

ForumJournal

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Looking Forward: The Next Fifty Years of Preservation



National Trust *for* Historic Preservation

**Preservation
Leadership Forum**

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Cover: The 1964-65 World’s Fair in New York embodied the Space Age optimism of mid-century America. Fifty years later, preservationists are advocating for the rehabilitation of the iconic New York State Pavilion, or the “Tent of Tomorrow.”

PHOTO BY DUNCAN KENDALL



The National Trust for Historic Preservation works to save America’s historic places for the next generation. We take direct, on-the-ground action when historic buildings and sites are threatened. Our work helps build vibrant, sustainable communities. We advocate with governments to save America’s heritage. We strive to create a cultural legacy that is as diverse as the nation itself so that all of us can take pride in our part of the American story.

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Introduction: The Future of Preservation

STEPHANIE K. MEEKS

We on the committee have wanted to know what is happening in the field of historic preservation; the present trends in saving what can be saved, and the losses from destroying what deserves to be saved. We have tried to discover what we must do to rescue from certain destruction what remains of our legacy from the past, and how best to do that rescue work.

So, 49 years ago, wrote Albert Rains and Laurance G. Henderson, chairman and director, respectively, of the Special Committee for Historic Preservation, in the preface of *With Heritage So Rich*. As many in our field know, this evocative and eclectic 1966 volume of essays, poetry, photography and policy recommendations laid the foundation for the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) later that year, and jumpstarted our movement in its present incarnation.

But this groundbreaking work did not emerge fully formed. In fact, *With Heritage So Rich* was the culmination of many meetings and high-level discussions about the future of preservation, beginning in Williamsburg, Virginia, three years earlier, at a national conference cosponsored by Colonial Williamsburg and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. In this issue of *Forum Journal*, as well as in recent discussions at Kykuit, the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and elsewhere, we want to try to catch that lightning in a bottle again, and think deeply about the future of the preservation movement.

At the time of *With Heritage So Rich*, preservationists faced a number of challenges endemic to that moment. Everywhere from southern towns to college campuses to Kennedy's Camelot, there was a sense of accelerating change—a welcome liberation from the burdens of the past. The Space Age



was in full swing too—Mercury and Gemini flights were in the news, *Star Trek* and *The Jetsons* on the television—and the nation’s eye was fixed on a sleek silver-and-chrome future that had little use for the trappings of history.

This cultural embrace of Tomorrowland extended well past Disney theme parks. With interstate highway construction and suburbanization at full throttle, historic buildings and neighborhoods were under constant threat of demolition to make way for Progress, usually in the form of more, wider and faster expressways and burgeoning sprawl.

In the nation’s cities, grassroots activists fought comprehensive and would-be Utopian “urban renewal” schemes that replaced vibrant city blocks with monolithic, single-use development. The razing of New York City’s beloved Penn Station in 1964, to make way for Madison Square Garden, became a potent symbol of loss that galvanized preservationists all over America to fight for the historic places that matter in their communities.

Two years later, *With Heritage So Rich* inspired positive change, and then the National Historic Preservation Act officially enshrined the values, tools and benefits of saving places into federal law. What ensued thereafter, as author Stewart Brand put it in *How Buildings Learn*, was “a quiet, populist, conservative, victorious revolution.”

Preservation became, according to architectural historian Vincent Scully, “the only mass popular movement to affect critically the course of architecture in our century.” Writing in 1990, James Marston Fitch, a pioneer of professional preservation education and practice, declared that “preservation is now seen as being in the forefront of urban regeneration, often accomplishing what the urban-renewal programs of twenty and thirty years ago so dismally failed to do. It has grown from the activity of a few upper-class antiquarians...to a broad mass movement engaged in battles to preserve ‘Main Street,’ urban districts, and indeed whole towns.”

Twenty-five years later, Fitch’s assessment rings even more true. Across the country, 15 million Americans and counting are now taking action in their communities to save places they love. Preservation now has a seat at the table in discussions of urban



Preservation strategies have empowered people who love their neighborhoods to be able to protect them. In the 1990s, a proposed surface freeway project that would have decimated the historic communities of South Pasadena, Pasadena and El Sereno was ultimately defeated by residents and allies. This decades-long battle is gearing up again, as transportation agencies have proposed a massive [freeway tunnel project](#) that would threaten the historic fabric of these neighborhoods.

PHOTO BY BARRY SCHWARTZ

planning, zoning policy and municipal growth. We have shown—and can empirically verify—that instead of being an obstacle to a vibrant and sustainable future, putting our historic fabric to work for communities is the key to attaining it.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS

Now, as we approach the 50th anniversary of *With Heritage So Rich* and the National Historic Preservation Act, it is our turn to lay the groundwork for the next 50 years of our movement. What should that future look like? We hope the many thought-provoking articles in this journal will invite discussion on this topic, and help identify the specific changes in outlook, tools and policy that should inform our work going forward.

A good place to start on this question is to recognize how far we have already come since the days of *With Heritage So Rich*. We are no longer voices in the wilderness—historic preservation is now correctly seen as a powerful tool for managing change, spurring employment, promoting health and well-being, and contributing to the betterment of our communities. Our task now is to continue to grow and expand this position.

At the same time, we have new opportunities and challenges that demand novel and innovative responses from preservationists.

Instead of being hollowed out by suburban flight and a lack of investment, America's cities are now experiencing a nationwide renaissance, with the large and diverse millennial generation taking the lead. This provides us with an excellent opportunity to put the power and potential of older buildings to work for communities all over America.

To do so, we need to work with developers, real estate agents, property owners, city officials and community members to further encourage the reuse of historic buildings. We should lift current barriers to reuse, work to make zoning and building regulations more modern and flexible, and help integrate preservation concerns into other policy areas, such as the planning and management of transportation systems and urban infrastructure.

We also need to become even more involved in addressing the challenges cities are facing—from providing affordable housing to promoting mass transit to preventing the displacement of longtime residents and businesses. In part, this means embracing fruitful partnerships with community and social justice groups whose values we share. Many organizations in America are already working to make cities healthier and more livable for their residents. We can contribute to this important work in a helpful and humble way, by illustrating the extraordinary potential of historic buildings to promote growth, sustainability and human well-being.

Our movement is also at an exciting time when it comes to the breadth of the history we are working to save. As the historian David McCullough once put it, "History is no longer a spotlight. We are turning up the stagelights to show the entire cast."

For preservation to flourish in the future, we need to save more places that tell diverse stories, and try to ensure a fuller record of the past at all historic sites. We should also work harder to engage people from all backgrounds in our movement, and see that everyone's voice is heard and experience acknowledged.

Doing this right will require changing how we currently operate in some ways, from moving beyond the traditional determination of a place's historic significance to finding ways to recognize complex and difficult chapters in our story appropriately and in a way that sheds valuable light on the issues of our present.

New tools can also facilitate our work. For example, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology is already transforming our field by bringing a wealth of disparate data together, and giving us new abilities to fight demolition and inappropriate development. We are also effectively leveraging the power of social media networks such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to mobilize communities on behalf of preservation. And innovative financing tools including revolving funds, tax credits and program-related investment loans are making it possible to achieve revitalization through preservation across entire neighborhoods.

A particularly fertile opportunity for the future, to my mind, lies with aligning more strongly with our sister organizations in the environmental and conservation movements. America is virtually unique in that, here, conservation and preservation evolved on separate paths. We are all committed to direct action on behalf of sustainable solutions. And we are all confronting the same serious problems, from the loss of treasured historic lands to the existential threat of climate change.

GAINING RECOGNITION AS A “MOVEMENT OF YES”

Finally, I believe that to keep growing preservation for the next 50 years and beyond, we need to keep working to become a Movement of Yes. For all our good work over the years, we still have a bad reputation in some circles, even among our natural allies. As one urban design blogger recently characterized us, preservationists are “busybodies, mostly...It really is the urge to tell the neighbors how tall their grass should be, or what color to paint the windows.” “Longtime preservationists are getting really uncomfortable with how unpopular they’ve become,” the former chair of Washington, D.C.’s Historic Preservation Review Board said, speaking of this prevailing stereotype, “and they haven’t gotten traction with more and more audiences that are important.”

