

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND THE NATIONAL MYTHOLOGY

*Both historians and agitators are makers of myths.*

Richard Hofstadter

What kind of history fills the American consciousness today? Some might argue that myths are the prevailing mode. They would claim this despite the traditional image of the United States as a young country without history or ancient myths.

The cliché of the "young country" is misleading.<sup>1</sup> Two hundred years ago the United States moved toward independence. Today there are 25 European nations; of these, only four (Great Britain, Denmark, Spain and Sweden) had their present forms of government in 1776. The others lived under different regimes or did not yet exist. Thus, the United States has shown considerable stability and attachment to tradition.

Europeans asked to choose one image to symbolize the United States might very well pick the skyline of New York City. But Americans put to the same test might choose an old, historic symbol such as the dome on the U.S. Capitol Building, the White House, Independence Hall or the Statue of Liberty.

The United States is, in fact, passionately interested in its history. No nation carries on more massive efforts to study its past. According to the 1973/74 *Directory of Historical Societies and Agencies in the U.S. and Canada*, prepared by the American Association for State and Local History, this country has almost 5,000 historical organizations. They range from old and affluent bodies, such as the Massachusetts Historical Society, founded in 1791, to small, inactive groups.

These groups are organized in the extraordinarily decentralized American way—nationally, by region, state, county, city, town or neighborhood, and often to preserve a single historic place. There are specialized historical societies for religious denominations, ethnic groups, professions, periods and for various objects from steam threshers to miniatures.

At last count there were more than 5,000 museums, again, ranging from world-famous institutions to obscure collections of trivia. That number is constantly growing, according to the 1975 *Official Museum Directory* of the American Association of Museums. The once aristocratic avocations of genealogy<sup>2</sup> and heraldry are also flourishing today.

These claims are not made in a spirit of American chauvinism. They are confirmed by the noted architectural historian, Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, in his *Outline of European Architecture*: "In the United States . . . thanks to a national penchant towards doing things thoroughly . . . architectural research is infinitely more active and successful (than in Britain)."<sup>3</sup>

When did all this feverish activity begin? It is impossible to pinpoint an exact birthdate for such a complex movement. In 1860 the romantic writer Nathaniel Hawthorne said, in the preface to his novel, *The Marble Faun*: "No author . . . can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land."

The Centennial celebrations of 1876 showed that Americans had little interest in their history 100 years ago. Countless speeches, writings and artifacts proclaimed America's pride in its recent progress and current achievements. The early American past was generally represented as a time of hardship. However, at some point in the last quarter of the 19th century, the word *old* ceased to be a derogatory term. Now the scale of values is reversed, as historian John Lukacs points out in his 1968 work *Historical Consciousness*: "Who today in the United States would prefer a restaurant advertising 'modern food' to another advertising 'old-fashioned cooking'?"<sup>4</sup>

### THE PREVALENCE OF MYTHS

Mythology is incorrectly associated only with ancient and prehistoric times. The Greeks, particularly Herodotus and Thucydides, are usually credited with overcoming myth and creating history in the fifth century B.C. Modern history is generally dated from the 1750s,<sup>5</sup> the Age of Reason that also saw the birth of the American republic. This is a simplistic view, for mythology is with us today, and history continues to carry a heavy load of myths.<sup>6</sup>

Every nation writes its own history as a chronicle of prowess and virtue, though few authors now are as candid as America's most honored historian, George Bancroft (1800-1891), who wrote that his own *History of the United States* exhibited "the movement of the divine power." Even today, Americans without a special interest in history remember from school days little more than a series of virtuous incantations, including Thomas Jefferson's "We hold these truths to be self-evident," Nathan Hale's "I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country," Franklin D. Roosevelt's "We have nothing to fear but fear itself," and John F. Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you."

Most Americans would reject the suggestion that they are not entirely rational. Yet, at the turn of this century Thorstein Veblen (1857-1930), an American social scientist of Norwegian descent, delighted in exposing

the "bizarre survival" of archaic traits, animistic habits and predatory barbarism in American society. In the same period, Sigmund Freud developed his theories, in which myths are essential. Freudian concepts may have been slow in crossing the Atlantic but they eventually penetrated every area of American life and thought. The theories of psychiatrist Carl Jung and anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, with their emphasis on myth, have also been influential. American politics, literature and mass communications are pervaded by myth and symbol though the public is not aware of it.<sup>7</sup> A myth is perceived as reality or it ceases to be a myth.

Sometimes the presence of myth is obvious. For instance, the presidency of John F. Kennedy is now often referred to as "Camelot" in open comparison to the mythical city of the legendary King Arthur.<sup>8</sup> However, sometimes mythical elements are not so apparent. For example, the Bible tells how Gideon's army of 300 destroyed the Midianite host of 120,000. Similarly, at the battle of Tours the Christians slew 375,000 infidels and lost 1,500 of their own. These are myths that assume divine intervention. Still, in our own days we have read the war communiques of unhappy memory: Both sides invariably claimed staggering enemy losses and usually conceded only that "One of our airplanes is missing." The modern scale of disproportion may be somewhat smaller, but the mythical principle remains.

