of living communities . . . [would lead to] integrating the protection of tangible and intangible cultural resources. Just as importantly, it recognized the significance of living communities and their values . . .” (Williams and Siegel 2015). *Bulletin 38* took an anthropological perspective to understanding the landscape through the eyes of the people who live there. The authors alluded to the use of these perspectives and methods as a means of assisting with the documentation, evaluation, and mitigation of resources important to other cultural groups. Unfortunately, at the state level, National Register coordinators interpreted traditional cultural properties (TCPs) exclusively for Native American properties and in actual practice few non-Native American nominations were produced. The National Park Service (NPS) has kept no official records of the number of properties nominated as TCPs, and therefore it is difficult to assess when and how often the designation was used (Williams and Siegel 2015).

The authors of *Bulletin 38*, Patricia Parker and Thomas King, brought the disciplines of ethnography and anthropology to the understanding of historic properties. They valued the insider’s perspective on the landscapes heritage practitioners evaluate. As living communities, cultural groups find it challenging to obtain the recognition and protection enabled by the NHPA. One perceived impediment to sites associated with ongoing cultural practice and significance is the so-called “fifty-year rule,” suggesting that the perspective of time is needed to evaluate a property’s significance. NPS

historian John H. Sprinkle, Jr. has demonstrated, however, that this “rule” was originally a guideline and was never intended to have the authority it has garnered over time (Sprinkle 2007). Recognition of sites in continual use under the NHPA becomes the basis for consideration of alternative ways of preserving and enhancing the resource from the perspective of the community. Key to the long-term survival of any historic resource is the connection between its associated communities and individuals who determine how it should be maintained.

As heritage professionals, what we are taught in school and what we learn on the job may be different; in that intervening space the professional grows and develops. This is where the traditional cultural place perspective for properties associated with non-Native Americans lives. In my career, historic preservation turned out to be an interdisciplinary set of skills that intersect the worlds of architecture, community planning and development, conservation, politics, and history. And people, a most important consideration left out of my early training. Although I studied anthropology and archeology in a department that focused on cultural resource management in the late 1970s, the connection between how people factored into decision making about place and the connection to the regulations was not well understood.

I have been influenced by the individuals I have met on my travels who actually preserve the places they value. My first window into that world came from the financial administrator at my first professional position at the Tennessee Historical Commission. Linda Wynn was passionate about understanding and promoting the African American history and the historic landscapes of Nashville, Tennessee. Our discussions on integration and the conferences she held to highlight her research and the work of others were formative for a new National Register coordinator who was just learning how to apply the criteria for listing. As my career progressed, I found people and projects to fuel my curiosity about how other people valued place. Those experiences generally focused on physical integrity, raising the question: When is a resource so changed that its value is lost?

The experience that had the greatest impact was the

preparation of documentation and listing of the Ardens Historic District in New Castle County, Delaware, work that took place from 1996 to 2003. The historic district of Arden is composed of three utopian enclaves: Arden, founded in 1900; Ardentown, founded in 1923; and Ardencroft, founded in 1950. These towns continue to function under their founding utopian principles, including direct democracy, Henry George’s single tax, anarchy as expressed through the Arden motto, “Ye are Welcome Hither,” and land planning that encouraged interaction and connection throughout the community. The community approached the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office seeking protection against the impact of increasing traffic flow in the area and a realignment of flight patterns at the Philadelphia International Airport that raised noise levels to an alarming degree. The citizens knew that listing in the National Register would lead to an environmental review process that might mitigate the noise impact on the community.²

One of Ardens’ founding principles, the single tax philosophy of nineteenth-century economic philosopher Henry George, had the greatest influence on the listing process. All the land within the towns was held in common; individuals rented parcels from the community through ninety-nine-year leases with rent amounts based on the lot size, not the improvements made. So a large house on a small lot paid less in land rent than a small house on a large lot. This incentivized building and property improvements, with the architecture of the community reflecting change over time in predictable ways. Because these processes were ongoing, many of the homes within the boundaries of the proposed historic district did not meet physical integrity standards. Part of the challenge was developing a way to deal with contributing and non-contributing resources. The community demanded that all the houses within the district be treated equally since it would be divisive within the community to approve of some buildings and not others with these determinations.

As the preservation professional, I acted as the liaison between the NPS National Register program staff and the community, interpreting the needs of each side for the other. The negotiation included, among other issues,

questioning the applicability of TCP designation because these people “spoke English and didn’t have a creation myth.” The initial draft of the nomination defined everything within the district as contributing, an assertion unacceptable to the National Park Service because some of the buildings were well under fifty years old. A subsequent draft considered all buildings on leaseholds noncontributing, which elicited the comment from the reviewer that it misunderstood the contribution architecture makes to historic districts. After a cold and snowy January site visit by the Keeper of the National Register and her staff, a compromise was struck. The final decision was to include everything owned in common by the community as contributing; all individually-owned resources would be noncontributing except for five Craftsman-style homes built around 1910 by community founders.