In short, preservation needs to be about more than simply stopping bad things from happening to old buildings. Of course, there is still an important place for local preservation controls. But all too often, laudable policy goals are experienced by the public as impersonal exercises in the picayune and the impractical.



Citizen involvement has been key in the fight to prevent construction of massive transmission lines across the James River. The “Down to the Wire” campaign is engaging local support through an awareness campaign that included two months of canvassing events in Richmond and throughout the Historic Triangle.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ELLI MORRIS

We should keep exploring less-rigid and more community-driven tools, such as conservation districts and eco-districts. And instead of trapping buildings in amber, we need to keep them in active service to today’s families. We should work with communities to re-conceptualize historic places, so they are meeting the needs of neighborhoods and reflecting the energy and diversity of their environment.

Most of all, instead of being the ones who hold back change, and say “no, you can’t do that,” we must lead by example—innovating, adopting new tools, crafting new partnerships, and finding more ways to adapt and reuse historic buildings.

Preservation has come a long way over the past 50 years, and our neighborhoods and cities are much more livable and lovable because of what has been achieved. We all stand on the shoulders of those who convened at Williamsburg and other venues 50 years ago, thought about the future of what we do, helped pass the NHPA into law, and waged the often-uphill preservation battles of the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s.

I hope the discussions in this journal inspire and engage you to think about where we need to go over the next 50 years—to build on the striking success we have achieved so far, and to propel us forward for the next half-century. **FJ**

STEPHANIE K. MEEKS is the president and CEO of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.



TAKEAWAY

[Click here for a PDF of *With Heritage So Rich*.](#)

We Need to Talk (and to Listen)

THOMPSON M. MAYES

The historic preservation movement is in a time of reflection. The 50th anniversary of New York City's Landmarks Preservation Law was celebrated on April 19, 2015, and the 50th anniversary of the enactment of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) is October 15, 2016. The half-century anniversaries of these two legal tools for preservation—one municipal, the other federal—creates an inflection point—a time to reflect about where we are and to try to see our way into the future.¹

It is in this context that many institutions, including the National Trust; the University of Pennsylvania; the University of Massachusetts-Amherst; and Morven Park in Leesburg, Virginia; to name a few, have been bringing people together to talk about the present state—and the future—of this field we currently call historic preservation. Because of the series of [essays I wrote on “Why Old Places Matter”](#), I've been privileged to participate in several of these gatherings. Now I've been asked to share the main themes that emerged from the different discussions as a way of opening the conversation for readers of this issue of *Forum Journal*.

I've heard a few key words and phrases that I think will be helpful for readers to ponder as they read this issue: *inclusiveness*, *livability*, *sustainability*, *democratization*, *obstacles*, *complexity*, *partnerships*. From almost everyone, I've also gotten a strong sense that we need to talk—and to listen. Preservationists seem hungry not only to talk about the future of preservation and its role in our society, but also to push for change. On the one hand, there's the sense that preservation is under attack, whether from Ed Glaeser and his largely unreadable but highly influential book *Triumph of the City* to the many historic preservation commissions that face a backlash every time they try to designate a new historic district.

At the same time, pent up frustrations are spurring preservationists to demand solutions to longstanding issues within the field—to push for the reconsideration of the application of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards; to question the usefulness

of the idea of the “period of significance”; and to move past the obstacle of meeting the criteria of “integrity,” which is viewed as an impediment to the designation of places significant to African-American, Hispanic, LGBTQ, Native American and other under-represented communities.

These anniversaries also present a rare, perhaps once-in-a-generation, chance to think much more openly and broadly. How would we envision the role of preservation 50 years from now? How can we open our present-day minds to a different future? How can we better utilize old places to fulfill fundamental human needs? What can we do to open people’s eyes to the potential of older and historic places? Clearly we need—and want—not only to talk but to create a more effective and meaningful preservation movement.

In May 2015, through the generosity of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the National Trust convened a group of people at Kykuit, in Pocantico Hills, New York, to talk—while we listened. The invitees included a writer and journalist, affordable housing advocate, restaurateur, developer, architect, artist, academics, developers of artists’ spaces, and advocates for public housing, among others. The idea was to hear from people who work with old places but who do not necessarily consider themselves to be professional preservationists.

From the moment the participants met, they shared a palpable sense of excitement about interacting with each other and talking about these issues—and they became enthusiastic about the possibilities inherent in preservation. Rather than summarize the ideas, I’d like to share quotes from the participants that capture many of the key concepts:

“Preservation can make people’s lives richer—it is a way to tell stories and resonate at the experiential level.” Nathaniel Popkin, [journalist, author, editor, film writer, historian and critic](#)

“As for users, people love the old buildings.” Nadine Maleh, executive director, [Institute for Public Architecture](#)

“We always do direct market surveys before starting a new project. When we ask, ‘Do you want a new building or an old building?,’ people invariably choose ‘old building,’ in part



A May 2015 meeting, convened by the National Trust at Kykuit in New York, enabled Trust staff to hear the perspectives of people who work with old places but do not necessarily consider themselves to be preservationists. These kinds of discussions can open the preservation field to new insights and options.

because artists derive inspiration from older buildings.”
Greg Handberg, [Artspace, Inc.](#)

“There’s a tension between preserving the architectural landscape and preserving history/memory. Are we dealing with the future or grappling with the past?” Saima Akhtar, architect and designer, postdoctoral fellow, [Forum for Transregional Studies & Max Planck Institute](#)

“‘Historic preservation’ is limiting. When people hear ‘preservation,’ they think ‘preserving in time,’ not ‘creating a livable space.’ I never use ‘the P-word’ when I talk to potential clients.” Katie Rispoli, executive director, [We Are the Next](#)

“Bringing different stakeholders into the conversation is really important. The work you are all doing has changed, but the perception of preservation hasn’t.” Adam Markham, deputy director, Climate and Energy Program, [Union of Concerned Scientists](#)

“When we decide to preserve something, we are saying that thing is important. We are saying this building with the plaque is important, but other stuff is not important. We need to democratize that a bit.” Nadine Maleh, executive director, [Institute for Public Architecture](#)

“By and large, when it comes to determining ‘historic significance,’ preservation agencies seem to find grand buildings



When historic designation guidelines favor places that have maintained their integrity, other places that truly matter to people are inevitably discounted—such as the Dew Drop Inn in New Orleans, a much-altered but longtime favorite local gathering place. Resources meaningful to underrepresented communities are especially affected by this.

PHOTO BY [INFROGMATION OF NEW ORLEANS](#) UNDER CREATIVE COMMONS

designed by and for architects to be significant, rather than a building or place that has made a significant contribution to the life of the community.” Greg Handberg, senior vice president of properties, [ArtSpace](#)

“That’s what makes us unique. Other social justice organizations could, but we use the emotional and spiritual power of place to encourage active citizen engagement.” Sarah Pharaon, senior director, [International Coalition of Sites of Conscience](#)

“These buildings are cool, fun to be in. When we talk about buildings, we’re really talking about the experience of buildings. If we focus on preserving that instead, it’d be more useful. How does it feel to walk in, to sit in this space?” Michael Babin, founder, [Neighborhood Restaurant Group, Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food & Agriculture](#)

“The challenge is crafting standards that are more inclusive, that take into account economic issues. The process needs to be more open, and more cognizant of the fact that standards may have to bend if some buildings are going to continue to exist.” Michael Grote, director of building programs, [Alembic Community Development](#)

“It should feel like a tool rather than an obstacle.” Nathaniel Popkin, journalist, author, editor, film writer, historian and critic
“Preservation makes my job easier. People are looking for significance, or more to the point, fear their lack of significance. People want to feel unique, a sense of connection. Old places

make people feel like they are part of something bigger, makes them feel less mortal.” Drew Mitchell, founder and president, [Fathom Creative](#)

“Preservation is about distortions in time. When something is preserved ‘out of time’ that distortion brings out an emotion in us. When something is brought out of its time, that gives it a jarring quality that we can sense.” Catie Newell, architect, principal, [Alibi Studio](#)

“There are stewards of property in neighborhoods all across America. There are flowers in all these neighborhoods. How do you connect those stories to each other and to the preservation movement?” Brad White, [Alphawood Foundation](#); member, [Advisory Council on Historic Preservation](#)

“There is a word that is implicit in our conversations that nobody’s said, and that is pleasure. If we’re doing our jobs right, our work elicits pleasure. That jarring expectation, that makes us perceptually awake, is another kind of pleasure.” Jamie Kalven, [The Invisible Institute](#)

The ideas embedded in these quotes include both the stubborn limitations and the exciting possibilities of preservation:

- People love old buildings, but preservation is viewed in a limited way.
- Preservation regulation is necessary to save places, but is viewed as an obstacle to creative rehabilitation.
- Preservation is complex, and yet needs more subtle and flexible tools.
- Preservation has been about rich white people, but new technology makes it more democratic.
- Preservation is perceived as stodgy, but can jar us into awareness and give us pleasure.