Anthropologist Edmund Leach has defined myths as "unobservable realities in terms of observable phenomena." A link between the national mythology and historic preservation is that buildings and artifacts can serve as concrete manifestations of mythical abstractions. A few examples will demonstrate the changing interplay between history and myth that has taken place on American sites:

George Washington had an extraordinary reputation for integrity, with one fable indicating that, as a child, he could not tell a lie. His towering height, Roman features, grave dignity and stately prose made him a living monument in his own time. After his death, partisan disputes were forgotten, and the Father of his Country was virtually deified. Washington's residence, Mount Vernon, passed to collateral descendants who might have sold the unprofitable estate to commercial interests. To forestall this eventuality, Ann Pamela Cunningham of South Carolina founded the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union. A well-organized campaign for funds was successful; the organization took over the mansion in 1858 and has managed it since. A house associated with Washington was probably the only one that could have enlisted nationwide support at a time when sectional loyalties were still strong. The aura of Washington has made Mount Vernon the ideal American home. The mansion with its distinctive portico has been replicated thousands of times. H. L. Hunt, a Texas oil tycoon who was among the richest people in the United States, built his residence in the shape of Washington's, as did many others of lesser means. If a full-size copy was out of reach, Mount Vernon could even be reduced to a one-story building. Washington's residence also served as the model for countless nonresidential buildings—country clubs, funeral homes and a chain of popular restaurants.



The Mount Vernon architectural motif is represented in commercial establishments such as Howard Johnson's restaurants, which adopted the style as a basic design in the 1930s. (Howard Johnson's Public Relations Office)

Le dessin architectural de Mont Vernon est représenté dans des établissements commerciaux tels que les restaurants Howard Johnson qui l'ont adopté comme dessin d'ornementation de base dans les années 1930.

Other house types of the 18th century were also revived until the "colonial" style became the standard for tract houses of the 20th century. Eighteenth-century America has become a mythical Golden Age, and millions of Americans want to live in a house that simulates an estate of landed gentry.

Monticello in Charlottesville, Virginia, is one of the most fascinating houses in America. It was not only the home of a great man; it was Thomas Jefferson's own design, inside and out. In 1826, he died in debt, and most of the Monticello grounds and furnishings were auctioned off the next year. In 1831 the estate was sold to an entrepreneur who turned it into a silkworm farm and went bankrupt. In 1834 Monticello was bought for \$2,500 by Uriah P. Levy, a colorful lieutenant in the United States Navy. Levy, a Jew, had experienced prejudice, and was an ardent admirer of Jefferson, the apostle of religious freedom. When Levy died in 1862, his will left Monticello to the U.S. government for use as an agricultural school for orphans. Levy's relatives sued and broke the will; meanwhile, Monticello had been seized by the Confederate government. After the Civil War, litigation continued until Jefferson Levy, a nephew of Uriah, bought out other heirs and acquired the neglected house in 1882. Jefferson Levy restored and maintained Monticello for more than 40 years. In 1923 he reluctantly sold the house to the new Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc. Thus, it was only the initiative of two private citizens that saved Monticello for the nation. The house had this checkered history because Jefferson, unlike Washington, was a controversial figure who did not emerge as an undisputed national hero until decades after his death.



Monticello, near Charlottesville, Virginia, designed by Thomas Jefferson 1770-89, represents a personal statement of his inventiveness, personality and intellect. Monticello, based on Roman, Palladian and 18th-century French designs, was a classical precedent in American architectural design. (Edwin Roseberry for Monticello)

Monticello, près de Charlottesville, en Virginie, dessiné par Thomas Jefferson entre 1771-1789 représente une déclaration personnelle de son pouvoir d'invention, de sa personnalité et de son intelligence. Monticello, inspiré des dessins romains, palladiens et français du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, a été un précédent classique dans le dessin architectural américain.

Visitors to Monticello find the building furnished as it was in Jefferson's day. The entrance hall leads to a salon, and lateral halls lead to four rooms on each side. (Roseberry for Monticello)

Les visiteurs qui se rendent à Monticello trouvent le bâtiment meublé comme au temps de Jefferson. Le hall d'entrée mène à un salon et les couloirs latéraux à quatre pièces de chaque côté.

Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia are famous monuments whose meaning has changed over the centuries. The Pennsylvania State House was completed in 1753. In this finest public building in the colonies, the Declaration of Independence was adopted in 1776 and the U.S. Constitution in 1787. The decaying wooden steeple was taken down in 1781. The Pennsylvania State government moved away in 1800, and little attention was paid to the "Old State House." Lafayette's

triumphal visit to the city in 1824 awakened interest in the building. In 1828 a new steeple was erected; this was the first historical restoration in the United States. The name *Independence Hall* was first used in the 1830s, and the building has been a secular place of pilgrimage since. As the epitome of Americanism, Independence Hall also became the model for numerous public and private buildings.<sup>9</sup>

Every American school child knows that the Liberty Bell with its famous inscription "Proclaim LIBERTY throughout all the Land unto all the Inhabitants thereof" signifies American independence. Actually, there is little connection between this bell and the events of 1776. The bell was ordered in 1751 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the charter William Penn granted to the people of Pennsylvania in 1701. The quotation is from the Old Testament book of Leviticus and refers to the Israelites' Jubilee, the 50th year in which slaves were freed. It was therefore appropriate that the "Old State House Bell" became a symbol of the antislavery movement in the 1830s. Countless famed visitors and millions of tourists have since enacted the ritual of touching the crack in the silent bell. In 1976 the Liberty Bell was moved from Independence Hall to a nearby steel and glass shrine. There it is displayed like a sacred relic.

Independence Hall stands within Independence National Historical Park, developed since 1948. As a 1975 National Park Service brochure points out: "No other cluster of buildings and sites conjures up for us so many images of great personages and significant events associated with... the American Revolution and the founding of the Nation." There were gains in restoring important buildings and attracting a wider public to this area but there were losses as well. Nineteenth-century buildings were demolished on the false principle of an arbitrary "cut-off date" for defining "historic" architecture. The urban matrix was altered, and the 18th-century buildings now stand among grassy malls. This change misrepresents the hard-working leaders of the new nation, who walked the narrow streets of this busy port. It perpetuates the false image of the "Founding Fathers" in powdered wigs, posturing in a fairy-tale land.

Just outside Independence Park is the Betsy Ross House. The story of the young woman who sewed the first stars-and-stripes flag for General George Washington was first told by her grandson in 1870. Although a tale heard for the first time 94 years after the supposed event often has little credibility, this one was well received. In 1898 an old house was opened as the Betsy Ross House and American Flag Memorial. We now know that the real Elizabeth Ross did not live at that address, but the legend continues to have great appeal. Visitors in 1974 numbered 249,000, and in 1975, 567,000. The estimate for 1976 is 1.6 million.

John Howard Payne (1791-1852), actor, author and diplomat, is now remembered only for writing the lyrics of the song, "Home, Sweet Home," which includes these lines:

'Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam  
Be it ever so humble, there is no place like home.

Payne was actually a lifelong bachelor and traveler who

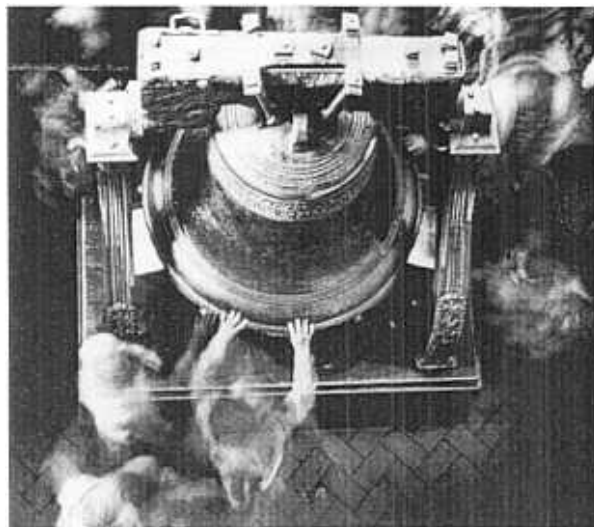


The Liberty Bell is viewed by visitors in a new steel and glass pavilion with Independence Hall, where the Liberty Bell was displayed until recently, in the background. (Frear for NPS)

On peut voir la Cloche de la Liberté dans un nouveau pavillon d'acier et de verre en même temps que le Hall de l'Indépendance où la cloche a été exposée jusqu'à récemment.

The Liberty Bell, enshrined in the Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is a symbol of the past and an emblem of American ideology. (Richard Frear for the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service)

La Cloche de la Liberté, précieusement conservée au Parc Historique National de l'Indépendance à Philadelphie en Pennsylvanie, est le symbole du passé et l'emblème de l'idéologie américaine.



never owned a home. However, as a boy, he lived in an old cottage at East Hampton, New York, and this house has been preserved as the original "Home, Sweet Home" since the 19th century.

Mrs. J. J. Brown of Denver, Colorado, enjoyed some local renown for her bravery at the sinking of the luxury liner *Titanic* in 1912. In the 1960s her story was told in the musical play and film *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*, which made the colorful heroine famous. Molly Brown's Victorian house was then handsomely furnished and became a popular landmark. In both cases literature and music created a historic place—or one myth bred another.

Henry Ford, whose mass automobile production changed the face of the country, was intent on saving old time Americana. Ford had the rare opportunity to create his own myth at Dearborn, Michigan, during the 1930s. To his Greenfield Village, Ford moved buildings associated with Americans he admired, including inventors Thomas Edison and Orville and Wilbur Wright, educator William McGuffey, horticulturist Luther Burbank and composer Stephen Foster. Eventually Ford also moved the house of his own birth there. Other villages were created at Cooperstown, New York, and Shelburne, Vermont.

