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SOME ASPECTS OF HISTORIC  
 PRESERVATION IN THE U.S.A.

This is a crucial time for Historic Preservation. Organized efforts are  
 everywhere needed today more urgently than ever before. Many historic  
 buildings — and even undeveloped but important areas — which have so far  
 withstood the slow erosion of time, are now being assaulted by the swift  
 destruction that passes under the name of « progress ».  

Much of this destruction could have been avoided if informed and in- 
 fluential people had become active early enough to persuade the authorities  
 to recognize the historic importance of some building or area that stood in the way, and make the slight shift in planning which is frequently all that is  
 needed to safeguard the historic landmark.  

Every country must find ways to meet the challenge of Historic Preser- 
 vation according to its own circumstances, geographic or otherwise. But  
 methods and techniques which have proved successful in one country can  
 sometimes be helpfully adapted to others. We have all come here to learn from  
 each other, so I am happy to present to this distinguished Congress some of  
 the aspects of Historic Preservation as it is being carried out in the United  
 States.  

The controlling factor with us is that our civilization is spread over an  
 immense territory, divided into fifty states, each with a strong local government.  
 (The recent admission of Alaska and Hawaii as the 49th and 50th states  
 of the Union, means that we are now concerned with an area that girdles half  
 the globe.) Starting with the thirteen original colonies, all on the Eastern  
 Coast, our country gradually expanded 3,000 miles to reach the Pacific, adding  
 state after state as the territory came under civilized control. The result of this  
 development is an intense devotion throughout the U.S.A. to the principle of  
 « State’s Rights » versus Federal control. This principle carries down to  
 county, municipal and township loyalties. Great local pride in, and a desire to  
 improve, one’s own community is an almost universal trait of the American  
 character.  

It is for this reason that the organization I have the honor to represent  
 here (the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States of  
 America) has recognized the importance of developing its program through the  
 medium of local groups; each one organized to preserve either a whole community, or quite often a single historic building — and not necessarily a large  
 one at that. It suffices that the building should have been important in the  
 history or culture of its particular locality.  

The American National Trust, which was chartered 17 years ago by Con- 
 gress, but which is strictly non-governmental and receives no financial support
from the Government, accepts as its primary mission the need to build in our
citizens awareness of and a sense of responsibility for our historic landmarks
wherever they may be situated throughout the country; and it recognizes that
this can best be accomplished through autonomous local groups. Over 500 of
these groups or associations belong to the National Trust as organizational
members paying annual dues. The Trust in return provides leadership and
general information through its regular publications, as well as expert advisory
services to individual projects — but no financial support.

A few of these conservation projects do, however, receive some state or
municipal assistance. (The Federal Government has its own preservation
program under the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior, but
this is mainly concerned, as its name implies, with our national parks; although
it does accomplish some notable work on building restoration such as at
Independence Square in Philadelphia).

Recent statistics indicate that in the U.S.A., over 68% of Historic Pre-
servation is privately initiated and supported.

This clearly puts a widespread mission of education upon the National
Trust, both to building popular awareness and developing technical proficiency.
We are providing this leadership through regular publications (an illustrated
magazine published six times yearly, and 14 newsletters), and through seminars
which are held in various parts of the country, usually in conjunction with local
groups.

Our educational mission thus falls into two parts. The first is to alert
the public whenever it is learned that a historic landmark is threatened. This
calls for much research, and the wide connections which the Trust enjoys with
important organizations such as the National Park Service, the A.I.A. (American
Institute of Architects) and the S.A.H. (Society of Architectural Historians).

The second part of the educational program is designed to provide advice and
training for those who engage in actual preservation. There is a shortage in our
country of trained personnel for the mounting number of historic projects.

In addition to its educational program, the National Trust has accepted
responsibility for a few important properties which are, in most cases, open
to the public on a daily basis. However, the policy of the Trust has been to
encourage local ownership wherever possible for reasons already stated.

Our National Trust derives most of its income from the dues of its
members. In addition to the 500 organization members already mentioned,
there are approximately 5,000 individual members and a few corporate members.
This third category is for business firms having no immediate concern with
historic preservation, other than a patriotic desire to assist the National Trust
in its important and ever expanding efforts to protect our nation’s heritage.

There are three points which might be considered as basic in the American
preservation picture.

