

DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN U.S. NATIONAL PRESERVATION POLICY
AND THE CHARTER OF VENICE

The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation Projects are the official United States regulations for government preservation work and for private sector projects that aim to benefit through investment tax credits granted to government-certified rehabilitation projects. There are eight basic Standards which govern all types of architectural preservation work, and there are also supplemental Standards that individually govern the Acquisition, Protection, Stabilization, Preservation, Rehabilitation, Restoration and Reconstruction of historic buildings. Because Rehabilitation is the prevailing treatment of historic monuments, it has become synonymous with preservation as a whole, so much so that the eight basic Standards and the two Rehabilitation Standards have been adopted as the sole regulatory basis for determining whether a project meets the requirements for preservation tax credits pursuant to the Tax Reform Act of 1976.

The need to compare the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation with the Charter of Venice arose from the growing concern that the unique directions of Preservation in the United States are increasingly divergent from the restoration norms and practices incorporated in the Charter and which are almost universally accepted outside this country. This conscious American condition of selective isolation poses the danger of ideological in-breeding and stagnation of creative thinking.

Perhaps the reason for the differences exposed later herein between the Charter and the Standards lies in the circumstances which gave rise to each. The Charter of Venice was the product of decades of effort by the international preservation community to first, clearly define the nature of a historic monument and second, limit the negative, but inevitable alterations that Preservation activities have on that nature. On the other hand, the Secretary of Interior's Standards were drawn up in 1979 as an institutionalization and eventual codification of the U.S. Government's prevailing preservation practices. While the reconciliations achieved by the Charter of Venice have been well-documented and studied elsewhere, the American preservation practices that were seminal to the Standards have not. Thus, before one can proceed to a comparison of the two documents, a brief narration of the origins and evolution of preservation in the United States is essential.

As elsewhere, the preoccupation with conservation began at the turn of the century. At the time, the country had recently completed its territorial expansion to the Pacific Ocean and soon thereafter threw open its frontiers to the large masses who had suddenly found themselves redundant in their Old World homelands.

The conservation movement arose from a concern that the settlements and exploitation of the new territory were irreversibly spoiling the beauty of special landscapes. Initially, conservation was directed towards the preservation of natural resources. In urban areas the effective absorption of an ever-growing number of largely uneducated immigrants of diverse ethnic extraction posed an increased potential for socio-political turmoil. Perhaps in an effort to accelerate their acculturation, a grassroots movement burgeoned among conservatives of the East Coast whose purpose was to regenerate the appreciation for the early history of the country by propagating largely idealized values of the American Revolution. A readily accessible tool to achieve this goal was the identification and eventual restoration of sites connected with figures and events depictive of life in the colonial and early national periods. The significance of these sites lay in their didactic potential to provide palpable evidence at a popular level of the country's roots. This concept of imbuing a defined place with a sacred character has come to be termed "associative history". Its logical result is the treatment of monuments or sites as museographic objects that can be manipulated in order to convey a pre-selected sense of place and time. The product of selective restoration for the sake of popular education is called an interpretive exhibit. Thus, the intent of this approach is more of a mise-en-scene than a true mise-en-valeur. No matter how valuable, architectural features present in the building at the time of identification are only important inasmuch as they contribute to the exhibit's purpose.

While this trend for preserving the historic built environment slowly developed, the movement to conserve natural landscapes and sites was more dynamic. By the early 1900's the U.S. Government had become the steward of an ever-increasing number of natural sites, and created the National Park Service for the exclusive purpose of their administration. At first, civilian conservationists agreed to serve as senior staff but the bulk of the field personnel were drawn from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Within a few years, the Park Service was also charged with the guardianship of man-made sites, apparently for lack of a more appropriate agency to handle such matters. Like the buildings that had been preserved by the private sector, the initial properties entrusted to the Park Service were valued only for their associative history. The earlier methodology of "historicification" of those properties was also adopted by the Park Service. While the Service grew in response to an increase in both natural and man-made inventories, preservation philosophy did not evolve significantly. In fact, the practice of thrusting a building back in time to the image it once presented became the sine-qua-non of architectural preservation, and to this day, that is the exclusive meaning that the term "restoration" conveys in the United States. Notwithstanding the philosophical stagnation, the actual process of this particular type of restoration was refined by ever-growing requirements for higher levels of archival, pictorial and archaeological evidence for the re-

