

## History Division

Report of Herbert E. Kahler  
at Director's Staff Meeting, April 17, 1952

The History Division supervises and coordinates the historical and archeological work involved in the selection, development, and interpretation of areas in the National Park System. It supervises historical and archeological research and performs the duties described in the Historic Sites Act of August 21, 1935. It conducts liaison work with organizations and institutions engaged in historical conservation.

The History Division is comprised of five branches: Preservation, Historical Investigations, Public Use, Archeological Investigations, and the position of archeologist held by Dr. Jesse L. Nusbaum, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, who handles requests for permits under the Antiquities Act for the Department and the Service.

In carrying forward its part of the Park Service program, the History Division has the assistance of many divisions. In fact, many aspects of the work are of a collaborative nature, as, for example, reviewing with the Museum Branch all museum prospectuses, plans and exhibits, preparing with the Legal Division cooperative agreements, such as the one for the Virgin Islands National Historic Site, or establishing qualification standards for historians or archeologists with the Personnel Division.

To preserve and interpret the great places of our history to millions of American and foreign travellers is a responsibility entrusted by Congress solely to one Federal Agency--the National Park Service. In these times of increasing leisure and mass education, this is a great and growing responsibility. Historical preservation has become even more pressing in recent years because encroachments of a commercial, residential, and industrial nature inch closer toward many of the most important scenes of American history.

The historical responsibilities of the Service have grown rapidly in the past twenty years. In 1916 the number of historical and archeological areas was only 9--in 1953, 123. The number of visitors to these areas has increased from about 5,000,000 in 1945 to over 15 million in 1952. To meet all the complex problems of research, preservation, restoration and interpretation, the Service has employed in Washington, Regional, and field offices, 48 historians, 27 archeologists, and 35 sub-professional aides. In assisting the Service to meet its responsibilities in this field this historical and archeological staff endeavors to perform the following major functions:

Research. Knowledge of the basic facts regarding historic sites and buildings for which the Service is responsible is indispensable to their intelligent preservation and public use. No other agency can or will provide this knowledge. It can be gained only through patient research by trained personnel in the principal documentary repositories and at the site itself. To provide this knowledge, two kinds of research are performed: (1) documentary, and (2) archeological. In performing documentary research, the historian locates, analyzes and compares all pertinent source materials; extracts all significant data; and presents and interprets these data in written narrative or other appropriate form, properly organized and documented and with suitable illustrative material, such as maps, plans, and prints. Frequently, development projects involving major expenditures are directly dependent upon the successful completion of historical research. The results of documentary research may be formulated in monographs, such as the History and Development of Yorktown, Virginia, 1691-1781; the History of Fort Frederica; in articles, such as, The Oldest Legislative Assembly in America; in historical base maps; in boundary studies; in museum plans; in special studies such as A Preliminary Handbook of Historical Information Concerning the White House and its Furnishings; or in identification and evaluation studies of such proposed projects as Fort Osage, Kansas, or Fort Vancouver, Washington. The identification of historic objects is another important phase of this work.

In performing archeological research, the archeologist directs excavations in the field, maintains detailed records of his findings; processes and preserves the artifacts in the archeological laboratory; and presents and interprets resulting data in properly organized archeological reports, with suitable illustrative material, including maps, plans, and photographs. The value of these accomplishments to the Service are illustrated by the outstanding discoveries made at Jamestown and Glass House Point, Fort Raleigh, Fort Frederica, the Whitman Mission, and Fort Vancouver. In such instances, future development and interpretation are directly dependent upon the results of archeological research.

The recording and salvage of historical and archeological data in river basins has been an urgent and active program. Research contracts have been negotiated with a number of universities and other institutions to survey and salvage scientific data. The Smithsonian Institution has, under an agreement, participated actively in this program.

Interpretation. The educational responsibilities of the History Division, in Washington and the field, flow directly from the annual visitation of over 15 million persons to the 123 historical and archeological areas in the National Park System. The understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of the great places and great events of American history which these visitors, including hundreds of thousands of school children, are seeking, is directly dependent upon the work of the park historians. The great significance of

this public contact work as one of the most important bases for public judgment of the Service, should be emphasized. To these visitors, the park historians endeavor to provide orientation talks, guided tours, illustrated lectures, and general information. They are responsible for the general care and presentation of historical museum collections and exhibits, including furnishings in historic houses; self-guided tours on foot or by auto; historical markers and trailside exhibits.