Assessing the historic district in this way enabled mitigation approaches (for impacts using federal funds within the district) that accommodated community needs and that were not necessarily standard solutions for historic districts. For example, the Belgian block pavers typically used by the Delaware Department of Transportation to calm historic-district traffic, were determined to be inappropriate for Harvey Road as traffic moving over them was too noisy and disruptive. Stamped asphalt was the preferred and less expensive alternative. The issue of airplane noise compelled the Federal Aviation Administration to consider different methods for calculating impacts for a community whose historic attributes include extensive outdoor activity.

Participating in the Ardens Historic District listing allowed me to see the process through the eyes of the people who valued the place. It was a transformative experience that changed the way I work as a historic preservation professional. The “Learning from the Reservation” conference emerged in part from a desire to learn more about how other practitioners worked through similar dilemmas to satisfy the communities most directly impacted.

Confronted with resources that need protection and that are clearly historic and significant but in ways that push on the accepted processes of traditional preservation practice, intrepid professionals—in

folklore, cultural landscape, public history, and other varied fields—have turned to the TCP approach.

With the Historic Preservation Education Foundation and the Delaware Humanities Forum providing generous support, the National Council for Preservation Education sponsored the “Learning from the Reservation” conference, held April 23–25, 2015, at Delaware State University in Dover, Delaware. The conference brought together presenters and attendees who had navigated the regulations and who administer them, at the National Park Service and at the state and local levels, protecting and preserving places that reflect historic resources broadly defined, places that continue to resonate with the public as they have in the past. To recognize continuing traditions is to challenge some foundational principles of the profession. How to assess the aspect of physical integrity when the historical processes continue into the present? Can a place, an environment, an unimproved place be a historic resource? Can processes and the places they inhabit be historic? The presenters found answers to their questions in the implementation of the NHPA using *Bulletin 38*.

The goal of this event was to bring these people together to share with each other and with an interested audience what they have learned about methods and places. The conference started with a panel titled “Projects From Indian Country,” moderated by keynote speaker Alan Downer, former Tribal Historic Preservation Officer of the Navajo Nation and now State Historic Preservation Officer of Hawaii. Two papers from that panel are included here, “Historic Preservation, Self-Determination, and the Resiliency of Traditional Pueblo Villages: Traditional Cultural Place as an Enabler of Change” by Shawn Evans, AIA, and “Traditional Cultural Landscapes, Consultation, and the Hualapai Cultural Atlas” by Peter Bungart, formerly of the Hualapai Tribe Department of Cultural Resources, and Dean Suagee, of counsel at Hobbs, Straus, Dean & Walker, LLP.

The second panel, “Using the TCP Approach to Understand Managing and Maintaining Cultural Identity” was moderated by Craig R. Lukezic, historic archaeologist with the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office. The third panel, “Using the TCP

Approach for Documenting Community Traditions and Occupations,” was moderated by John Martin, archaeologist with Commonwealth Heritage Group, Inc. Cultural anthropologist Barbara Garrity-Blake’s paper, “Commercial Beach Seiners of Cape Hatteras: Heritage, Identity, and Politics in a Contested Landscape,” from that panel discusses how tourism at Cape Hatteras National Seashore has threatened traditional beach seine fishing practices and how the fishing industry has reframed itself to convince policy makers to help sustain the historically rooted occupation.

The final panel of the day, moderated by Henry Ward, supervising archaeologist with WSP Parsons Brinkerhoff, was titled “Spotlights, Bricks, and Breaks: The Power of Connection to Traditional Places.”

Taken together, the conference and the contents of this volume of *Preservation Education & Research* extend the discussion about the necessity of engaging communities to protect historic resources, including landscapes. There is no doubt that the framers of the NHPA understood the importance of this. The contribution of *Bulletin 38* is that it calls for additional attention to the methods of those who undertake surveys and nominations and a necessity for more humility in approaching living cultures whose values and histories may be unfamiliar to us. Although there is no easy answer to the question of how to evaluate community values in any culture, it is time to go beyond providing a list of complaints and a litany of problems and to develop approaches that validate alternatives. The papers contained here suggest that various frameworks must be created to observe contemporary activities, and only after that is accomplished can we understand the meaning of the places where these activities occur. The conference organizers, editors, and contributors hope that others who are interested in developing solutions will find this volume helpful.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended through 1992. Public L. No. 102-575. Retrieved from <https://www.nps.gov/history/local-law/nhpa1966.htm>.
- 2 The oldest of the three communities, Arden, had been listed in the National Register since the 1970s when the construction of Interstate 95 was being planned to the east of the community. Construction of a full intersection at Harvey Road, the main spine of the community, raised concerns that it and future development would impact the functioning of the community. A compromise created through the Section 106 process allowed for the construction of half an interchange, allowing access toward Wilmington, but not toward Philadelphia.