Such outdoor museums can be enjoyable and instructive when there is no attempt to mislead the public. However, restorations often err in the direction of excessive elegance, changing a harsh past into a candybox scene. After seeing one such setting with costumed attendants, Lewis Mumford wrote the definitive word on this topic in his *Sticks and Stones*: "The past cannot be re-created in space because one element is missing, time, which brings changes and transformations."<sup>10</sup> Unusual is a homestead scene at the Farmer's Museum, in Cooperstown, New York, featuring "flies in the kitchen, sour milk in the pantry and dung in the cowbarn."<sup>11</sup>

The brightest star in the galaxy of American mythology is the famous "log cabin myth," also known as "from rags to riches," "the Horatio Alger tradition,"<sup>12</sup> or "The American Dream." Social mobility in the United States has been exaggerated,<sup>13</sup> but the myth endures, as an ever-present spur to competition and ambition.

The greatest hero of the national mythology is, of course, Abraham Lincoln. His life combined the secular log cabin myth with the Christ-like epic of the humble man who redeems the guilt of a nation and is cut down in his hour of triumph. The Lincoln legend has never lost its hold on the imagination of the American people, or indeed on the people of the world. It does not detract from Lincoln's greatness to note that he was a more complex man and more ambitious politician than was the mythical person of Honest Abe.

Lincoln himself frequently reminded the public of his legendary rise because he knew the power of the myth: "I happen, temporarily to occupy this White House. I am a living witness that any of your children may look to come here as my father's child has."<sup>14</sup> The log cabin myth dates from the presidential campaign of 1840, when William Henry Harrison ran under the emblem of "a log cabin and a barrel of hard cider." Harrison was

really born in a Virginia mansion, but this appeal has since been used by every presidential candidate who could possibly claim modest origin.

Five Presidents were born in log cabins: Andrew Jackson, Millard Fillmore, James Buchanan, Lincoln and James Garfield. Three more—Zachary Taylor, Andrew Johnson and Chester Arthur—started life in poor cottages. Many future Presidents were born in humble circumstances, but no poor man was ever elected President directly. Even Lincoln moved from log cabin to White House from the comfortable house of a successful lawyer. America's 38 Presidents have been mobile in every sense of the word. One or more residences of all but one leader are now standing; only the homes of Millard Fillmore, from a log cabin to a Gothic mansion, have disappeared.<sup>15</sup> Americans are fascinated by the private lives of public persons, and many presidential homes are now tourist attractions.

It is also interesting to see that the private setting sometimes matches the public personality; they are certainly in accord at Theodore Roosevelt's expansive and colorful Sagamore Hill in Oyster Bay, New York, and at austere Calvin Coolidge's home in Plymouth, Vermont. However, the Lincoln birthplace in rural Hogenville, Kentucky, is an oddity: A log cabin of dubious origin has been literally enshrined within a classic temple of marble and granite.

The preceding discussion may lead the reader to think that myth is a bad thing. This is not the case, for myth is no synonym for falsehood. Mythology is a symbolic language that can be a positive force in the life of a nation. Raphael Patai closes his 1972 book, *Myth and Modern Man*, with the hope that America will see a great, central myth of democracy. Such a "charter myth"

could express what America stands for at home and abroad and could help spur Americans to constructive actions. It could also give them the exhilarating feeling that comes from taking part in great ventures.

## THE ARTS AND MYTHOLOGY

The arts have been the traditional carriers of mythology. Historian Alan Gowans, in a 1973 statement for the Institute for the Study of Universal History Through Arts and Artifacts, characterized architecture as "*the* historic art of conviction . . . making tangible symbols and visual metaphors of collective beliefs . . . The arts hold society together and introduce ideas for needed change."

The story of Washington, D.C., is appropriate. The American government began on a small scale. When it moved from Philadelphia to the new capital in 1800, President John Adams, the cabinet members and the clerks numbered just 54. Mrs. Adams lamented having to move to the site where "the houses which are built are so distant, the streets so miry, and the markets so ill supplied."<sup>16</sup> But George Washington and his architectural-minded Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson, had insisted on a grand plan. For years, American and European visitors to Washington scoffed at the unfinished city: "They have already rooted up the trees for ten miles around lest they should interfere with the future citizens of this imaginary metropolis. They have erected a magnificent palace for Congress in the center of the city and have given it the pompous name of the Capitol."<sup>17</sup>