The History Division, in cooperation with the Publications Committee and the Division of Information, plans and programs the production of all sales booklets relating to historical and archeological areas and assists in programming the publication of free folders. The original manuscripts for both sales and free literature are prepared by the historians in the field and reviewed for accuracy, format and design, and conformance to National Park Service standards by the History Division. They are put into acceptable form before being sent to the Information Division for final editing and processing. The program of in-Service training of new historical personnel in relation to all these activities is also of fundamental importance.

Planning. The History Division, in Washington and the field, participates in two kinds of planning: (1) park area planning; and (2) proposed area studies. The historical staff is responsible for the basic data incorporated in the following phases of master planning for historical and archeological areas: (1) development outline sections--introduction, general information (visitation section), park operation prospectus (interpretive division and management plans), and interpretive section; and (2) interpretive drawings, including historical base maps, troop position and movement maps, and plans of interpretation. It prepares basic historical data for museum plans and restoration plans, and with other Division reviews construction plans to insure that historic sites and structures are not adversely affected by proposed developments. Historical data pertinent to boundary changes is prepared in close cooperation with the Recreation Planning Division.

Consideration of proposed historical areas is a major activity of the History Division. Requests from individuals, organizations, and Members of Congress are continuous and numerous. During one 18-month period, 114 requests were received. Some of these requests take the form of proposed legislation. The History Division prepares the historical data for incorporation in the reports on these bills. These activities involve correspondence, conferences, research, field investigations, preparation of reports, and presentations to the Advisory Board. Because of its bearing on the standards and future growth of the National Park System, it is of the highest importance that this activity be conducted with the utmost care.

Protection and Preservation: The History Division, in Washington and the field, performs important functions which contribute to the protection and preservation of historical and archeological areas. Park historians, archeologists and historical aides are frequently the only personnel available to protect their areas against vandalism from visitors. They are on guard for evidence of encroachments, deterioration, or misuse. They act as the eyes and ears of the superintendent in many situations.

The archeological staff in Region Three formulates and executes current Ruins Stabilization programs; the History Division advises with the Division of Design and Construction regarding the program for Stabilization of Historic Buildings, and with the Museum Division concerning the preservation of historic collections. When historical research and restoration practices are involved, it shares in the formulation of basic policies and procedures in these respective fields.

Advisory Services: The National Park Service is the sole Federal agency engaged in the preservation of historic sites and buildings. As such, it has important advisory responsibilities to other Federal agencies and to states and preservation societies. The historical staff performs the principal duties of this character for the Service. Under the Historic Sites Act, as interpreted by the Bureau of the Budget, the historical staff is responsible for formulation of the national program for the recovery of historical and archeological remains from reservoir areas. Under the Antiquities Act, this staff reviews all antiquities permits involving Federal lands under the jurisdiction of the Department. Under three separate acts relating to surplus Federal property, this staff performs research and field studies and recommends determinations regarding the historical value of such properties. By cooperative agreements with the Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, and Office of Indian Affairs, this staff provides professional historical and archeological assistance to those agencies. Under the provisions of nine additional cooperative agreements, the historical staff provides advisory historical assistance to one state, four preservation societies, and four religious organizations. It has important relationships with the Memorial Division of the Quartermaster Corps in regard to national cemeteries, and has currently made historical and archeological field investigations at Guam and other islands in the Pacific at the request of the Division of Territories.

Leadership in Preservation Movements: The National Park Service is looked to for national leadership in the field of historic sites and buildings. The historical projects of the Service deal with many of the most important sites and buildings in the United States and set standards followed by others. The History Division is endeavoring to contribute its share toward meeting this responsibility. Professional groups, such as the Committee for the Recovery of Archeological Remains, look to the Service for

leadership. UNESCO has recognized that the Service leads in historical preservation in the United States, and, at the request of the Department of State, the History Division has been assisting in the preparation of position papers setting forth the attitude of the United States with respect to proposed international conventions and declarations for the protection of historic sites, buildings, and objects in the event of armed conflict. This work involves collaborating with the Department of State, Library of Congress, National Archives, National Gallery of Art, Provost Marshal's Office, and Judge Advocate General's Office to comment on clauses of proposed treaties and to suggest appropriate amendments or revisions. The Chief Historian has been appointed corresponding member for the United States on the International Committee on Monuments, Artistic and Historic Sites, and Archeological Excavations. The opportunities as well as the obligations in the field of historical conservation are many.