Following the Kykuit meeting, in June 2015 the University of Massachusetts–Amherst and the University of Pennsylvania hosted a meeting of people who are contributing to a book tentatively

titled *Fifty Ideas for the Next Fifty Years*.² The participants discussed present perceptions of preservation and reviewed the ideas proposed for the book. Many of the themes were consistent with those cited at the Kykuit meeting—the need for increased inclusiveness, growing democratization enabled by new technology, the limited perceptions of preservation today, and the possibility of a broader, more vibrant notion of preservation. And perhaps because this was primarily a gathering of academics, participants highlighted the need to research, test, measure and study the goals and achievements of historic preservation.

I was struck by how the ideas discussed in both of these meetings corresponded with the draft statement of values developed at Morven Park, near Leesburg, Virginia, as part of its series of [workshops on the future of preservation](#), led by Jana Shafagoj, Morven Park’s director of preservation and education. During the first workshop held in June 2014, with a keynote address by Ned Kaufman, author of *Race, Place and Story*, participants identified the following core values to “guide the field of preservation.”

Identity. Preservation of authentic natural and manmade resources allows people to recognize and experience elements of their environment that can contribute to or expand their sense of self, community and nation.

Responsibility. Preservation promotes a collective responsibility for the condition of our shared environment that balances a respect for the past with the needs of the present and an anticipation of the future.

Inclusiveness. Preservation recognizes the broad spectrum of cultures, experiences and stories that are embodied within the physical environment of our communities and strives to identify, document and protect those resources.

Civic Engagement. Collaboration, innovation, advocacy and collective action within local communities are necessary to support and guide the protection of our shared cultural resources. Preservation is only successful when resulting from, and supported by, an engaged citizenry.

The Morven Park draft values statement and the ideas raised at Kykuit and at Amherst share overlapping themes:

- Preservation is about meeting deep human needs of identity,



Morven Park in Leesburg, Virginia, preserves for the public an 18th-century mansion and gardens. But it is also looking to the future, by hosting a series of workshops concerned with “reviewing the success of current preservation practices, identifying 21st-century challenges, and developing innovative solutions to advance the field of historic preservation.”

PHOTO COURTESY OF MORVEN PARK

belonging and memory, not only about architecture, and we should be rethinking our tools to match these needs.

- Preservation provides an opportunity for social justice in the recognition of under-acknowledged histories, identities and stories.
- Preservation is likely to be much more democratic in the future, with people determining the places that matter to them and how they should be protected; the field should embrace and foster the democratization.

All these concepts point to a broader vision for the role of older and historic places in American society. At the end of my exploration of why old places matter to people, I came to the surprising realization that old places were even more important to people than I, as a lifelong dedicated preservationist, had thought that they were. Listening to participants in these meetings talk about the power and challenges of old places excited me about the potential of old places to unlock possibilities in people, and in our society.

I hope that these quotes and values statements will spur more thought and discussion. As you read the essays in this issue of *Forum Journal*, and as we try to envision the next 50 years, I encourage all readers of this journal to participate in discussions and take advantage of this rare national consideration of the role of historic preservation in our national life. FJ

THOMPSON M. MAYES is the deputy general counsel for the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

- 1 See also information from the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the National Park Service on PreservationFifty, at <http://preservation50.org/about/nhpa-history/>, and from the coalition of individuals and organizations participating in Landmarks50 in New York at <http://www.nylandmarks50.org/>.
- 2 Edited by Max Page and to be published by the University of Massachusetts Press, anticipated in 2016.



VIDEO

Click here for a playlist of videos featuring Kykuit participants.

The Right to the City

JAMIE KALVEN

The symbolic launch of Chicago's [Plan for Transformation](#), the City's sweeping overhaul of its public housing, took place on December 12, 1998, more than a year before it was formalized as policy and christened with its Orwellian name. On that day, amid pomp and circumstance, the city demolished four vacant public housing high-rises by imploding them.

The event received massive attention. As the day approached, media coverage was akin to that for the St. Patrick's Day Parade or the Chicago Marathon. On the eve of the implosion, the *Chicago Tribune* published an article that provided a schedule, a map of the "spectator area," and a diagram showing how the buildings had been wired with explosives. The article included an interview with a demolition specialist who explained that the explosives were placed and timed so the structure would fall straight down, with each floor landing like a pancake on those below. "We do not blow buildings up," he said. "We let gravity tear buildings down."

Whatever the technical complexities involved in the implosions, the reporter had no doubt about their meaning. They "will serve," he wrote, "as a symbolic funeral" for the Chicago Housing Authority's "policy of warehousing the poor in high-rises." The *Tribune* editorial page underscored the point, hailing the event as "a televised tribute to the repeal of old mistakes and the laying of new foundations."

Known as the Lakefront Properties, the doomed buildings were located on the South Side at the edge of Lake Shore Drive. Each was 16 stories tall and contained 150 apartments. The plan was to replace them with a "mixed income community."

The implosion was scheduled to begin shortly after 8:00 am. The day was bright and clear; unseasonably mild for mid-December, with a brisk wind from the west.

The best vantage point was a sliver of parkland along the lakefront east of the Drive directly across from the buildings. People approached this spot from the north and from the south.



The first building to be demolished at Stateway Gardens with the downtown Chicago skyline in the background.

PHOTO BY PATRICIA EVANS

They came on foot, having left their cars some distance away, for there was little parking nearby. Many had cameras

and camcorders. Some had children in tow or on their shoulders. Estimated to be about 1,200, the crowd was largely composed of spectators from elsewhere in the city and the suburbs, most of them white, who would never have come to this part of the South Side under normal circumstances. Mixed among them were some former residents: people for whom the buildings had been home.

The dominant note of the gathering was celebratory. It was hard to place at first. A pilgrimage? A sporting event? It occurred to me later that what it most resembled was a public execution.

In preparation for the implosion, agile Bobcat bulldozers had pushed down the interior walls of the high-rises. The eviscerated structures had then been wired with explosives. A big yellow banner reading “Brandenburg Demolition” was strung across the front of one of the buildings.

Carefully choreographed by the City, the meaning of the spectacle was encapsulated in a simple equation:

*public housing high-rises = multiple urban ills
ergo: demolition = progress*

The press was present in force, with cameras poised and at the ready to broadcast that message far and wide.

A viewing stand had been erected for dignitaries. They included HUD officials, local politicians and representatives of Chicago philanthropy. In a brief ceremony, several spoke of the significance of the event.

“This is the beginning of a new era,” said a HUD spokesperson.

“We look forward,” declared a MacArthur Foundation executive, “to a triumphant future.”

The crowd chanted a countdown—“three, two, one, zero!”—and the explosives were detonated. The noise was surprisingly loud.

Ten seconds passed. Three buildings gave way and collapsed, then a few seconds later the fourth. Their structural integrity was undone in an instant, yet the materials that composed them hung suspended in the air like someone mortally wounded who stays on his feet for a bewildered moment before falling to the ground. Then it was over. The buildings were gone.