integration of missing elements and removal of non-period additions. This concern with historical accuracy explains the unusually high proportion of architectural historians involved in preservation in the U.S. In the end, the oxymoron "authentic replication" became the objective of preservation activity. Probably the most notable example of this labor is the town of Williamsburg in Virginia: an "authentic reconstruction" of a largely lost environment on its original site as opposed to Disney World, also an "authentic reconstruction" but with no historic pretensions.

In the sixties and seventies the until-then isolated American preservationists began to exchange information with their counterparts in other countries, becoming exposed to their ideas. Concepts such as those contained in the Charter of Venice began to creep into American preservation thought; some in opposition to or divergent from the traditional norm. More often than not, reconciliation was neither attempted nor perhaps possible, and a dichotomy evolved in which the newly discovered principles and the traditional American preservation practices coexisted. Undoubtedly, it was the significant influence of architectural historians that assured the continued emphasis on "associative history" and "authentic replication". By 1979, an unprecedented appreciation of the built environment had become widespread and preservation activities had grown substantially in both the public and private sectors. To meet national needs and in response to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service drew up the Secretary of Interior's Standards for the purpose of regulating interventions in historic buildings. The Standards drew from the dichotomous philosophy of preservation and for that reason present a duality of thought and a lack of cohesiveness that has necessitated the issuance of a clarifying set of Guidelines in the form of "Do's" and "Dont's" as well as an on-going series of illustrative case studies, many of which, instead of providing clarification, contribute to the confusion and, on occasion, promote perversions of the real intent of historic preservation.

In spite of its problems, the Standards contain several meritorious passages, some of which carry a spirit similar to certain Articles of the Charter of Venice. These include the emphasis on re-using monuments for functions that are equivalent to or compatible with the original use (Standard 1 and Article 5); the condemnation of using conjecture to re-integrate missing parts (Standard 3 and Article 9); the need for conserving monuments in perpetuity (Article 4 and more obliquely in Standard 10); the principle that changes and additions to a monument which have acquired significance in their own right must be conserved (Standard 4 and Article 11); and the safeguarding of Archaeological evidence which appears in Standard 8, and in the Charter receives more detailed treatment (Articles 9 and 15). The concept of the dual nature of a monument as both aesthetic and historic stated in Article 1, turns up in somewhat obscure terms in Standard 5, which requires that stylistic features

(aesthetic) and examples of skilled craftsmanship (historic), be "treated with sensitivity."

Although the preceding ideas are roughly in concert in those instances, in other cases the Standards and the Charter stand in mutual contradiction. The comparative study of both documents unveils several reasons for these conflicts. The first basis for discrepancy has to do with the way thoughts as well as language in the Standards are fragmented, while the Charter is composed of ideas governed by a cohesive philosophy that flow in logical progression from one Article to the next. Perhaps a carry-over of the rigid military thinking of its early staff, the structure of the Standards is blatantly compartmentalized in that each preservation activity is controlled by a set of separate Standards (Restoration, Preservation, Stabilization, etc.), so that in practice, a project is only regulated by one set. Thus, a Rehabilitation project always involves certain Preservation activities such as Preservation and Stabilization, that are in no way regulated, since only those Standards that are specific to Rehabilitation are applicable to the project. This partial application of the Standards greatly reduces the protection that they can provide.