In acting like a great nation, the United States became

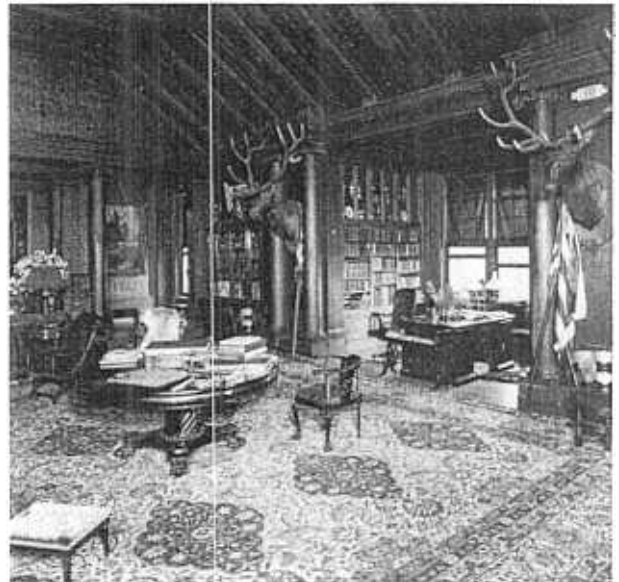
The Log Cabin Myth is reflected in this artist's conception of Abraham Lincoln's birthplace. (Reinhart for NPS)

Le mythe de la Cabane en Rondins est reflété par la conception que se fait cet artiste de la maison natale d'Abraham Lincoln.



Sagamore Hill, Oyster Bay, New York (1884–85), built as Theodore Roosevelt's permanent residence, was used as his "Summer White House" and is now a National Historic Site. (National Trust)

Sagamore Hill, à Oyster Bay, dans l'Etat de New York (1884–85) fut construit comme résidence permanente de Theodore Roosevelt qui s'en servit comme "sa Maison Blanche d'Eté"; c'est aujourd'hui un Site Historique National.



one. The first federal buildings, the Capitol and the White House, the Treasury and the Patent Office, set a standard of excellence for the entire country. Under the decentralized system of government, Americans lived under four authorities: the town or city, the county, the state and the United States. Each had its own architectural symbols: the town hall or city hall, the county courthouse, the state capitol, the custom house and post office. Their quality was remarkable, with handsome public buildings in many a raw settlement.<sup>18</sup> There is something moving about the efforts of so many little-known builders and craftsmen to embody the ideals of a community.

Modern America should live up to these high standards of the past. In doing so, there are two basic appeals for preserving a historic building or artifact: (1) association with notable persons, concepts or events and, (2) architectural or artistic quality. Of these, the first is far more powerful. The public is eager to believe inspiring myths or to worship heroes. Americans want to preserve the monuments of good times and admired people. Conversely, they are quick to demolish old buildings associated with periods or persons in disfavor. For example, many buildings in the Second Empire or "General Grant" style were condemned because of guilt by association with the corrupt administration of President Ulysses Grant.

Most professional people in the preservation movement respond to the beauties of art and architecture, but it is a grave error to attribute the same feelings to the general public, and futile to rely only on aesthetic arguments when public support is needed. The social functions of architecture must not be slighted in favor of a fashionable aestheticism.

Historic preservation has roots in ancient Athens and Rome, and it has itself acquired the power of a myth. Preservation for solely aesthetic reasons dates from the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*; only in the 20th century has the name of the architect assumed great prominence. The Robie House in Chicago, Illinois, was saved for its architectural quality; no one asked who bicycle-maker Robie was. Even in this case, the architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, was a man who had created his own mythical persona of the Great American Artist.



The Calvin Coolidge Homestead, Plymouth Notch, Vermont (1876–87), was the childhood home of Coolidge and his summer retreat while President. The simple frame cottage is now a historic house museum and a National Historic Landmark. (Vermont Development Commission)

La propriété de Calvin Coolidge, à Plymouth Notch, dans le Vermont (1876–87) fut la maison d'enfance de Coolidge et son lieu de retraite estival durant sa Présidence. Cette chaumière simplement construite est maintenant un musée historique et un Site Historique National.



## THE FUTURE OF THE PAST

I see this day the People beginning their landmarks.

Walt Whitman

Certain trends in preservation have been evident for some time; these trends generally parallel developments in the larger discipline of history. For example, in 1971, the U.S. Postal Service issued four stamps on the theme of historic preservation. The subjects were selected with obvious care from thousands of potential topics. The first stamp depicted the Decatur House in Washington, D.C., the traditional historic house *par excellence*. It was the home of Stephen Decatur, the naval officer who became one of the first United States national idols; it was designed by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, the foremost American architect of his time; it now serves as headquarters of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The second stamp featured the whaling ship *Charles W. Morgan* at Mystic, Connecticut, and the third a San Francisco, California, cable car. These two designs exemplify nonarchitectural Americana of wide appeal; both are in the field of transportation, where Americans have long excelled.

The fourth stamp pictured the beautiful Mission San Xavier del Bac in Arizona, a landmark outside the Anglo-Saxon Protestant tradition. These stamps foreshadowed some of the coming trends.

Among the expected preservation trends are these:

\* A greater variety of structures will be preserved.