The crowd cheered.

“Now you see it, now you don’t,” a man said to his companion.

For most looking on, it was pure spectacle. But for some the moment was colored by grief.

“All them memories over there,” a woman standing beside me said quietly. “They took it all away.”

Then something unexpected happened. A thick cloud of dust rose from the ground back up into the air as if attempting to reconstitute the ghost buildings. After a minute or so, it was carried east by the wind and enveloped the crowd. The coarse particles darkened the sky and reduced visibility to a few feet. They fell on everyone, covering their clothes, penetrating into every exposed opening. People coughed and rubbed their eyes. They scrambled to shield their children and protect their cameras. Some ran for cover.

After the bright rhetoric and dawn-of-a-new-day symbolism, the dark cloud descending equally and without distinction on

policymakers, spectators and former residents was as startling—as implicating—as being splattered with blood. Drifting out over the city, the windblown particles of what had once been a community foreshadowed a future in which the disappearing act we had just witnessed would have consequences.



Resident Pat Evans and her son on the grounds of Stateway Gardens.

PHOTO BY PATRICIA EVANS

“TRANSFORMATION”

Seventeen years later, that future has arrived. During the intervening years, the sight of public housing high-rises being demolished, though never again imploded, became common in Chicago. In a remarkably short span of time, the archipelago of high-rise developments that had constituted a city within the city disappeared. The Robert Taylor Homes, Stateway Gardens, the Cabrini-Green Homes, Rockwell Gardens, the Ida B. Wells Homes, the Harold Ickes Homes—these and other developments were not simply demolished; they were erased. And almost overnight, it seemed, the land where they had stood reverted to urban prairie.

Today some 350 acres once inhabited by the poorest, most vulnerable residents of the city stand vacant.¹ Such mixed-income developments as have been built on former public housing sites are, for the most part, strangely un-urban—even anti-urban—places, and relations within them between market-rate and public housing residents are often toxic. The headlong implementation of the Plan has also had consequences for the fragile neighborhoods to which displaced public housing tenants were relocated, causing collateral damage to local institutions and almost surely contributing to spikes in the homicide rate.

Whatever else might be said about the Plan for Transformation, one thing is beyond question: the disappearing of places and people really works. To the extent the communities obliterated by the Plan can be said to survive, they are preserved in the memories, griefs and stories of those for whom they were home. They will never, however, be reconstituted as living places. They are utterly gone.

It is hard not to accept and accommodate to the altered facts on the ground. Yet the implications of doing so are profound. For that which has been disappeared remains powerfully present. The phenomenon is akin to black holes. Invisible to the eye, they can be detected by the ways their gravitational fields distort the visible world.

I witnessed this extraordinary process—this “transformation”—from beginning to end, on the ground in one of the communities “transformed”: the Stateway Gardens development, where I worked for more than a decade as an organizer and tenant advocate. The

attachment to place I observed among Stateway residents was unusually strong. This was due in no small part, I suspect, to the fact that it was a place for those for whom, within the American caste system, there was no other place.

Early in my immersion in Stateway, I learned from public health researcher and advocate Mindy Fullilove to reject the inevitable characterization of impoverished inner-city communities as “isolated.”² These communities are not isolated, she argues; they are abandoned. It was an important lesson—a critical distinction. Isolation suggests the poor and disfavored somehow moved away from the rest of the society. Abandonment, by contrast, asserts relationships and forms of accountability.

Yet to an extraordinary degree, conditions that should be the basis for calling various public and private institutions to account are evoked by those very institutions to advance their agendas. They make a massive ongoing investment in maintaining a narrative that absolves them of responsibility and blames residents for the condition of their neighborhood.

Among Gandhi’s greatest intellectual contributions is his insistence on the nexus between falsehood and violence: the former is necessarily enforced by the latter. In the case of Chicago’s public housing “transformation,” it was inevitable, given the character of the official narrative, that the process of demolition and forced relocation would do violence to the identities of residents.

Human beings are adaptive. Under conditions of abandonment,

they find ways to survive, to create meaning and beauty, to be at home in the world. So it was at Stateway and other high-rise public housing communities. It was my great good fortune to come to understand, not as an abstraction but as a daily reality, that Stateway



Basketball tournament organized by young men at Stateway Gardens.

PHOTO BY PATRICIA EVANS

Gardens—and by extension other public housing developments—were the sites of communities as complex and unfathomable, embracing as wide a spectrum of human variety, as any other.

I have written extensively about the afterlife of violence.³ A central motif that emerges from the accounts of those who have suffered torture, rape and other violent assaults is the image of being torn out of the world, of having their connections—the relationships and attachments that give meaning to their lives—severed. Such is the nature, if not the degree, of the violence inflicted on Chicago public housing residents in the name of “new beginnings.”

Imagine having the known world, the world by which you know yourself, destroyed. Then imagine being told that this trauma was inflicted for your own good and that your grief over the loss is pathological.

That perverse logic was essential to the ideological underpinnings of the Plan. Central among them: anything is better than this. In the late 1990s, after allowing conditions in high-rise public housing to deteriorate over generations, the City suddenly announced that those conditions were intolerable. This apparent moral awakening did not take the form of confronting the mass of discreet practical problems arising from longstanding patterns of incompetence, inattention, corruption and racism. Rather, the city declared monolithic systems failure. This rhetorical sleight-of-hand produced the opposite of accountability. It effectively gave the political and economic interests that had built the high-rise developments *carte blanche* to profit from tearing it down.

Only the most robust democratic discourse could have withstood that powerful confluence of interests. Yet there was no such discourse. Housing policy experts and urban planners, civic leaders and philanthropists, journalists and editorial writers—none provided critical perspectives commensurate with the scale and implications of the Plan for Transformation. The silence of preservationists was particularly striking, in view of the fact that the Plan was comparable in its impact to the urban renewal projects of the 1950s and 60s that provoked the birth of their movement.⁴

The Chicago experience thus presents a question with implications that extend beyond Chicago: what responsibilities do



Children at Stateway compete with one another, doing flips on to a discarded mattress.

PHOTO BY PATRICIA EVANS

preservationists bear to abandoned places and to populations threatened with invisibility? Does historic preservation have any relevance to the experiences and priorities of those who struggle to remain visible in our cities and our democracy?

IMAGINING AN ALTERNATIVE

A thought experiment: what qualities would have been required for the preservation movement to play a constructive role in Chicago's urban drama? What would a movement equipped to address current and future threats to other abandoned communities look like?

For one thing, the central focus of such a movement would be on places rather than buildings. It would recognize that places are dynamic and hence that it is necessary to think in ecological terms about the mesh of relationships that support their vitality, adaptability and resilience—qualities that such a movement would, above all, be dedicated to preserving and enhancing.

Paradoxically, such an orientation requires that preservationists look past the built environment—past an abandoned public housing high-rise, say—in order to discern the relational ecology essential to the character of the place for those living there. Such an approach requires an ethnographic openness to the variety of ways human beings adapt to particular circumstances. It is a

matter of asking what supports life in this place—and equally, what stunts life—without allowing moralistic judgments to immediately preempt the inquiry. (One of the most counterproductive and insulting aspects of the Plan for Transformation has been the confident ease with which it ascribes underclass deviance as measured against the gold standard of middle-class norms, as opposed to recognizing cultural difference.)

In order to discern what is valued by members of a given community, preservationists must be prepared to set aside their expertise with respect to the architecturally and historically significant and seek local knowledge. Not an easy dance to do, but necessary. For the true experts with respect to the qualities of a place are those living there. This is necessarily immersive work, a matter of putting aside preconceptions, exercising active curiosity, and listening deeply. The effort may seem disproportionate, but there are certain things that can only be learned on the ground.

