

Taking It on the Road

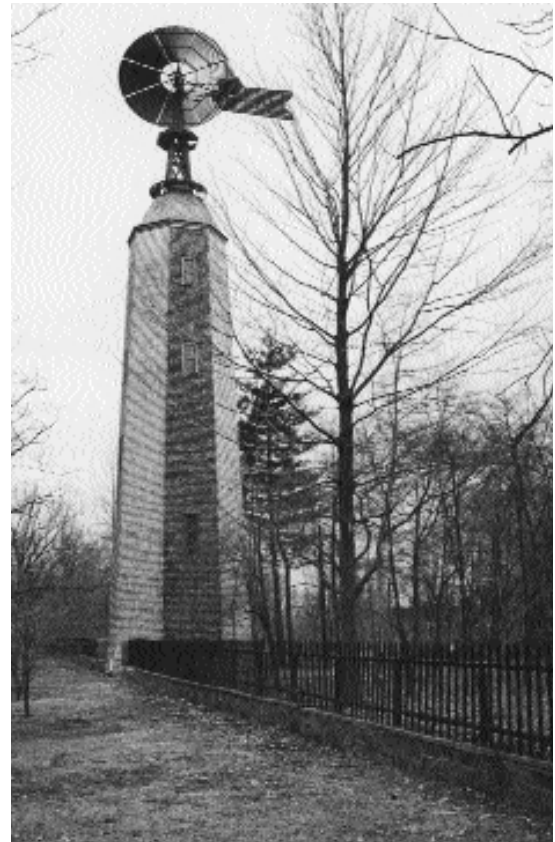
National Register Documentation Becomes Available Over the Internet

In 1994, Diane Miller reported on the valuable uses of the National Register Information System (NRIS) and the National Register collection, in her *CRM* article, “National Register Information is a Hidden Treasure” (*CRM* 17:2). At that time, online access to the NRIS was only available for states and federal agencies. The general public could request from the Register hard copy printouts if they needed a list of properties in their communities or the answer to a specific question. The National Register had not yet created a web site (the web site made its debut in 1995) and was only exploring the possibilities of this rather new technology. The database was, nonetheless, an important source of information for policy analysis, project planning, community awareness, and research. Eight years later, the NRIS remains an important source of information, but is now an expanded and more accessible tool. The database presently contains information on about 74,000 properties and is accessible through the Web at <www.nr.nps.gov>. Providing names of properties, their addresses, associated data elements (such as architectural style, significant dates, and applicable National Register criteria) and links to pertinent National Park Service web sites, the NRIS now links to quad maps for all National Register listings (except those that are address restricted, most commonly archeological sites).

In 2000, the National Register began to explore the possibility of digitizing its entire collection and integrating that information with the NRIS by consulting the Cornell Institute for Digital Collections (CIDC) on issues associated with conversion, funding, on-demand digitization, and database management. After meeting with representatives of the National Register and the National Historic Landmarks Survey and inspecting the collection, CIDC presented its findings to the program in spring 2001. With these recommendations, the National Register

developed a work plan for digitizing the collection and making it available through the NRIS.

The first phase of the project, currently underway, is the digitization of the Multiple Property Documentation Forms or thematic covers. The National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form nominates groups of related significant properties. On it, the themes, trends, and patterns of history



*The National Register Collection was a source of information for Gretchen Woelfe when researching windmills for her book, *The Wind at Work, An Activity Guide to Windmills* (Chicago Review Press, 1997). Shown here is the Bronson Windmill in Fairfield, Connecticut, one of more than 20 windmills individually listed in the National Register.*

Researchers Take Advantage of the National Register Collection

The National Register's ever-growing collection reaches out to potential researchers with files documenting the nation's official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture. The collection provides a physical description of each listed property, information about its history and significance, a bibliography, photographs, and maps.

The National Register collection is often used by government agencies and consulting firms, which use the documentation for policy analysis, project planning, evaluation, and registration assistance. Independent researchers and free-lance writers have also taken advantage of what can be found in this unparalleled body of information. Gretchen Woelfe used information gleaned from the National Register on the subject of windmills in her book, *The Wind at Work, An Activity Guide to Windmills* (Chicago Review Press, 1997). Marilyn J. Chiat, working with the Center for the Documentation and Preservation of Places of Worship, came to the National Register file collection to do first-hand research of places of worship in the United States. Her research into the files eventually produced *America's Religious Architecture, Sacred Places for Every Community*, published by John Wiley and Sons in 1997. Stating in the book's introduction that "(a) great deal of research for this book was conducted at the National Register of Historic Places," Ms. Chiat chose to concentrate on places of worship that were often community based, and "are the ones most often threatened with insensitive renovations or demolition." Freelance writer David Pike is using the National Register files for research on his book about New Mexico roadside historical markers. Oxford University Press has contracted with a number of distinguished historians to write a series of thematic books based on National Register documentation. Another publisher, Book Builders, is working on a state guide using the National Register Collection. Frequently, the collection is used by individuals who simply want to find information about their historic house or neighborhood, an ancestral home, or a property associated with a significant person in history.

The National Register collection is located at 800 N. Capitol Street, NW, Washington, DC, and is open from 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm. to 4:00 pm, Monday through Friday. Copies of documentation can be received by contacting the National Register Reference Desk at 202-343-9559, or by email at <nr_reference@nps.gov>.

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shared by the properties are organized into historic contexts, property types, and registration requirements. The Multiple Property Documentation Form may be used to evaluate, nominate and register thematically-related historic properties simultaneously, or to establish the registration/eligibility requirements for properties that may be nominated in the future. One-third of the properties listed in the National Register have been submitted under Multiple Property Documentation Forms. A list of all thematic covers is available on the National Register web site at <www.cr.nps.gov/nr/research/mpslist.htm>.

The National Register chose to first digitize the thematic covers because as a management tool, the thematic approach can furnish essential information for historic preservation planning.

They provide historic context information that can be used widely to assist in project planning, in identifying and evaluating cultural resources, and for public education and interpretation and other research. Furthermore, during the 1999 National Forum on Assessing Historic Significance for Transportation Programs, sponsored by the Transportation Research Board, the Federal Highway Administration, and the National Park Service, participants recommended that existing historic contexts be made available to transportation planners, other preservation professionals, and the public via the Internet. Historic contexts help federal, state, and local officials to make more informed decisions on the significance of historic properties and the impact of projects on these properties.