Fragmentary thinking is also evident in the requirements for evaluating a monument, which force segregation of a historic building or site into discrete parts and assign to each of these a different level of significance. This direction is given in Standards 2, 5 and 9. In addition, the Standards instruct that only those elements or features that carry greater significance deserve conservation. Applying a hierarchy to original building elements in isolation of the totality of the structure or site is in direct conflict with Article 9 which asserts the indivisible unity of a monument or site by calling for all work to respect original materials and authentic documents (authentic "parts" in the Spanish and French versions of the Charter). Categorizing building parts as "lesser" or "greater" has resulted in the loss of entire portions of buildings, a sort of architectural synecdoche, in which the parts become the whole. The problem of assessing a building in terms of its components is aggravated by the subjectivity implicit in assigning significance to each existing feature or element. Defining levels of historic and aesthetic significance for each part can be extremely arbitrary, and often requires involved discussions by Architectural historians. The most serious manifestation of this approach has been the epidemic of "Facadism" so prevalent in American cities, where entire buildings are demolished while their "significant" facades are left in place. The National Park Service also participates in this activity by replacing entire structural systems and concealed fabric, since they are not considered highly significant because of their lack of visibility.

A second area of opposition between the Charter and the Standards is that which deals with replacement of missing or deteriorated elements. Standard 6 calls for restitution of such elements with

replicas that are exact in "Composition, Design, Color, Texture and other visual qualities". The Charter does not address replacement of deteriorated parts, only missing ones. Nevertheless, its context would indicate that an element that is removed and discarded, becomes de facto a missing piece. In contrast to the Standards, Article 12 calls for re-integration with harmonious elements that must also be "distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the artistic or historic evidence." The danger in using exact facsimiles is not only the outright forgery, but also the possible eventual replacement of the entire structure as its parts deteriorate in time, leading to a total falsification with no historic or cultural value. This has not been a concern of American Preservationists as evidenced by the fortunately seldom-used Secretary of Interior's Standards for Reconstruction which regulate the re-creation of entire monuments that no longer exist. In the Standards, falsifications are justified in popular didactic terms as "essential for understanding and interpreting the value of a historic district or when no other building, structure, object or landscape with the same associative value has survived." This position of historiographic greed is untenable, since every man-made object that has ever disappeared creates a gap in our knowledge and understanding of the past. It is unrealistic, perhaps unethical, to use facsimiles posing as the real thing to educate a public that is unwilling to exercise its imagination.

The last major difference between the Charter and the Standards lies in its use of language. The language of the Charter is either clearly affirmative or negative, so that its limits can be patently established and understood. The Charter does not offer any opportunities, exceptions or excuses for laxity in Architectural Preservation. In comparison, the Standards are full of exhortatory language and of subjunctive tenses. There is a considerable weakening effect in the use of expressions such as double/triple negatives (Standard 8); "every reasonable effort shall be made..." (Standards 1 and 8); "when possible" or "if possible" (Standards 2,6,7 and 10); "shall be discouraged" (Standards 3 and 9); "shall be treated with sensitivity" (Standard 5); "should" or "may" instead of "shall" or "will" (Standards 2,4,and 6). A quick glance at the above references shows that all 10 Standards have built into their language an escape from the course of preservation. As a Government regulation, the Standards perhaps require such escape mechanisms to reduce the Government's responsibility for forcing hardship on those in the private sector who own monumental properties. In any case, the loopholes in the language have been thoroughly exploited at the expense of the cultural resources. It is not difficult for a developer with an able lawyer to claim that every reasonable effort has been made to achieve a certain level of preservation, and that exceeding that minimal level would cause severe hardship. In response for the public's yearning for traditional environments in recent years, developers have repeatedly used the loopholes in the language in combination with

Federal encouragement to preserve only significant portions of monuments to produce megastructures that engulf or make fragmentary use of historic buildings and sites. Since zoning ordinances are often blind to the existence of historic districts and buildings, owners whose monumental properties fall short of the maximum building area permitted in the lot, will usually claim a hardship if required to keep the site underbuilt. A common recent compromise for this has been the construction of additional stories atop historic buildings, a process of "bi-cornization" that produces two classical attics, not unlike wearing two hats. For this questionable level of preservation, developers are rewarded with government-subsidized economic benefits. The establishment of a direct link between tax credits and a minimal interpretation of the Standards has converted the incentive for preservation into incentives for development and profits.