The practice of preservation, as I am envisioning it, would recognize that the fate of places and communities is, first of all, determined in the semantic realm. This is one of the lessons bequeathed by the Chicago experience. Power does not impose itself nakedly. It requires ideological justification to facilitate its ends. That the official narrative is patently false, even absurd, doesn't matter so long as it is uncontested. What is required is not our belief but our acquiescence.

This dynamic gives rise to a sphere of potential resistance where preservationists might play an effective role as disinterested advocates of vital communities, challenging the disconnect between the official narrative and observable realities on the ground, and insisting on diagnostic clarity. As Vaclav Havel observed in another context, “a world of appearances trying to pass for reality” is vulnerable to any act that makes visible an alternative. “It is utterly unimportant,” he writes, “how large a space that alternative occupies: its power does not consist in its physical attributes but in the light it casts.”⁵

Returning to the Chicago experience, not only was the official narrative defamatory of residents, not only did it necessitate an assault on their identities, it was also stupefying. It stifled creativity

and hobbled adaptability. The fiction of monolithic systems failure—a failed experiment—necessitated the immensely wasteful destruction of a huge inventory of housing, a significant portion of which could have been reconfigured and rehabbed. The fiction that conditions in the developments were due to a design flaw—the high-rises themselves were to blame rather than gross negligence by the city-as-landlord—precluded the construction of any high-rises in redevelopment projects, even when conditions were optimal and more affordable housing could have thereby been created. Above all, the fiction that public housing communities were bad places—that anything was better than this—blinded those driving the process to resources within the communities that could have been drawn upon in a process of genuine renewal.

The work of challenging the “world of appearances trying to pass for reality” is thus of great practical importance. To the extent that it is successful, it opens up space for creativity and innovation. The preservation movement I am positing would vigorously inhabit that space. Its respect for and curiosity about the webs of meaning, patterns of usage, and strata of memory grounded in a particular place would almost surely yield design innovations and creative repurposing of familiar structures and materials. Most important, this quality of attention would contribute to more humane processes of development that honor memory and grief, thereby enabling community members to remain moored in the midst of change.

RECASTING PRESERVATION'S ROLE

Is such a paradigm shift possible? George Orwell once observed that sometimes one's “first duty” is “the restatement of the obvious.” In that spirit: the built environment testifies to past and current injustices. In abandoned communities, failures of democracy are manifest not only in disenfranchisement and patterns of violence arising from powerlessness but also in injuries to place that reflect and reinforce the social status of those living there. Those physical conditions are as essential to enforcing structures of inequality and exclusion as the disparities in policing that have commanded so much attention in the post-Ferguson era.

Viewed in such a light, the central assumption of the preservation movement—that attachment to place is a fundamental human need—is a demanding principle. It can be recast, in the idiom of the international human rights movement, as the right to the city. And it dictates that the movement directly engage the ways structural inequalities in our society are expressed, reinforced and *hidden* by the built environment. Could it be that a robust, inclusive future for this movement, so easily caricatured as elitist, turns on embracing the radical nature of its underlying premises and following where they lead? FJ

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- 1 This inventory will soon be reduced—not by construction of new housing but by deals the housing authority has entered into with big box stores and sports facilities hungry for large parcels of land.
- 2 For a description of Fullilove's current work, see Robert Sullivan, "The Town Shrink," *New York Times Magazine*, June 23, 2015.
- 3 See Jamie Kalven, *Working With Available Light: A Family's World After Violence* (W. W. Norton, 1999).
- 4 Two exceptions serve to sharpen the point. First, preservationists have supported the effort to establish a National Public Housing Museum in Chicago. Second, they successfully challenged plans to demolish the Lathrop Homes, the last major redevelopment project in the Chicago Housing Authority's portfolio, arguing that its architecture and landscaping are historically significant. Both are instances, however welcome, of traditional preservation advocacy. What preservationists did not do is engage the realities on the ground as perceived and experienced by residents. Nor did they contribute to a process by which the things residents valued about their places and wanted to preserve were acknowledged and given weight.
- 5 Vaclav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," *Open Letters: Selected Writings, 1965-1990* (Vintage, 1992).



VIDEO

Click here to hear presentation by Jamie Kalven at the James Marston Fitch Charitable Foundation Symposium, October 2014.

Respecting the Layers of Urban History

NATHANIEL POPKIN

One day about seven years ago, when my daughter, Lena, was nine, we were walking toward our house on Bainbridge Street in Philadelphia. Pre-boom, change was coming to the neighborhood in fits and starts. Workers were transforming the worn-out antiques store next to our house into condos. But at the corner where our house sits, only an old furniture store, lovingly reimagined as a crêperie, had new life.

We stopped in front of the Norge appliance showroom, which had been boarded up as long as I could remember. Now the owner was finally ready to sell. Workers were cleaning the place out. They'd removed the store's iconic three-foot-tall, yellow metal letters—N-O-R-G-E—and had stacked them inside the doorway. The letters were to be scrapped, the workers told us, and we started to walk away. Sensing my disappointment, Lena suggested I ask if we could take them. Ten minutes later, they were sitting in our living room, once a carpet store and then a grocery store and a café. We put the O in the storefront window to show our support for Senator Obama's campaign for president.

Our corner is on the border of two neighborhoods, Queen Village and Bella Vista—names invented by Realtors in the 1970s.

The only views in flat Bella Vista are from third- and fourth-floor decks, but the name acknowledges the long history of Italian immigration,

The former Norge appliance store, now a pub, reused the premises—and even the sign letters—of an earlier men's clothing store. Such modest commercial buildings represent a long tradition of small-scale entrepreneurship. Ignoring such buildings disregards a rich vein of community history.

PHOTO BY PETER WOODALL



which began here in the mid-19th century (as I write, I can glimpse the steeple of the first Italian Catholic church in America, St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi). The “queen” in Queen Village is Christina of Sweden, who commissioned a colony here in the 1630s, the short-lived New Sweden. This part of the city, indeed, has been shaped and reshaped by waves of migrants and immigrants since then: British, Scottish, and Welsh sailors; the largest free black community in early America; Irish; Italians; Poles; and Jews. But preservationists have had little to say about and almost nothing to do with maintaining the architectural presence of these culturally and economically vital groups that have so thoroughly shaped our nation. Most buildings on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places aren’t schools or churches or civic buildings or mills or workshops, but houses—private displays of ambition. The lack of attention to these threads of urban life robs us of a true understanding of the urban fabric’s intrinsic richness while exposing the preservation movement’s deeply entrenched bias toward buildings and places valued by the WASP elite.

For much of the 19th century, Irish immigrants lived cheek-by-jowl on claustrophobic alleys with even poorer African Americans, neighbors and nemeses in the fight for jobs at the port. The great defender of the Irish against both blacks and Protestants was William McMullen, who ran a tavern, a hose company (a private firefighting fraternity), and a Democratic political club. Aside from the alleys themselves and one or two corner taprooms that suggest the powerful intimacy of McMullen’s tavern, his world is gone (there had been, in McMullen’s time, 450 liquor licenses in the neighborhood). The hose company was purchased by an Italian immigrant group and restyled as Columbus Hall; recently a real estate investor turned the building into an apartment house, retaining C-O-L-U-M-B-U-S--H-A-L-L in stone on the cornice. McMullen is infamous for ordering the assassination of leading black teacher and powerful national activist Octavius V. Catto during an Irish election-day assault on black voters. The Italianate-style Institute for Colored Youth, where Catto taught, is one of only three Bella Vista buildings on the National Register. The neighborhood’s other

key civic and commercial spaces including St. Mary Magdalen, Columbus Hall, and even the century-old Italian Market are missing from the list.

Urban neighborhoods such as Bella Vista evolve mostly by accretion. Like sediment, the layers collect over centuries. The built form—the scale and size of buildings, the street patterns—remains. These are the good bones of an old place. The joy in them is in the discovery of the sedimentary layers of all those people who have come before. Preservation ought to have a role in the process.