As history once dealt mainly with great affairs of Church and State, so the preservation movement originally protected grand public buildings and residences. Now both history and preservation range through all strata of society. Already the National Register of the U.S. Department of the Interior lists a wide variety of historic places. These include a conservatory in the state of California, an opera house in Colorado, a windmill in Connecticut, a lighthouse in Florida, a locomotive in Georgia, a fish pond in Hawaii, a shipyard in Maine, an aqueduct in Maryland, a cyclorama building in Massachusetts, a firehouse in New York, an arcade in Ohio, a round barn in Oregon, a gymnasium in Tennessee, a market house in Texas, a kindergarten site in Wisconsin and a dam in Wyoming. Diversity is the glory of the United States. There will be even more interest in vernacular architecture,<sup>19</sup> including the brash imagery along the highways, and more response to architecture once

George Washington's birthplace, Wakefield, Virginia, a reconstructed memorial manor, represents an 18th-century Virginia plantation house and colonial farm with crops, livestock, a working kitchen and park rangers in period dress (Frear for NPS)

Le lieu de naissance de George Washington à Wakefield, en Virginie, est un manoir reconstruit qui reproduit pour les visiteurs une plantation et une ferme coloniales du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle avec son bétail, ses récoltes, sa cuisine qui fonctionne et des gardes forestiers en vêtements de l'époque.



The Frederick C. Robie house, Chicago, Illinois (1910), designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, is a National Historic Landmark presently used as the Adlai E. Stevenson Institute of International Affairs of the University of Chicago. (Cervin Robinson for HABS)

La maison de Frederick C. Robie à Chicago, en Illinois (1910), dessinée par Frank Lloyd Wright, est un haut-lieu historique national et sert aujourd'hui à l'Institut d'Affaires Internationales Adlai E. Stevenson de l'Université de Chicago.





A stamp block on the theme of historic preservation was issued by the U.S. Postal Service in 1971. (National Trust)

La planche du timbre sur le thème de la conservation historique émis par le Service des Postes des Etats-Unis en 1971.

considered eccentric. Examples of the latter are: Olana, the Victorian-Oriental villa of painter Frederic E. Church, near Hudson, New York; Fontheill, the castle-like residence of scholar Henry C. Mercer, of Doylestown, Pennsylvania; and Watts Towers, the fantastic spires built in Los Angeles, California, by Simon Rodia, a tilesetter.

\* There will be more emphasis on districts.

Conventional history dealt with prominent persons, and conventional preservation favored prominent houses. Now preservationists look beyond the isolated edifice to the setting. For example, within the smallest state, Rhode Island, there is a great variety of historic neighborhoods, from well preserved Colonial Newport, elegant Victorian Newport, and the fine urban ensemble of College Hill in Providence, to characteristically American textile mill villages such as Slatersville, Forestdale and Carolina Village. More of these distinctive communities will be rediscovered.

\* There will be new emphasis on the historic places of ethnic and racial groups.

Historians and preservationists have often viewed the United States largely in terms of its majority white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) population group. The myth of America as a "melting pot" of many races and nationalities has not worn well; it has become clear that the ethnic and racial minorities are still distinct, and that they do not wish to be homogenized into that "melting pot," a term popularized by a 1908 play written by Israel Zangwill.

Blacks especially have been the forgotten people of American history, with hardly a mention between Emancipation and the emergence of Martin Luther King 100 years later. The Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation in Washington, D.C., found that, among 1,200

national historic landmarks, only three related directly to black history. The organization has since located many such places and about 50 have been designated as national landmarks. There are also opportunities for such work at the local level. In Rhode Island, for example, the Black Heritage Society has been active with research and exhibits.

The American public can also look forward to greater awareness of the American Indian heritage, beyond the stereotypes of wigwam and tomahawk. It is hoped that all races will henceforth enrich the national mythology.

\* More attention will be given to historic places related to the American Industrial Revolution.

Since 1971, the Society for Industrial Archeology has been active in the study and preservation of historic mills, factories, bridges, railroads, machinery and other works of engineering. A few years ago, cast-iron mercantile buildings were cited only as examples of bad taste. Now they are recognized as a distinctive American contribution to urban design, and the Friends of Cast-Iron Architecture are working to save these impressive Victorian relics.

These are appropriate activities for American preservationists, because the United States has long been a world leader in technology. Such men as Benjamin Franklin, Robert Fulton, Eli Whitney, Samuel Morse, Cyrus McCormick, Samuel Colt, Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Henry Ford and the Wright Brothers became folk heroes at home and celebrities abroad. When European observers came to the Centennial Exhibition of 1876, they marvelled at American engineering and production and proclaimed a new myth of America's incomparable genius for invention throughout the world. This tradition has endured to the present atomic age.

\* There will be new life in the preservation movement. Historic preservation has had an affinity with the preservation of the status quo. Members of historical organizations were once largely middle-aged and older people of conservative social views. However, in recent years, there has been an influx of young people who see historic preservation as part of the fight for a better environment. There will be more welcome recruits of all ages and backgrounds.

