

CHARLES W. PORTER III
PRINCIPLES GUIDING HISTORICAL PRESERVATION
AND RESTORATION WORK AT INDEPENDENCE HALL
AND INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK,
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Independence National Historical Park comprises an area of approximately 22 acres in the heart of the old section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It includes one of the most important historic buildings in the United States, Independence Hall, associated with the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and the formation in 1787 of the Constitution of the United States. Other nearby structures are associated with the movement for American independence during the Revolution and with the early Federal Period of our history under the Constitution. Included in the Park are a number of historic churches, but these remain owned, administered, and maintained by their respective church congregations. The historic Hall of the American Philosophical Society is also privately owned and administered. The greater part of the historical park is maintained and administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior.

In the preservation, restoration, and development of this historical park, the National Park Service is guided by the Restoration Policies recommended by the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments and adopted by the National Park Service on May 19, 1937. These policies were the product of considerable study of both European and American policies and practices and were intended to bring together the best thought of that time bearing on the problems of preservation and restoration. The policy statement adopted May 19, 1937, has remained substantially unchanged and has guided all important Service historical work since that date. The policy statement reads as follows:

General Restoration Policy:

« The motives governing these activities are several, often conflicting: aesthetic, archeological and scientific, and educational. Each has its values and its disadvantages.

Educational motives often suggest complete reconstitution, as in their heyday, of vanished, ruinous or remodelled buildings and remains. This has often been regarded as requiring removal of subsequent additions, and has involved incidental destruction of much archeological and historical evidence, as well as of aesthetic values arising from age and picturesqueness.

The demands of scholarship for the preservation of every vestige of architectural and archeological evidence — desirable in itself — might, if rigidly satisfied, leave the monument in conditions which give the public little idea of its major historical aspect or importance.

In aesthetic regards, the claims of unity or original form or intention, of variety of style in successive periods of building and remodelling, and of present beauty of texture and weathering may not always be wholly compatible.

In attempting to reconcile these claims and motives, the ultimate guide must be the tact and judgment of the men in charge. Certain observations may, however, be of assistance to them:

1) No final decision should be taken as to a course of action before reasonable efforts to exhaust the archeological and documentary evidence as to the form and successive transformations of the monument.

2) Complete record of such evidence, by drawings, notes and transcripts should be kept, and in no case should evidence offered by the monument itself be destroyed or covered up before it has been fully recorded.

3) It is well to bear in mind the saying: "Better preserve than repair, better repair than restore, better restore than construct".

4) It is ordinarily better to retain genuine old work of several periods, rather than arbitrarily to "restore", the whole, by new work, to its aspect at a single period.

5) This applies even to work of periods later than those now admired, provided their work represents a genuine creative effort.

6) In no case should our own artistic preferences or prejudices lead us to modify, on aesthetic grounds, work of a bygone period representing other artistic tastes. Truth is not only stranger than fiction, but more varied and more interesting, as well as more honest.

7) Where missing features are to be replaced without sufficient evidence as to their own original form, due regard should be paid to the factors of period and region in other surviving examples of the same time and locality.

8) Every reasonable additional care and expense are justified to approximate in new work the materials, methods and quality of old construction, but new work should not be artificially "antiqued" by theatrical means.

9) Work on the preservation and restoration of old building requires a slower pace than would be expected in new construction".

Such are the policies or principles that have guided our historical work.

However, policies alone are not sufficient. One must abide by them. To insure adherence to these policies, the historic buildings in the care of the Service have been inventoried and the importance of each one graded. No construction work other than emergency stabilization may be undertaken on an important historic structure until careful Historic Structures Reports have been prepared and the recommendations in them approved by appropriate authority. Preparation of the reports involved documented historical studies and architectural analyses, bringing together every scrap of available information or data relating to the structure. This is supplemented by archeological excavations, as necessary or desirable. The decision to preserve, repair, or restore rests on the evidence in the report and the proposed use of the structure; but no one person reaches this decision alone. The findings in the report are studied by the professional staff (historians, architects, and archeologists) of the park, of the Regional Office, and of the Director's Office in Washington. Approval of the Park Superintendent, of the Regional Director and of the Director in Washington is required for any change in an important historic building. At Independence National Historical Park, as elsewhere in the National Park System, the Service has emphasized preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration rather than reconstruction. There is no thought of reconstructing all of the long-destroyed buildings once there.

Reconstruction is the exception rather than the rule and there have been

only two instances of it: the « reconstruction » of New Hall, of which one wall remained, as a memorial to the first beginnings of the Marine Corps and the reconstruction, with modern adaptations, of Library Hall to meet the needs of the historic American Philosophical Society for book space. This last is defended on practical and aesthetic grounds. It enhances the setting of the other buildings.

Work on Independence Hall has proceeded slowly since 1951, with research preceding construction at every step. Service historians have combed the United States for documentation and two of them have been sent abroad to look for information, one to England and one to France — the last quite recently. Generally speaking, the attitude of the public toward the slowness that this process entails has been one of understanding; perhaps because the public instinctively appreciates that painstaking care, which is time consuming, is a necessity if we are to abide by our principles.

At the present time, in cooperation with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, we are making a re-examination and reappraisal of our Preservation and Restoration policies, with a view to strengthening them. We want to define more sharply the reasons for historical conservation and restoration work; we want to place more emphasis on the preservation of the life history of historic buildings as opposed to restoration to a particular moment of time; we also wish to build safeguards against what might be called creeping reconstruction, that is to say the tendency for repair to lead to restoration and for restoration to become, by degrees, total reconstruction. We desire to explore the possibility of having more living monuments, that is to say to find new, sympathetic uses for old buildings. However, the basic Service policies are expected to remain substantially unchanged.

The United States National Park Service is keenly interested in celebrating the National Monument Year and we are determined to encourage and publicize the movement for the safeguarding of the beauty and character of landscapes and sites. Toward this end, we are currently engaged in discussions with the Urban Renewal Administration looking toward closer cooperation between our two agencies. We hope the experience and knowledge gained by the Service at Independence National Historical Park in the heart of historic old Philadelphia, and at other historic places like it, may be made more generally available to guide historical work in other old urban centers of the United States. It is a consumation devoutly to be wished.

CHARLES W. PORTER III
PRINCIPES FONDAMENTAUX POUR LA CONSERVATION
HISTORIQUE ET TRAVAUX DE RESTAURATION
À L'INDEPENDENCE HALL ET À L'INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL
HISTORICAL PARK DE PHILADELPHIE, PENNSYLVANIE
RÉSUMÉ.

- 1) Description rapide de l'Independence Hall et de l'Independence National historical Park.
- 2) Origines des systèmes du National Park Service ou principes fondamentaux pour la conservation historique et les travaux de restauration.
- 3) Compte-rendu sur les systèmes et principes actuellement utilisés.
- 4) Possibilité de renforcer le Compte-rendu sur les systèmes et d'en étendre l'usage.