HOW PRESERVATION TOOLS FALL SHORT

A problem is that the tools of preservation are both underutilized and limited in this context—a crippling combination that has left whole swaths of urban America out of the preservation conversation. On another Bella Vista block, a developer of upscale rowhouses recently purchased a century-old carpet warehouse and showroom to tear down and replace with three new houses. The warehouse wasn't exceptional, but as a sturdy and handsome commercial building it asserted the neighborhood's depth of history and character. The building formed part of a layer of Jewish culture and mercantile identity that developed here over 70 years, from the 1880s to the 1950s. Yet no one posited preservation as a practical means of opposition to the rowhouse plan. Rather, the developer used it to cudgel the neighbors: if you don't allow me to build luxury houses, I'll convert the warehouse into apartments for transients.

Small-scale investors and developers—the vast majority of those renovating old buildings—are notoriously averse to wide thinking or bureaucratic tools. Efficiency and simplicity are paramount—preservation as we now conceive it eschews both. Had Columbus Hall, an elegant civic building, been listed on the National Register, it's unlikely the developer of that property would have pursued historic preservation tax credits. It wouldn't have been worth the trouble.

About two years ago, another neighborhood investor took possession of B'Nai Reuben, Philadelphia's first Hasidic synagogue, one door down from the Norge appliance showroom. The 1904 baroque revival building (the congregation had been founded in



This 1904 former Jewish synagogue found a compatible use for a while as an antiques mart. When a new owner, converting it to apartments, obliterated the finely crafted interior murals and exterior carvings associated with the building's original use, no protections were in place.

PHOTO BY BRADLEY MAULE

the 1880s), designed by Charles W. Bolton and John J. Dull, with two copper onion domes (the only pair in the neighborhood to survive), is one of the most delightful buildings in this part of the city. For years, after the synagogue closed in 1956, it housed an antiques mart, Antiquarian's Delight. Wooden signs covered over the Hebrew writing on the building, but several Stars of David, in carved stone, adorned the facade. When the investor, owner of a beer distributor and popular neighborhood brunch spot, purchased the building in 2012, he indicated that his plan was to convert the interior, including the second-floor sanctuary with its vaulted ceiling, into apartments. This would mean the loss of that special interior space, unused for so long, and historic murals of Hebrew months and mazalot (zodiac signs). But the investor said he planned to restore the exterior. Then, last June, a disturbing surprise: workers chiseling off the Stars of David and the Hebrew writing over the doorway that read, "This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter into it." Concrete was troweled into the blank spaces, the Stars of David replaced by generic forms that resemble the Greek cross (the investor is Greek). In a single day, a layer of the neighborhood's history, evident in quiet iconography of this single landmark building, had been erased.



When workers chiseled off the iconography that adorned the facade of the former Jewish synagogue a layer of the neighborhood's history was erased.

PHOTO BY ROB KOPF

The news story that my publication, the *Hidden City Daily*, produced on the removal of

Jewish iconography from the building provoked a reaction from City Councilman Jim Kenney, the likely next mayor of Philadelphia, who wondered why the synagogue wasn't listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places (it's not listed on the National Register, either).

Because the local register has regulatory (as opposed to financial) power, historic status would have effectively stopped the destruction of the Jewish symbols and Hebrew writing. While the National Register wasn't needed to preserve Columbus Hall, the Philadelphia Register would have forced the investor to put his plans for the synagogue before a public agency, fomenting discourse. In this case, there was a role for a strong preservation tool, but the underfunded Philadelphia Historical Commission didn't have the resources to commission a nomination. With development pressure increasing almost everywhere, citywide preservation advocates were also overstretched.

The year before he purchased the synagogue, the same investor picked up the old Norge showroom. He turned it into a gastro pub. Up the block, we hung two of the old N-O-R-G-E letters in our family room to spell out O-R, a kind of existential provocation in a room full of books. The letters of the Norge sign, we learned later, had come from the building's previous occupant, Sam Gerson, whose men's clothing store was one of dozens of Jewish stores in this part of Philadelphia. In G-E-R-S-O-N, only the S had to be discarded to form N-O-R-G-E.

ENGAGING PEOPLE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The circumstances of this one corner where I live carry us deeply into preservation's gray area, where the questions often fail to clarify. Is it more important that B'Nai Reuben and the Norge building survive or that they function as culture signifiers? Do we

need buildings to express history and, if so, can we imagine that owners of real estate are capable guardians of public memory? Whose memory? Who decides, and what kinds of tools are available? Must the buildings be architecturally distinctive or historically important to be considered as targets for preservation, as traditional preservation tools dictate? In poor neighborhoods, where the real estate market has negative value, do preservation tools help or hinder investment? And if traditional preservation tools are not available, or the building doesn't fit the requirements of the historic register, how do we preserve the suggestive layers of the city? Must we continue to write off so much urban history?

Unless you believe that preservation need only be concerned with buildings of landmark status as determined by experts, the questions only intensify the gray. And in no sense, as you can see, do I imagine adaptive use as fundamentally different from preservation. The answers to some of these questions, then, require us to push beyond regulatory and financial tools to real engagement with people in neighborhoods.

In Philadelphia, where intense development pressure threatens an entire layer of neighborhood architectural forms—churches, schools, libraries, community centers, fire stations, factories, movie theaters and workshops, landmarks of migrant and immigrant life—staff and members of our nonprofit organization [Hidden City Philadelphia](#), in conjunction with the [Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia](#) and the journalism site [Plan Philly](#), have been using the internet and public tours to expose the economic and cultural significance of these sites. The Hidden City Festival, presented twice now, has invited artists to reimagine 20 vulnerable buildings and places. The National Trust has engaged too, particularly on landmarks of African American cultural significance including Joe Frazier's Gym.

The broad public push has produced preliminary results, opening the Philadelphia Register nominating process to nonprofessionals. Activists have saved some buildings, and artists and entrepreneurs have given others new life. Though politics has weakened the protections granted by the Philadelphia Register in some notable cases, more people are involved in the quotidian work of saving

buildings—from triage repair work on a neighborhood church’s roof to reimagining an Art Deco school as a center for art and innovation—than there have been in two decades. A next step will be to give residents the technological tools to assess buildings of significance in their neighborhoods.

LIVING WITHIN LAYERS OF HISTORY

On most days, I leave my house, built by the immigrant Gerace family in the 1920s to be their grocery store, walk through the slender remains of William McMullen’s turf to take a bus (along an old streetcar line) to an office on the third floor of the old Wolf Envelope Company’s factory. In a city whose built form erupted in the century between 1850 and 1950, all of us inhabit the ruins of someone else’s city; all of us carry it forward.

The point of preservation in the urban context, then, may not be to set architectural masterpieces in perpetual amber, but to deepen the experience of the city itself and thus, in turn, the active, palpable feeling of being human, connecting to others across time and space. At B’Nai Reuben, on my corner, the sloppy investor overlooked the two cornerstones of the synagogue, put into place on May 22, 1904, inscribed in Hebrew and English. Inside them are the names of the people who founded the congregation in 1883, their families, and newspaper clippings about the synagogue, a place of refuge for Russian rabbis in the years before their world would be shattered by pogroms. The Jewish quarter was founded in 1881, according to historian Harry Boonin, and this would be its first new synagogue building. The 23-year lapse tells us something about the immigrant struggle. On dedication day, so many thousands crowded the street to get into the 1,600-seat sanctuary that the synagogue’s elders had to yell down to the crowd to keep order. “They might as well have attempted to whistle down the wind,” said a writer for the *North American* newspaper.

Whistling down the wind, it seems to me, is a decisive metaphor for the process of preserving the layers of the city. Just three blocks from B’Nai Reuben is the Institute for Colored Youth, whose Italianate architectural style equally calls to my mind the villas that line the streets of Rome’s outlying districts and the monumental



Although now a condo building, the former Institute for Colored Youth still stands as a reminder of that respected and pioneering school and of its accomplished faculty, notably the national activist Octavius Catto, whose racially motivated murder shocked the city.

PHOTO COURTESY CHEYNEY UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

ambition of Philadelphia's post-Civil War black elite, who sought justice through education and organizing. The tools of preservation have maintained this palpable layer of urban history, but elsewhere in the city, similar buildings are threatened.

