

Beth L. Savage

Spreading the Word

Fulfilling the National Register's Mission Online

The digital media is increasingly a reflection of our world—every view, every discipline, every commercial interest, every repository of knowledge. Because it is distributed, interactive, malleable, and lacking central control, it is a vehicle for revolutionary change in every discipline, attitude, and social structure. Never has there been a time of greater promise or peril.

Don Tapscott

Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation

Encompassing a vast and diverse array of historic places throughout the United States and its territories, the National Register has been a catalyst for preserving properties, maintaining cultural traditions, commemorating community history, and revitalizing cities nationwide. The Register includes landmarks of American achievement as well as those that reflect the everyday lives of ordinary people in locales across the country.

The mission of the National Register program is to expand and maintain the National Register, to provide technical assistance to those seeking to nominate historic properties, to foster a national historic preservation ethic in partnerships with others, and to make information on National Register-listed places accessible to all members of the public through a variety of educational tools. The National Register's web site located at <www.cr.nps.gov/nr> is a primary vehicle to publish information about the National Register, its properties, programs and products. The Web is a most powerful tool for information dissemination as demonstrated by the exponential growth in site visitation since statistics have been collected. Currently comprised of more than 3,500

pages, approximately 50,000 weekly user sessions were tallied for the web site during fiscal year 2001. This award-winning site is a primary venue to engage the public by showcasing our partnership programs and products.

Beyond basic information on the National Register and the process of nominating places to it, the web site is generally organized by four seminal functions or uses of the National Register—Research, Publications, Travel, and Education—each of which provides access to a variety of products that further aspects of the Register's programmatic mission.

Research: The National Register Collection

About 74,000 properties have been listed in the National Register since its inception in 1966. Together, these files hold information on more than 1.2 million individual buildings, sites, districts, structures, and objects that provides links to the country's heritage at the national, state, and local levels. The documentation on each property consists of photographs, maps, and a National Register registration form, which provides a physical description of the place, information about its history and significance, and a bibliography. Researchers can take advantage of this unparalleled collection in a number of ways,

Bizzell Library at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, was designated a National Historic Landmark on January 3, 2001, for its pivotal role in the desegregation of American educational facilities. It was highlighted in the National Register's online African American History Month feature in 2001. Photo by Susan Salvatore.

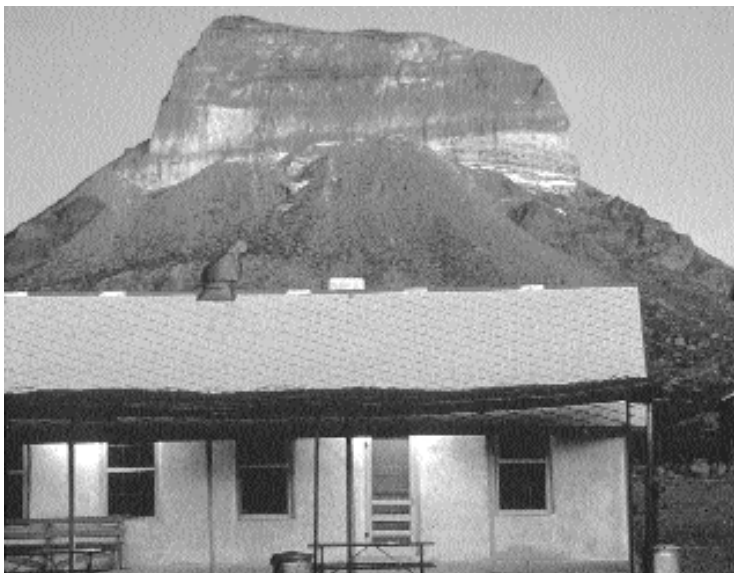


some examples of which are illustrated by Rustin Quaide and Heather Cushman (see p. 45).

The National Register Information System (NRIS), a database that contains information on places listed in or determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, is available online at <www.nr.nps.gov>. At present, there are four searchable categories—name, location, agency, and theme—and more will be added in time. The name, location, and agency categories each include several ways of defining searches. Once the database matches the search query, it provides the name of the properties, their addresses, and links to pertinent web sites that may provide further information. These include National Register travel itineraries and Teaching with Historic Places lesson plans, and the records of the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record.

From the Research page, Web visitors may also consult a list of Multiple Property Submissions (MPS), which organizes National Register documentation by historical themes, property types, or geographic areas. More than one third of all places nominated to the National Register are documented in this format and the context statements for these nominations often represent seminal research in the field of cultural resource management. Sarah Pope's article chronicles the project that is underway for digitizing these records for online access by spring 2002 (see p. 44). We hope to have several indexes to the MPSs available online at that time as well.