The future of historic preservation is busy and bright, but why? The phenomena of "nostalgia" and "looking for an identity" are often invoked, but they sound like vague abstractions. Some of the reasons are almost embarrassingly mundane: History provides a pleasant escape from the workaday present. It is a genteel interest that confers social prestige on both professional practitioners and amateur devotees. History requires a high level of affluence and leisure; America has the time, the money and the automobiles to travel into its past.

Perhaps there are deeper causes within the American mind. We cannot experience the tricentennial future, and the present lasts but a moment. Only the long memory of the past is real.

John MAASS

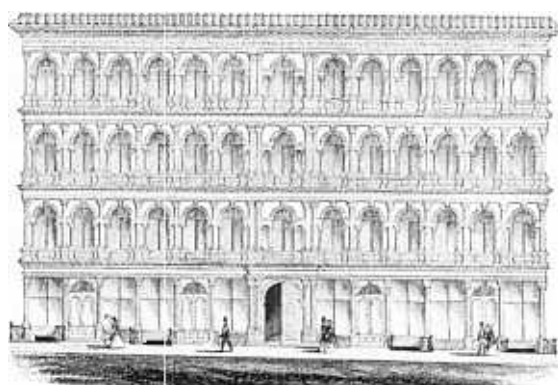
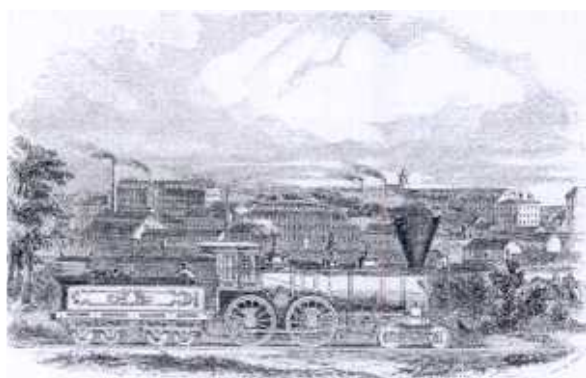
Collaborators:

James C. Massey

Joan Thill

Frederick C. Williamson





Renewed interest in industrial architecture has fostered attempts to preserve factory complexes such as the Amoskeag Millyard, Manchester, New Hampshire, which from 1838 to 1913 was the largest textile mill in the world. (R. Randolph Langenbach for HABS)

Un renouveau d'intérêt dans l'architecture industrielle a encouragé les tentatives de conserver les fabriques telles que la fabrique Amoskeag à Manchester dans le New Hampshire, qui de 1838 à 1913 fut la plus grande fabrique de textiles du monde.

The Amoskeag Millyard extended along both banks of the Merrimack River for more than a mile, and in its most prosperous days also produced locomotives, steam-driven fire engines and firearms.

La fabrique Amoskeag s'étendait le long des deux rives de la rivière Merrimack et produisait au temps de sa prospérité des locomotives, des voitures de pompiers à vapeur et des armes à feu.

The Old Dry Goods Store, West Main Street Historic District, Louisville, Kentucky (c. 1890), is an example of the preservation and adaptive use of cast-iron mercantile buildings. It is being adapted for use as the Museum of Natural History and Science with a grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration. (© Caulfield & Shook)

Le vieux bazar des Nouveautés dans les Quartier Historique de la Rue Principale côté ouest, à Louisville dans le Kentucky (1890), est un exemple de conservation et de reconversion de bâtiments commerciaux en fonte. Il s'est vu reconverti en Musée d'Histoire Naturelle et de Sciences grâce à une allocation de l'Administration pour le Développement Economique des Etats-Unis.

Friends of Cast-Iron Architecture is working to preserve Victorian-era prefabricated mercantile storefronts.

La société des Amis de l'Architecture en Fonte travaille à conserver les devantures préfabriquées des magasins de l'époque victorienne.

## RESUME

L'image traditionnelle des Etats-Unis auprès des Européens est celle d'un jeune pays indifférent à l'Histoire. Cette notion est fautive, car l'Amérique s'intéresse vivement à son Histoire et fait des efforts considérables pour étudier et conserver son passé. Il existe, par exemple, plus de 5000 organisations historiques et plus de 5000 musées dans ce pays. On étudie avec intensité l'histoire architecturale.

Quel est le genre d'histoire dont l'esprit américain s'occupe aujourd'hui? Une grande part se rapporte à la mythologie. Nous associons souvent le mythe aux temps anciens et préhistoriques et affectons de croire que l'histoire moderne a triomphé de la mythologie. Pourtant, les mythes et les symboles s'infiltrèrent dans la vie américaine actuelle et les constructions et les objets façonnés illustrent souvent concrètement ces abstractions mythiques. Qui plus est, le terme mythe n'est pas synonyme de faux, mais est une langue symbolique qui peut être une force positive dans la vie d'une nation.