Octavius Catto, the respected black leader who spoke Latin and Ancient Greek, inhabited these blocks—my blocks—with as much guile as anyone before or since. Often I walk by and someone, a resident of one of the condos inside perhaps, will be walking out, taking the same path Catto did after dismissing his students the afternoon of October 10, 1871, about to become a martyr to the cause of justice. He was whistling, probably, down the unsettling wind of terror and violence; seeing that building, I'm sure I can still hear him. FJ

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The Evolving Definition of “Historic Preservation”: More Complex, More Inclusive

SUSAN WEST MONTGOMERY

With some 50 years of federal preservation law and policy in place and decades more of individual and collective action to save places, you’d think we’d have a clearer definition of what we mean when we say “historic preservation.” Instead, it is as though the more time that goes by the more complex the meaning becomes, the more diverse the motivations that lead us to it, and the more wide ranging the actions we take in its name. The effort to find a clear and common definition is also muddied by how others define the concept for us. As we look to the future of preservation, we should understand and own this complexity and be deliberate in pointing out preservation everywhere we see it.

One way to look at the discipline known as historic preservation is as a continuum that flows from the micro to the macro and back again. When I spackle mortar on brick to repoint a wall, or hammer a nail to repair a joist, I am engaging in historic preservation. When I survey and document a set of resources and nominate them to the National Register of Historic Places I am engaging in historic preservation. When I acquire a vacant manufacturing building, save some of its original fabric, but adaptively reuse it as a hotel and retail space I am engaging in historic preservation. When I work to enact a design review ordinance in a historic district I am engaging in historic preservation. When I develop a comprehensive marketing plan and recruit new businesses to open on Main Street in rehabbed older buildings I am engaging in historic preservation.

What all these examples have in common is they revolve around a building or buildings, but historic preservation can also be the act of saving a landscape. We might preserve a farmstead, for example, with its particular arrangement of fences, fields, trees, hedgerows and ruins; or a Native American trail, still discernible after decades of disuse. Even a stretch of riverbank with its telltale



Supporting traditional cultural activities is also an aspect of historic preservation, especially when that helps to promote continued use of places where those activities are best experienced. Traditional dances of the Chamorro people were featured at a celebration of Pâgat, one of the last ancient village sites still publicly accessible on Guam.

PHOTO BY BRIAN TURNER

scars and manmade topographical features can reveal an industrial past and be worthy of preservation.

Moving even further away from physical fabric, we may find ourselves preventing new building on a site even when there are few or no historic remnants on the property. Even places that seem empty and unused can be inextricably tied to a people or an event that is best experienced and interpreted in that open space. We have also learned that historic preservation can be the act of uncovering the names, experiences and actions of individuals even where no tangible history remains, as is the case with the narratives of so many enslaved and working-class people. Our work to protect sacred and cultural traditions—dance, sport, music, language, food ways—is also historic preservation when it recognizes, honors and encourages the continued use of the traditional cultural places where such activities occur.

Historic preservation then is essentially rooted in the concept of “saving” something, whether a building, place or landscape; or, in its wider applications, a story, cultural practice or tradition associated with a place. We generally consider something saved when a place, story, practice or tradition is able to continue to exist for some time to come. In a way, it is the antithesis of consumption, when a building, place, landscape or other resource is used up or used in such a way that it loses its value over time. Preservation is all about retaining value, even enhancing it. Every action we take that adds value—including continued use, continued practice,

revival, restoration, rehabilitation, reuse, interpretation—can in its own way fall under the rubric of historic preservation.

If you accept the premise I have laid out—accept that historic preservation spans this continuum and that it is about buildings, and places, and stories, and traditions—then you may not be surprised to learn that preservation practitioners come in all shapes and sizes too. Earlier this year, the National Trust convened a group of individuals at Kykuit in Pocantico Hills, New York, whose work as developers, business people, social justice advocates, artists and more takes advantage of historic resources in one way or another. Before the convening, few among them would have called themselves preservationists. But as they described their work using, reusing, interpreting and researching historic places, we couldn't help but remark, "That is historic preservation!" and, by extension, "You are a preservationist!"

The couple who buy and maintain a previously owned house are preservationists. The craftsman who carefully replicates historic plaster is a preservationist. The city planner who includes existing buildings in her comprehensive plan is a preservationist. The activist for the homeless who secures funding to rehabilitate a historic apartment building as affordable housing is a preservationist. The restaurateur who adaptively reuses a warehouse is a preservationist. The site director who digs into archival material for information about the enslaved people who lived at the site so that this will be part of site's interpretation is a historic preservationist.

What is also clear is that the motivations that bring people to engage in historic preservation are remarkably complex as well. Last fall National Trust staff, inspired by the proliferation of social media quizzes, drafted their own

online [quiz](#) that asked Forum members:

"What kind of preservationist are you?" The quiz creators settled on six types of preservationists: Vocal, Accidental, Classic, Green, People and Artisan. They then prepared a series of questions and six possible answers for each.

The set of answers individuals selected served to indicate what type of preservationist they are.





Building on the success of the “This Place Matters” campaign, “This Is Historic Preservation” signs could highlight the preservation-related activities of home and business owners, tradespeople, developers, housing advocates, artists and countless others.

Needless to say the quiz was far from scientific and rather lighthearted, but it did reveal that individuals are motivated to engage in historic preservation, professionally or vocationally, for very different reasons. It also suggested that the way they go about saving a place and the resources they are most interested in saving may differ widely from person to person.

If the term “historic preservation” can be used to describe all that I have suggested above, then it is not only a remarkably complex endeavor but also an amazingly widespread phenomenon. My colleague Tom Mayes, in his [series of essays “Why Old Places Matter,”](#) has effectively made the case that old places matter to nearly everyone, everywhere and for a staggering array of reasons. I would argue the act of preserving old places is happening everywhere all the time, and likewise for a staggering array of reasons. It is happening so that we might provide shelter, commerce, community gathering places. It is happening so that we can tell stories, understand our history—even its most difficult aspects—and to continue and bequeath our sacred traditions and cultural heritage. It is happening so that we can resist consumption and, rather than use up resources, work to retain their value. Many individuals and organizations are actively engaged in this work, whether or not

they call it preservation or themselves preservationists. Let us honor that. Instead of a narrow definition, let us embrace a broad one. Let's become preservation seekers, ever vigilant to discover preservation wherever it is happening, whether in its most precise form or its most informal; in its most modest or its catalytic. Could we be so bold as to hand out signs, much as we do with the "This Place Matters" campaign, that say "This Is Historic Preservation!" and let individuals decide how they'd like to apply that term?

In 1966 Congress enacted legislation that legitimized the act of saving historic buildings and declared historic preservation to be in the public interest. Fifty years later we have the chance to acknowledge the complexities inherent in the endeavor and the diversity of interests that participate in carrying it out. If we do that successfully, historic preservation may eventually be seen not just as a public benefit but as the most valuable of public actions. **FJ**

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[Click here for "Exposure" of This Is Preservation](#)

Thinking Ahead: Forum Members Share Vision for Preservation's Future

ELIZABETH BYRD WOOD

Last June, in anticipation of this issue of the journal, we asked Forum members to tell us about their hopes and dreams for the future of historic preservation. We posed the following question: “What is your vision—your wish—for an ideal preservation world?”

Some three dozen Forum members responded with thoughtfully written emails about their vision for the next 50 years of the preservation movement. Not surprisingly, several common themes emerged.

BROADEN PRESERVATION'S OUTREACH

The need for preservation to broaden its reach and engage new audiences came through clearly in many of the responses. Brittany V. Lavelle Tula, owner of BLV Historic Preservation Research and adjunct professor of historic preservation at the College of Charleston, writes that we need a “young army of motivated, inspired Americans, who not only understand the importance of preservation as seen through historic materials and cultural heritage, but also as it relates to urban planning, community pride and a healthy future for our country.” “Keep [preservation] relevant and necessary!” she says.

