

Celebrating 150 Years

I am pleased to help celebrate the Department of the Interior's sesqui-centennial with this special issue of *CRM* surveying the Department's commitment to cultural resource management.

The National Park Service and most other Interior Department bureaus are commonly associated with natural resources. But for much of this century, we have been equally concerned with cultural resources: archeological sites, historic structures, landscapes, objects, and museum collections. We preserve and promote public appreciation of these resources on the lands we manage, and we conduct programs to identify and encourage preservation and appreciation of cultural resources outside our custody. Over the past few decades, our work has expanded into the preservation of culturally diverse historic resources and embraces many minority groups including Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanic people.

The Department of the Interior, through the National Park Service, manages many of the most significant cultural sites in the country. Valley Forge, Abraham Lincoln's birthplace, Martin Luther King's home, Gettysburg battlefield, and Mesa Verde National Park represent various faces of American excellence. Other places, such as Independence Hall, Women's Rights National Historical Park, the Monroe School in Topeka, Kansas, and Manzanar National Historic Site remind us how much the words "freedom" and "equality" are central to our cultural heritage and how our society has struggled to ensure that they apply universally to all Americans. Because the stories inherent in these places are cherished ingredients of our national psyche, the Department of the Interior preserves and protects them as permanent reminders of our collective past.

National Park Service involvement with cultural resources is best known from the historic sites, battlefields, and monuments it administers and the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic

Landmarks programs it manages. Lately, we have initiated projects focusing on the educational aspects of cultural resource management. For example, the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom seeks to promote a deeper understanding of that 19th-century phenomenon which involved tens of thousands of enslaved African Americans "voting with their feet" in search of American liberty. The Vanishing Treasures Initiative is working on long-term preservation of the internationally significant archeological and historic structures located in the Southwest. We are also increasing public awareness and appreciation of cultural resources through *Links to the Past* <www.cr.nps.gov> on the World Wide Web.

The National Park Service may be more visibly associated with cultural resources than other Interior bureaus, but as the contents of this issue make clear, they are a Department-wide concern. Befitting an anniversary observance, most of the articles are retrospective, looking back at how we became involved with cultural resources and how we progressed to where we are today. Some look to the future as well, and contemplate the challenges ahead.

Through public awareness of the importance of historic preservation to our civic health, and congressional commitment to the identification and protection of the significant places that define us as a society, the Department of the Interior has been at the forefront of cultural conservation in this country for almost a century. Its obligation to the American people is to preserve for present and future generations the cultural touchstones of our nation. This rich collection reminds us of our journey from past to present ... and even contains suggestions for how we might comport ourselves in the future. We are proud to be its stewards.

Robert Stanton
Director
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