Quelques exemples témoignent de ce jeu d'échange entre le mythe et l'histoire dans les sites américains. Mont Vernon, par exemple, le domaine de ce personnage souvent légendaire qu'est George Washington, a été l'objet premier d'une campagne de conservation d'échelle nationale et Monticello, foyer de ce Thomas Jefferson si souvent idéalisé, a, lui aussi, été sauvegardé pour la nation. Le Hall de l'Indépendance et la Cloche de la Liberté à Philadelphie sont des monuments du dix-huitième siècle ayant revêtu une nouvelle signification, alors que le Parc Historique National de l'Indépendance proclame le mythe des "pères fondateurs" des Etats-Unis. La maison de Betsy Ross est celle de la prétendue couturière qui aurait cousu le premier drapeau américain. Pareillement, une vieille chaumière à East Hampton,

dans l'Etat de New York, fut la source d'inspiration de la chanson "Home, Sweet Home" et la maison victorienne de Molly Brown à Denver est devenue célèbre après la mise en scène d'une comédie musicale, *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*.

A Greenfield Village, Henry Ford a créé sa propre légende et a aussi inspiré d'autres musées en plein air. Mais le mythe américain le plus célèbre et le plus tenace est celui de la cabane en rondins, ou le rêve américain, ayant comme héros principal Lincoln. Ainsi, les maisons associées à trente six Présidents, y compris plusieurs cabanes en rondins sont devenues des sites historiques.

Deux sortes de recours existent pour obtenir la conservation d'un monument historique ou d'un objet façonné: son association à des personnages notoires, à des concepts ou à des événements connus, et sa qualité artistique ou architecturale. Le premier moyen est de loin le plus puissant et ne doit pas être ignoré en faveur d'une croyance élégante à l'art pour l'art.

La direction de la conservation future s'affirme déjà. On sauvegardera un nombre plus varié de constructions et d'objets façonnés et on attachera une attention plus grande aux districts et aux sites historiques de groupes ethniques. De plus, les lieux en rapport quelconque avec la Révolution Industrielle recevront davantage de considération. Enfin, le mouvement pour la conservation comptera plus de jeunes qui le considèrent comme partie intégrante de la bataille pour un meilleur environnement. L'avenir de la conservation historique semble très actif et s'avère brillant. Quoique cette nouvelle vogue de l'histoire soit fondée sur des raisons purement mondaines et snobs, d'autres en sont plus profondément ancrées en nous. Nous ne pourrions jamais faire l'expérience de l'avenir lointain, et le présent ne dure qu'un moment. Seul le long souvenir du passé est réel.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Foreign travelers have been writing books about America for 300 years. An extensive bibliography is in Hugh Honour, *The New Golden Land*, 1975, a brilliant view of America through European eyes.
2. American descendants of Hessian mercenaries in the Revolutionary War write hundreds of letters a year to the Hesse State Archives in Marburg, as reported by Craig R. Whitney, "Hessians, Foes in War, Friends in Bicentennial," *New York Times*, March 10, 1976.
3. Nikolaus Pevsner, *Outline of European Architecture*, Baltimore, Pelican Books 1974, p. 448.
4. John Lukacs, *Historical Consciousness*, New York, Harper & Row, 1968, p. 2.
5. Voltaire's *The Age of Louis XIV*, 1751, is generally considered the first modern history.
6. Raphael Patai's *Myth and Modern Man*, 1972, is scholarly and highly readable. There is no general history of the United States in terms of mythology, but the following are among books aware of the mythical elements: Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, 1948; Marshall Fishwick, *The Hero, American Style*, 1969; David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies*, 1970; Howard Zinn, *The Politics of History*, 1970; Jerre Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal*, 1972.
7. Specialized studies on various American myths include: H.M. McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*, 1951, and Carol Ward, *Myth America: Picturing Women 1865-1945*, 1976.
8. In 1963 Kennedy's widow said that the President's favorite lines were from the musical play, *Camelot*:

Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot

For one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot.

9. For examples, see John Maass, "Architecture and Americanism or Pastiches of Independence Hall," *Historic Preservation*, April-June 1970, pp. 17-25.
10. Lewis Mumford, *Sticks and Stones*, New York, Dover, second revised edition, 1955, p. 50.
11. Irwin Richman, "Historic House Museums, Museum Villages, and Public Education," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, December 1975, p. 294.
12. Horatio Alger (1834-1899) was the author of many boys' books in which virtue and hard work were always rewarded by success and riches. Alger was born to affluence and died poor.
13. See Seymour M. Lipset and Reinhard Bendix, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1959.
14. Lincoln in speaking to the 166th Ohio Regiment.
15. See Cranston Jones, *Homes of the American Presidents*, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1962.
16. Letter from Abigail Adams to her sister, February 27, 1800.
17. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 2, 1840.
18. The Victorian Society in America sponsored a study of State Capitols by William Seale, entitled *Temples of Democracy* (1976) and published with co-author Henry-Russell Hitchcock under title *Temples of Democracy, the State Capitols of the USA*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.
19. The most scholarly study of American folk and vernacular design is Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States*, 1969; it has an extensive bibliography.