Sarah Marsom, historic preservation advocate for the German Village Society in Columbus, Ohio, writes: “[We need] creative and inspiring engagement to catapult unique projects and minority interpretation...Whether we are teaching people traditional trades, promoting tax credits, or advocating for structures to be saved, marketing preservation through new methods that resonate with broader audiences is at the forefront of importance for a positive preservation-focused future.”

Educating all Americans about historic preservation and the tools used to protect our heritage will be important to achieving

this goal. Raina Regan, a community preservation specialist with Indiana Landmarks, writes: “With a common understanding of preservation vocabulary, Americans will understand the significance of our built heritage and the importance of its continued use to building sustainable communities.” Jim Bertolini from Carson City, Nevada, agrees. He writes: “I hope the next half century is defined by strengthening the outreach and preservation programs that focus more on *why* we preserve, not just how.”

Other respondents suggest that we try to do a better job of engaging politicians. Kendra Parzen, a conservation intern working in Washington, D.C., writes: “My hope for the next 50 years is that we will finally be able to convince the majority of politicians to support preservation efforts and incentives. Extensive research clearly demonstrates that preservation is the right move to rejuvenate communities, attract businesses, generate jobs, and foster creative environments...Yet preservation offices and programs are facing cuts across the country! I’d like to see more of the government working with preservationists, not against them.”

EXPAND TRAINING IN TRADITIONAL BUILDING METHODS

Several respondents commented on the need to train more people in traditional building methods and crafts. Katie Totman, a recent graduate of the historic preservation program at the University of Texas in San Antonio, says she would love to see more trade-based professionals sharing their knowledge with younger preservationists. Dena Kafallinos, an architectural conservator in San Francisco, hopes that preservationists will spend more time researching technical

means and methods to preserve. She writes: “The destruction and sometimes mediocre

Training more people in traditional building trades and crafts will prepare workers for skilled employment, promote greater respect for those specialties and for good stewardship, and make restoration work more affordable. Shown here, a worker tests a mockup of a new cornice section for the 1860 Iron Block Building in Milwaukee.

PHOTO BY MARK DEMSKY, AIA-DENTAL ASSOCIATES.



restorations of historic resources are often due to the fact that historic preservation treatments are still in their infancy.”

“If we make it more affordable to repair historic materials such as windows, homeowners will not be ‘forced’ to replace the historic materials,” writes another respondent. She explains that where she lives, there are only a handful of window restoration specialists, and they charge approximately \$1,000 per window for a repair. Many homeowners would not be able to afford that expense, she notes.

Elizabeth Hallas, AIA, an architect with Anderson Hallas Architects in Golden, Colorado, agrees: “Rather than have the latest and greatest zippy ‘green’ products which are processed and chemically infused and require complete replacement with the slightest wear and tear, let’s have materials and assemblies that are durable, repairable and readily available. Let’s train our next generation in preservation, conservation and stewardship. Let’s foster a genuine

respect for the talent of our craftspeople. Let’s not allow these skills and trades to perish. That which we can sustain, we can preserve.”

UTILIZE NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Rebecca Fenwick, historic preservation specialist with Lominack Kolman Smith Architects in Savannah, Georgia, says

she appreciates the value of new technology but at the same time worries about the cost. She writes: “I wish to see preservation technologies—such as laser scanning, 3D modeling, total station, and photogrammetry—

This 3-D visualization created with GIS technology enabled Mount Vernon to analyze potential threats to its viewshed—information that was used to put development restrictions on nearby land.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GEORGE WASHINGTON'S MOUNT VERNON.



more accessible and affordable. These technologies save time in the field, improve accuracy, and offer a great visualization tool for illustrating preservation possibilities.”

PLAN FOR EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Recognizing that preservationists will need to spend more and more time dealing with the effects of climate change, Jen Sparenberg, the hazard mitigation officer with the Maryland Historical Trust, proposes that we expand the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards to include appropriate approaches for flood mitigation. She also suggests modifying tax credit programs to allow mitigation action as an eligible expense. She writes: “By making mitigation part of the national preservation policy, preservationists will be on the front lines of protecting historic properties from climate change and natural hazards.”

TAKE A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN SUSTAINABILITY

Others commented on preservation’s role in the sustainability movement. Margaret O’Neill, a landscape preservation associate with the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training in Natchitoches, Louisiana, sees collaboration with other organizations working for sustainable and healthy communities as critical. She writes: “For the next half century, the goal of preservationists should be one of compromise and accessibility, especially when considering cultural landscapes and clean energy development. By working jointly with groups to pursue this goal, we can move preservation from being an afterthought to a leader in sustainability.”

PROMOTE PRESERVATION AS AN URBAN STRATEGY

We need to do a better job of making the case that older and historic buildings contribute to the sustainability and livability of cities, according to some respondents. “To be effective, we must better demonstrate the power of preservation for city rebuilding as a tool for both economic and social development,” suggests Dan Rose, member of the City of Edmonton Historical Board in Alberta. This applies to smaller towns too, notes Ellie Isaacs, Historic Preservation/Designer at Taylor Kempkes Architects in Hot Springs,



In the ideal future, conservation, rehabilitation, and continued or adaptive use of existing built heritage would be widely recognized as the preferred option for the renewal of cities and towns. One model project is the revitalization of the Union Block Building, a prominent building in the downtown square of Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

PHOTOS COURTESY MAIN STREET MOUNT PLEASANT

Arkansas. She writes: “We need to move back into downtown areas from the suburbs.” Isaacs

urges us to create thriving, mixed-use neighborhoods; support local businesses; use mass transit; and promote the adaptive use of old buildings. She ends her comment by quoting Jane Jacobs: “You can’t rely on bringing people downtown, you have to put them there.”

MAKE PRESERVATION THE FIRST-CHOICE OPTION

Claire VanderEyck, who works for Dominion Development in Minneapolis, writes that the future of preservation lies in demonstrating that preservation is economical and sustainable, preservation is trendy, and preservation creates positive outcomes. “The key is to stop harping on the times we fail and start celebrating the times we succeed,” she adds.

Deborah Kent, an architectural designer with Bonstra/Haresign Architects in Washington, D.C., looks forward to a time when rehabilitation is the obvious choice for owners, developers and architects. She envisions a world 50 years from now when “people understand that rehabilitation is more sustainable, often cheaper, and less disruptive to infrastructure and cultural continuity. It is universally accepted that quick and thoughtless construction and knee-jerk demolition leads not to enrichment and progress, but rather to feelings of loss and regret.”

INSPIRE COMMUNITIES TO PRESERVE THEIR OWN HISTORY

Denyse C. McGriff, National Trust Advisor from Oregon, would like far more people to “be able to have an understanding of what heritage means to them and their place in it. This awareness would translate into the preservation of places throughout the country that matter.”

Cayce Lee, owner of Leeuta Original Designs in Athens, Alabama, agrees, writing: “The masses need to be given access to the stories to move them to action and generate the passion to keep their history alive. The idea that preservation is an unattainable hobby or activity of the elite or solely the responsibility of the government or an organizational body needs to be demolished and replaced with the understanding that preservation is for the people and possible by the people.”

Amber Rojas, Historic Preservation Officer in Tyler, Texas, wants people to view preservation as an “honor, not a hindrance.” She explains: “A community that respects its history respects itself. Communities should encourage each generation to understand the historic importance connected to its culture and to embrace contextual, contemporary design living alongside the historic places to help tell the entire history of the community.” “Preservation equals identity,” she says.

Ann Waigand, a researcher and writer in Herndon, Virginia, shares an anecdote about a neighbor in her condo building, a rehabbed and repurposed 1908 African American church, who “restored” one of her stained-glass windows by replacing the central panel, an image of a chalice that she didn’t care for, with family initials. “My hope is that, in 50 years, this [sort of disregard for historic fabric] will be unthinkable. My dream is that it will take less than 50 years for the public to recognize the importance of conserving the heritage that surrounds us, and that preservation will become not the work of a few, but the commitment of many.”

Great thoughts, everyone. Let’s get to work. **FJ**

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