The Castolon Historic District, with Cerro Castolon in the background, was featured in the National Register's online 2001 Hispanic Heritage Month feature and is the subject of a TwHP online lesson plan. Photo courtesy Big Bend National Park.



Publications

The National Register has developed a broad range of published and audiovisual materials to meet the needs of states, federal agencies, national parks, local governments, Indian tribes, and private citizens seeking to nominate properties and use the National Register. We offer several books and videos which describe properties already listed and different approaches to evaluating our past, such as *African American Historic Places* and *American Legacy: The Work of the National Register of Historic Places*. Our National Register Bulletin series provides guidance on evaluating, documenting, and listing different types of historic places. Bulletins are available online for topics ranging from the basics of *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* and *How to Complete the National Register Registration Form* to identifying, evaluating, and nominating such specific and varied property types as cemeteries and burial sites, battlefields, historic vessels, aviation-related properties, and designed landscapes. During fiscal year 2001, the publications pages of the web site received more than 2,000 weekly visits.

Travel

The National Register promotes heritage education and tourism through its travel itinerary series, *Discover Our Shared Heritage*, which makes it easy to explore America's extraordinary historic places. With our list of National Register itineraries growing regularly, the historic destinations available online or in person are virtually endless. Each itinerary is a self-guided tour to historic places listed in the Register. With information about national parks, National Historic Landmarks, and state and locally significant historic properties, these travel itineraries can help users plan their trips. The 20 itineraries online to date provide information on more than 900 historic places. Six new itineraries are currently in development, and more than 30 others are in the preliminary planning stages. As the library of travel itineraries expands the numbers of online visitors are steadily increasing, currently averaging about 25,000 visitors weekly.

The online itineraries include places linked geographically like Washington, DC, and the parishes of southeastern Louisiana. Other historic places are related to broad historic themes and may be geographically widely dispersed, such as those throughout 18 states contained in *All*

Featured in the National Register's online celebration of National Asian-Pacific Heritage Month last year was the Bai Ra Irray (Men's Meeting House), Airai Village, Babelthup Island, Republic of Palau. Photo by David Look.

Aboard the Underground Railroad, each of which played a vital role in the system designed to assist escaped slaves prior to the Civil War. Likewise, the 49 places associated with the modern civil rights movement in *We Shall Overcome* span 21 states.

Itineraries are produced in partnership with the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions, communities, other federal agencies and preservation organizations. Spotlighting different cities, communities, and themes across the country, the itineraries expose online visitors to a huge variety of historic places. The travel itinerary program goals, discussed in Patrick Andrus' article, are reinforced by steadily increasing numbers of visitors to the travel section of the web site, and the growing interest expressed by communities and organizations seeking to partner with the National Register on new itineraries.

Education

The Teaching with Historic Places (TwHP) program is another major vehicle for the National Register's promotion of heritage education as described in Beth Boland's article.

The program uses properties listed in the National Register to enliven history, social studies, geography, civics, and other subjects through a variety of products and activities, available through its web pages, that help teachers bring historic places into the classroom. These include a series of classroom-ready lesson plans; guidance on using places to teach; information encouraging educators, historians, preservationists, site interpreters, and others to work together effectively; and professional development publications and training courses. Initially created in collaboration with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the program grew out of a desire by both organizations to expand educational outreach.

The lesson plans form the core of the TwHP section of the National Register web site: in fiscal year 2001, 26 classroom-ready lesson plans were posted, bringing the total number available online to more than 80. Lesson plans



are indexed by subject, period, and geographical area. They cover a broad range of themes from 19th-century inland water transportation and women homesteading in the West, to ethnic heritage, the commercial automobile landscape, and the Cold War.

Special Features

The National Register celebrates the achievements of all Americans through a host of regularly published special features. These have honored African American Heritage Month, Women's History Month, Asian-Pacific Heritage Month, Historic Preservation Week, Hispanic Heritage Month, Family History, American Indian and Native Alaskan Heritage Month, and Veterans Day. These features integrate spotlighted historic properties, history in the parks, lesson plans, travel itineraries, and other related publications and activities.

Readers are invited to log on to the National Register's web site to discover programs and products that illustrate our rich, shared history and culture, stimulate efforts to learn about and preserve historic places, and foster community pride and heritage tourism. In all of the ways that have been mentioned, the National Register's web site is fulfilling our mission by spreading the word to vast numbers of online visitors about the meaningfulness of preserving historic places as living parts of communities across the country and beyond.

Beth L. Savage, architectural historian, manages the National Register of Historic Places web site, in Washington, DC. She is a guest editor of this issue of CRM.