1. That the citizen and local organizations, rather than the national
government, take the main responsibility for Historic Preservation. (68%)

2. That we believe in decentralization, in stimulating and encouraging
organizations at the community level, rather than in one controlling national
society. (500 local organizations)

3. We believe that great monuments are certainly very important, but

that there cannot be a full historic record of a country except it include
consideration of the small community and the dwellings of simple people.

To illustrate, our National Trust is currently engaged with the Department
of the Interior in the preservation of a very small dwelling which, if not
quickly moved to another site, would be razed to make room for a new super-
highway. The reason this house is important enough for the National Trust to
grant it a new home site in one of its own historic properties, is that it is the
pioneer example of one of our most noted architects, Frank Lloyd Wright, to
meet the needs of a low cost, low maintenance house for moderate income
families.

We do not profess, of course, to be the only nation concerning itself
with the historic importance of simple buildings or early communities, Several
countries have developed fascinating historic preservation projects in villages
and mining towns. To wit: Denmark’s Frielands Museet, Sweden’s Stockholm
Village, Mexico’s Taxco, Brazil’s Oro Preto, France’s Richelieu and, in the
U.S.A., Old Salem, North Carolina.

There is another type of community preservation in the U.S.A., perhaps
more properly designated as historic reconstruction (insofar as most of the build-
ings are concerned), which is designed especially to teach today’s generation
how yesterday’s lived. These projects represent meticulous archeological research, both
as to exterior and interior furnishings; and serve the valuable educational pur-
purpose of enabling the visitor to establish a sense of identity with his forefathers.
Outstanding examples of this type of community museum are Williamsburg in
Virginia, and Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts. Both of these have been
initiated and developed by private enterprise, and both are National Trust
members.

We strongly believe in this process of identification with the past by means
of recreating livable and homelike interiors in historic houses; and any members of
this Congress who visited Mount Vernon, Woodlawn, Kenmore and Gunston
Hall (to mention only a few) will understand why so many visitors say with
surprise, “Why I could settle right down here!” Thus the past is linked with
the present. Again, all the House Museums I have mentioned are privately
restored and maintained, and all are members of the National Trust.

From these brief notes I hope to leave with you the impression that the
most significant feature of the American National Trust is its emphasis on non-
governmental achievement in the field of Historic Preservation, and its recogni-
tion and encouragement of local responsibility.
Helen Burgess

Quelques Aspects
De la Préservation Historique aux U.S.A.
Résumé.

Les U.S.A. sont divisés en cinquante États et chacun d'eux a un Gouvernement local. Il en résulte un intense attachement, d'un bout à l'autre de la Nation, pour le principe du « State's Rights » contre le Contrôle Fédéral. C'est pour cette raison que le Trust National pour la préservation historique aux U.S.A. s'est rendu compte de l'importance de développer son programme par le truchement de groupes locaux.

Notre Trust National est strictement non-gouvernemental et ne reçoit pas d'aide financière du Gouvernement. Sa mission de base est d'éveiller un sens conscient des responsabilités envers les témoignages de notre histoire et il l'accomplit à travers des groupes autonomes locaux car il reconnaît que c'est ce qui peut donner les meilleurs résultats. Plus de 500 de ces groupes appartiennent donc au National Trust en tant que membres actifs payant des cotisations annuelles. Le Trust, en retour, assure la Direction de ces groupes par des publications régulières et les aide avec un service de consultations de spécialistes qui examine les projets individuels. Mais il ne fournit pas d'aide financière.

Le Trust national retire la plus grande partie de ses revenus des cotisations de ses membres. En plus des 500 organisations membres il y a approximativement 5000 membres individuels et quelques membres constitués.

Le Trust National américain exerce une mission d'éducation qui se divise en deux branches: sa première tâche est d'alerter le public toutes les fois qu'il apprend qu'un témoignage de notre histoire est menacé et de prodiguer, toutes les fois que cela est possible, à ceux qui s'occupent de la préservation de se perfectionner.

En plus de son programme éducatif le National Trust a accepté d'être responsable d'un certain nombre de propriétés qui sont, dans bien des cas, ouvertes journalièrement au public. Par l'intermédiaire des séminaires à l'Université ou d'autres groupes, le Trust insiste sur l'importance qu'il y a à conserver les coutumes qui contribuent à donner aux édifices historiques un rôle vivant dans les communautés.