

Reading About the National Register

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Over the past several years, numerous articles have been written about the National Register of Historic Places and the role it plays in preserving our nation's historically significant cultural resources. These writings range from general informational articles that explain what the National Register is and how it works, to articles that present specific case studies of communities that have been impacted by listing in the National Register. This bibliography offers a brief overview of recent writings on the National Register, grouped by subject matter.

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- "Certified Local Governments and the National Register." *Historic South Dakota Newsletter* (Summer 1990): 4-6.
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⁷ For more information on the Teaching with Historic Places program, write to Teaching with Historic Places, National Register of Historic Places, Interagency Resources Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127.

⁸ For information on the educational philosophies embodied in this format, refer to Fay Metcalf, "Creating Lesson Plans for Teaching with Historic Places," *CRM: Teaching with Historic Places* 16 (1993): 12-13. For information on purchasing lesson plans, write to The Preservation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20036, or call toll-free (800) 766-6847.

⁹ For information on writing a lesson plan for consideration as part of the series, write to Teaching with Historic Places, National Register of Historic Places, Interagency Resources Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127.

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discovery process. They experience the excitement of researching and synthesizing material to create a historic context and reach an understanding of a resource that never existed before. Part of this is accomplished by having them work with primary sources such as street directories and Sanborn maps. They also experience the discipline of applying National Register criteria, making a decision of eligibility, and preparing the nomination forms.

The overarching goal of the reevaluation of the National Register historic district nomination is to simulate a professional experience in preservation—if one thing ties us together in the preservation field, it is working with the National Register of Historic Places. At the end of the semester, students are told: "You are ready." "Ready for what?" they ask. I tell them, "Ready to practice preservation."

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lously bulldozed to unthinkingly make room for “progress.”

Once understanding has been established, effective interpretation is intended to move the visitor from understanding, an intellectual exercise, to appreciation, a mental process closely tied to emotions. Appreciation engenders value assignment and values are not necessarily rational. They are, however, critical to effective interpretation. It is the author’s strong belief that any interpretation which does not touch the human emotions will fail to be totally effective.

Finally, the last stage in the Sensitivity Continuum is commitment which comes when the visitor finds internal prompting causing them to take actions they would not have taken without interpretation. For example, when they actively help protect the object of interpretation. In other words, the goal of interpretation is a change in behavior of those for whom we interpret.

Communities interested in designing architectural, historical, or cultural interpretive programs should consider the properties listed in the National Register. National Register properties are well suited to be the core of heritage interpretation because they represent a wide array of architectural building types and styles, historical themes and events, and diverse cultural associations. However, National Register status and value often goes unnoticed in the daily lives of local residents. Interpretation can bring to life the stories of these properties and begin the Sensitivity Continuum. The successful interpretation of cultural resources requires involvement of government agencies, industries, service clubs, special interest groups, youth groups and educational institutions, among others. The keys are coordination and correlation.

The nature and location of National Register properties will define the interpretive activities and determine how they will be tailored to travelers in cars, on bikes, in water craft, and on foot. Both traditional and non-traditional interpretive approaches should be applied to these resources. Wayside exhibits and historical markers assist

motorists traveling along highways to understand the history of the areas they pass through. Cassette tours, radio message repeaters, and guided walking tours may be appropriate for interpreting National Register historic districts. Trail markers and cassette tours may be the answer for a series of historic resources along a linear route, such as railroad roadbeds, where cyclists and hikers are the predominant trail users. Published brochures are traditional sources of interpretive information.

Ambitious interpretive projects can cover a large geographical area. In such cases, preservationists may consider thematic interpretive “safaris.” Recently a group of Wyoming educators participated in a trek that traveled a 75-mile section of the Oregon Trail in wagons to learn first hand of the rigors of such ventures. “In-home” tours on laser disks, interactive video, ordinary video tapes, and interactive multimedia computer games and simulations offer those who cannot participate in the above activities a means for innovative learning and recreation.

For those of us responsible for perpetuating cultural viability and protection for future generations, interpretation must never be considered a frill. It is vital. It must be of the highest quality possible, innovatively carried out. Interpretation, if done well, can be a profound experience for visitors as well as local residents. We owe it our best efforts.

Notes

¹ Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 8.

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