

The International Connection

HAER and the US/ICOMOS International Summer Intern Program

In 1983, US/ICOMOS cosponsored with HABS/HAER an international seminar on architectural and engineering documentation. US/ICOMOS, the United States Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites, is one of 100 national committees of ICOMOS, the international, nongovernmental organization dedicated to the preservation and conservation of the world's cultural heritage. US/ICOMOS fosters heritage conservation and historic preservation at the national and international levels through education and training, international exchange of people and information, technical assistance, documentation, advocacy, and other activities consistent with the goals of ICOMOS.

Out of that collaboration grew the idea to work together on a regular basis through the HABS/HAER summer field teams. The pilot year of the US/ICOMOS International Summer Intern Program was 1984. Four young architects from Canada and Japan were placed on HABS teams; the next year the program expanded significantly with six participants from the U.K. and Germany, all assigned to HABS teams, and an equal number of U.S. interns heading out to those same countries. It was in 1986 that the first interns worked with HAER, and this has become the numerically strongest partnership and a highly successful one. The Program has grown over 17 years to include internships with NPS regional offices and parks, as well as other non-profit organizations, and a long list of exchange countries. At the end of 1999, 387 interns from 51 countries had participated in the Program.

Since 1986, US/ICOMOS interns have been a part of the great majority of HAER teams across the United States. They have participated in all areas of HAER's exploration of new fields: maritime documentation, historic bridge projects, iron and steel industry, roads and parkways, hydroelectric and railroad projects. In this way

the interns have been exposed to two principal features of HAER documentation: process and context.

"But I'm an architect," is often the applicant's response to the offer to join a HAER team for the summer. Soon, however, the US/ICOMOS intern learns the unusual nature of the work of HAER and the uniqueness of its objectives in the context of a national program of cultural resource documentation.

Why is this partnership a good thing? The US/ICOMOS International Summer Intern Program fills a need in the profession and renders a service to participants and to sponsors. The Program is a unique educational effort that extends the network of education, international exchange, and understanding to the next generation of preservation professionals. The Program

Wang Bing, from China, was a team member on the New York State Historic Bridges Survey, 1994.



*Albert Aflenzer
of Austria, mea-
suring part of a
gold mill at Bald
Mountain,
South Dakota,
1992.*

benefits the global community by insuring a continuing dialogue between nations, by internationalizing preservation education, and by introducing young members of the profession to the intellectual and practical network that will continue their education and help them to find creative solutions to the conservation problems that they encounter in their daily work.

The total immersion in a foreign culture, the daily interaction with colleagues in a professional setting, the hands-on work—all these elements contribute to a more profound professional and personal experience. Neither a classroom setting nor a thoughtfully constructed travel itinerary can offer the same opportunities.

“The US/ICOMOS internships are the Fulbrights of the preservation world,” according to Eric DeLony, Chief of HAER. “I had the opportunity to accept a fellowship after completing my studies at Columbia University to study the history of the industrial revolution in the U.K. I returned from England with a completely different view of what our heritage is.” The importance of this experience and its impact on the development of his career, DeLony believes, explains his personal dedication to the US/ICOMOS program and his eagerness to integrate ICOMOS interns into all the HAER teams.

In what way is the work of HAER different than it would have been without US/ICOMOS interns? How has the participation of the interns affected either the process or the product of HAER documentation?

Although some interns have previously participated in projects documenting industrial structures, both traditional and post-industrial, the HAER emphasis on process, not solely construction, is a new experience for most. The typical reaction of interns is surprise and disappointment at the discovery that an entire summer will be spent documenting a structure that is modern by their standards, and usually not an aesthetically pleasing one at that. Inadvertently playing the devil’s advocate, the intern’s plaintive “why are we doing this?” often leads to a deeper understanding on the part of the U.S. team members. The need to explain and justify a project forces the team members to think about their work on a different plane.

The need to illustrate process makes the collaboration between architects and historians all the more critical. This close consultation is also at times a new element. Historian Richard



Terry, from the U.K., worked on the Avery Island Salt Works Recording Project in 1989. “Working with architects on a recording project was something new to me. I have gained a deeper appreciation of drafting techniques which are readily transferable to my archeological work in England.” The need to articulate verbally and graphically how something works stretches the traditional architectural view of documentation.

The immediate reaction of interns is not always one of incomprehension. On the contrary, the participation of interns from certain institutions and countries with a developed program of industrial archeology has brought a highly sophisticated and perceptive viewpoint to some projects. Interns from programs at the Ironbridge Institute in the U.K. and the Technical University of Vienna, for example, have brought unique perceptions and skills to the HAER teams.

An area where HAER has pioneered an aspect of landscape documentation is in its parkways and park roads and bridges surveys. In these projects, not only is the construction process of bridges exposed through peeling back the layers,

Oliver Schreiber of Austria, preparing a drawing of the Roebling Works, New Jersey, 1996.

but the engineering objects are seen as less than the sum of their parts. They are viewed in the context of the landscape that surrounds them.

Here, industrial archeology meets cultural landscape studies. Most international interns studying landscape architecture have experience in documenting historic gardens; a few have worked on rural cultural landscapes. The parkways projects force an examination of this new category of cultural resource where the importance of nature and of engineering are equal.

Describing her work to document Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park, Anna Sniegucka of Poland explained, "For me, it was important to show how the new roads influenced the landscape. The [drawing] sheet analyzed the existing road system and illustrated the problems and potential of the park and its road system."

In general, US/ICOMOS interns are older and more advanced in their studies than their U.S. teammates. The HABS/HAER summer program and the US/ICOMOS International Summer Intern Program have evolved differently. While HABS/HAER has become an opportunity for relevant summer work for college graduates in architecture, landscape architecture, engineering and history, the US/ICOMOS program offers a range of different internships for participants with different skill levels and degrees of professional experience. A cordial competition between participants in the two programs, according to Tom Behrens, a HAER architect and US/ICOMOS Intern to Croatia in 1997, heightens the performance level.

There are other repercussions of this program. Cooperation with US/ICOMOS is a marketing tool for HAER, for example. The participation of US/ICOMOS interns also makes HAER an international activity of the National



Park Service. The presence of international interns generates interest on the part of sponsors and helps to validate local support for the site in question. "For me, it was surprising to see how the local townspeople were interested in our work," Ms. Sniegucka explained. "The local paper printed information about the project and we were celebrities for the summer."

The partnership between HAER and US/ICOMOS is successful for many reasons. Katie Dugdill of the U.K. summed it up neatly:

Taking part in the US/ICOMOS International Summer Intern Program gave me the opportunity to exchange ideas at an international level with other like-minded professionals in the workplace. The project allowed me to adapt my skills and knowledge of landscape design and develop further my ability to observe and record the landscape in a historical context. Indeed, it was a privilege to work for a highly-regarded institution, which has taken me one step further from university into the professional field. I was given the chance to contribute to the recording and understanding of a historic site and to sustain one of America's cultural legacies.

In the end, it's the caliber of the work and the success of the projects that validate this partnership.

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