

The Dos and Don'ts of Historic Preservation



FEMA

What is a historic property? Generally a structure or site gains the potential to become a historic/ archaeological resource upon its fiftieth birthday; however, this is only the initial requirement. Other questions must be taken into consideration—is my property associated with historic events or persons (national or local); does my property have distinctive design or physical characteristics; could my property potentially provide important information about prehistory or history? If the answer to these questions is yes (or even maybe) you might want to consider taking measures to preserve your structure.

As the owner of a historic property in a disaster-prone area, you have many things to consider when altering, improving, and/or repairing your property. Historic properties in Louisiana have been subject to repeated flooding, stormwater surges, and hurricanes due to their proximity to natural waterways and bodies of water, the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. Consequently, the necessity of repairing a home to prepare for the next event—or in many cases, rebuilding—often overrides salvaging cultural resources. This document will assist you with the Do's and Don'ts that apply to preserving, rehabilitating, restoring, and reconstructing your historic property while still building back safer and stronger.

Preservation advocates throughout the country use a set of preservation “standards” to help guide their projects called the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* (http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/standards_guidelines.htm).

From these basic guidelines, a list of “Dos and Don'ts” has been developed to assist historic property owners with preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction.

DO

1. Repair/replace structural and ornamental elements as closely to the original elements as possible. Contact your local preservation organization to identify a reputable architectural salvage business or to find an experienced carpenter to replicate the elements.
2. Retain and preserve as many historic materials as possible. Maintaining original components is an easy way to ensure that your home retains its historic qualities.
3. Retain the architectural style of your structure, which stands as a record of the building's place in history. Specific information regarding local architectural styles can be found in *Historic Preservation Resources* on this site or by consulting with a qualified historic architect.
4. Maintain prior architectural alterations that have acquired historic significance of their own. Regional examples might include structures that were raised years after their original construction, camelbacks or porches that have been added over time.
5. Preserve any distinctive features, finishes and/or construction techniques that characterize the property. An example of this would be preserving the deep roof overhangs with exposed rafters found with Arts and Crafts period buildings, or preserving the decorative trim work often found in Victorian buildings.
6. Repair historic features instead of replacing them. If it is necessary to replace historic features, document the need for replacement with physical or pictorial documentation.
7. Utilize less aggressive options in cleaning and/or resurfacing historic materials; methods such as sandblasting can be damaging to historic fabric.
8. Exercise caution in performing any ground-disturbing activity that may potentially affect known or unknown archaeological resources. Specific information about protecting archaeological resources can be found in *How to Avoid Impacting Archaeological Sites* on this site.

9. Ensure that any new additions or structural alterations do not destroy historic elements of the structure. New architectural components should be of comparable design, massing, size and scale of the pre-existing structure.
10. Design any new additions or structural alterations in a manner that, should the addition be removed in the future, the original form and structure of the historic property would remain as intact as possible.

DON'T

1. Alter the style of the structure by omitting or greatly modifying the architectural elements that were originally there.
2. Use contemporary building materials that are materially different from those that were originally there.
3. Add or subtract any structural or ornamental elements which will make the building appear to be of a different style or age than it truly is.
4. Remove structural or ornamental components of the building that, while not likely to be original, have gained historic value of their own.
5. Alter any distinctive finishes, features, and construction techniques.
6. Replace distinctive historic features with materials that do not resemble the original element's design, color, texture and/or other visual qualities, and where possible, materials.
7. Use cleaning and/or resurfacing methods that will prove destructive to the historic elements of your structure.
8. Ignore archeological artifacts that you may find on your property.
9. Alter the historic integrity of your home by constructing an incompatible addition and/or using inappropriate architectural elements.
10. Greatly alter the massing, size or scale of your structure.