Concealed under this veneer of Preservation, there is a widespread level of destruction and alteration of the Architectural patrimony that is reaching alarming dimensions. This goes against Standard 10 which requires that all rehabilitation work be reversible so that the removal of changes and alterations will leave the monument unimpaired. It will not be easy to reverse either the damage to the buildings nor the trends that have been entrenched for so long in theory and practice at such an extensive national level. A huge bureaucracy has grown and functions very smoothly in the management of the existing system of Preservation. Solutions to the problem involve first and foremost a complete re-evaluation of Preservation policy at the highest professional and governmental levels. The regulations embodied in the Standards would require considerable amendment to give them a more solid philosophical base that would guarantee a greater and more real protection to our architectural patrimony. There is also the problem of re-educating the preservation community, a task that pales vis-a-vis re-educating a public that is enthralled by the cute, quaint and "original" mutations to which American historic buildings and sites are subjected. In the process of re-education, the semantics of Preservation need new definition so that a term like "Restoration" can be rid of its negative associations with construction of replicas and regaining lost histories. Terms such as Rehabilitation, Restoration, Stabilization and Preservation must never be mutually exclusive, but rather inseparable aspects of the same overall activity that historic buildings demand for their upkeep and conservation in perpetuity.

This paper is presented as a step in achieving a new direction.

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-- SUMMARY --

This paper investigates the reasons for certain unique practices of preservation in the United States and searches for their philosophical or pragmatic basis through a comparative analysis of the Charter of Venice and the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, the U.S. Government's official regulations for Architectural Preservation. After giving a brief overview of the origins and development of the Preservation movement in the U.S. the authors identify and discuss both the parallel concepts that appear in the Charter and the Standards, as well as theories and recommended practices that stand in mutual conflict or contradiction. The roots of those principles indigenously American that appear in the Standards are traced to early 20th century attitudes that have survived to this day. The authors contend that those sections of the Standards have had an overall detrimental effect on the authenticity in conservation of monuments and sites in the United States. The continued use of the Standards in conjunction with the current popularity of traditional and historic buildings and districts augur a considerable increase in the alteration, disfigurement and destruction of the country's cultural patrimony.

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DISCREPANCIAS ENTRE LA POLITICA NACIONAL DE CONSERVACIÓN
EN LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS Y LA CARTA DE VENECIA

-- RESUMEN --

En esta ponencia se buscan explicaciones para ciertas prácticas de conservación y restauración que son particulares a los Estados Unidos. Para identificar la base filosófica o pragmática de dichas practicas, se compara la Carta de Venecia con The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, que es el documento regulador oficial del gobierno norteamericano para las obras de conservación y restauración de monumentos y sitios. Tras una breve exposición panorámica de los orígenes y el desarrollo del movimiento de conservación en los EEUU, los autores identifican y comentan tanto sobre los principios que se presentan paralelamente en la Carta y The Standards, como también las teorías y recomendaciones conflictivas entre ambos documentos. Se trazan las raíces de esas prácticas de restauración puramente indígenas a EEUU que se fomentan en The Standards hasta su origen en ciertas ideosincracias de principios de siglo que han sobrevivido hasta nuestra época. Los autores mantienen que dichas porciones de The Standards han tenido un efecto dañino sobre la autenticidad en la conservación de monumentos en los Estados Unidos y que la continuación de su uso a la par de la presente popularidad de los ambientes tradicionales e históricos auguran una mayor alteración, desfiguro y destrucción del patrimonio monumental de la nación.

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