

Archeology and the National Register

Jan Townsend

The National Park Service, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development took the lead in writing and lobbying for passage of the National Historic Preservation Act. The Special Committee on Historic Preservation, which was organized and funded under the auspices of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the U.S. Conference of Mayors, began its study in October 1965. The National Park Service assisted by providing information from its files and making recommendations on a new program of historic preservation. In February 1966, the committee reported its findings and recommendations in *With Heritage So Rich*. The committee defined historic preservation as “the protection, rehabilitation, restoration and reconstruction of communities, areas, structures, sites and objects having historic, architectural, social and cultural significance.”¹ It was particularly concerned about preserving America’s architecture and aesthetics, especially in urban settings. The committee called for new legislation. The National Historic Preservation Act, which was signed on October 15, 1966, contains most of the committee’s recommendations. The archeological community did not lobby for or against passage of this new act.²

J. O. Brew, an archeologist and director of the Peabody Museum, provided input on how the proposed act should be implemented within the National Park Service. Brew, along with Ronald F. Lee, a special assistant to the director of the National Park Service, George B. Hartzog, Jr., and Ernest Allen Connally, a professor of architectural history at the University of Illinois, proposed that the National Park Service establish an Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation (later known as OAHP).³ They recommended dividing the office into three branches—archeology, history, and architectural history. The Lee-Brew-Connally committee also advised the National Park Service director that the chief of the new OAHP should report directly to him and that the chief should be an architectural historian, in part because this aspect of National Park Service professional staffing needed strengthening.⁴ Director Hartzog appointed Connally to head the newly formed Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation.

The Origins of National Register Criterion D

In November 1966, the National Park Service established the National Preservation Task Force to counsel the National Park Service on how to implement the procedures and requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act, including development of National Register evaluation criteria. Robert M. Utley chaired the task force. At the time, he was chief of the National

Park Service’s Division of History and acting chief of OAHP. Zorro A. Bradley, a National Park Service archeologist and deputy chief of the Division of Archeology, represented archeology. Murray H. Nelligan, William E. Brown, and John A. Hussey, all of whom were National Park Service historians, represented the discipline of history. Russell V. Keune, an architect and architectural historian, represented architectural history and historical architecture. Connally, who was completing his teaching commitments at the University of Illinois, provided input as a member of the task force’s Steering Committee, which also included Brew, Lee, and Herbert E. Kahler, a former Chief Historian of the Park Service.⁵

The task force minutes suggest that archeology was not an important discussion topic, although early in its deliberations Robert Utley warned the task force to “make sure that archeology and architecture are appropriately recognized.”⁶ Archeological properties were discussed at the December 5, 1966 meeting. Ronald Lee indicated that the River Basinwide archeological survey sites would be put in the National Register. He also suggested that the concept of “district” could be used for archeological sites as well as for buildings, and stated that “archeological sites identified in any way with significance in American history should be on the National Register.”⁷

The task force submitted its memorandum report to the director of the National Park Service on February 16, 1967, and then disbanded. In accordance with Robert Utley’s advice, the task force recommended National Register criteria that were based on the National Park Service’s Historic Sites Survey criteria, which were used to establish national significance of prehistoric and historic sites and structures according to the 1935 Historic Sites Act. The task force simply modified the wording of the national significance criteria, or exceptional value criteria, to include state and local significance.

Archeological Properties Evaluation Criteria

National Preservation Task Force, February 1967

Criterion 5:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects:

5. That produced, or may be expected to produce, important scientific information affecting theories and concepts.

Historic Sites Survey (National Historic Landmarks), 1966 Criterion 6:

6. Archeological sites that have produced information of major scientific importance by revealing new cultures, or by shedding light upon periods of occupation over large areas of the United States. Such sites are those which have produced, or which may reasonably be expected to produce, data affecting theories, concepts, and ideas to a major degree.

National Register of Historic Places Criterion D:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects... that possess integrity..., and (d). That have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

The National Preservation Task Force's Criterion 5, which was based on Criterion 6 of the Historic Sites Survey Criteria of Evaluation, "was intended to be used in evaluating archeological sites."⁸ As the task force worded it, however, the archeology criterion was problematic—it was "so broadly worded that it could be construed to apply to features that had nothing to do with American history, architecture, archeology, or culture."⁹ In fall 1967 Connally formed a panel to review the proposed criteria. The members included Connally, William J. Murtagh (the recently-appointed Keeper of the National Register), Robert Utley, Joseph Watterson (chief, Division of Historic Architecture), John Corbett (chief, Division of Archeology),¹⁰ Russell Keune, and Jerry L. Rogers, who had recently come to work at the National Register. To clarify Criterion 5, the panel inserted the words "information important in pre-history or history" in place of the reference to scientific information. What was to become National Register Criterion D (i.e., that has yielded, or is likely to yield, information that is important in prehistory or history) was essentially in place by fall 1967.

National Register Archeological Properties

Since 1967, 4,358 archeological properties have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Of these, 177 were grandfathered in as previously designated National Historic Landmarks.

Today, only 7% of the National Register listed properties are archeological properties. Of these, 2,144 are historical archeological properties and 2,902 are prehistoric properties. Most archeological properties are nominated as sites (3,130); 837 are districts, 263 are buildings, and 124 are structures. The listed archeological districts are composed of 16,658 contributing sites. Four archeological properties are classified as objects.

The five states with the largest number of listed archeological properties are New Mexico (310), Texas (294), Ohio (216), California (194) and Kentucky (184). The District of Columbia (3), Vermont (9), North Dakota (13), Montana (20), and Louisiana (21) have the least number of listed National Register archeological properties. Of the federal agencies, the National Park Service (244), Bureau of Land Management (238), and Forest Service (222) have nominated most of the archeological sites and districts. Unlike other kinds of properties, a large percentage of listed archeological properties (43%) are in public ownership.

All archeological properties are listed under Criterion D; that is, they are listed because study of the property has yielded or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history. Many also are listed under one or more of the other National Register criteria. For example, 1,166 are listed under Criterion A because of their association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.¹¹ There are 207 archeological properties listed under Criterion B because they are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past, and 859 are nominated under Criterion C because they embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; represent the work of a master; or are of high artistic design.

Archeological properties have always been included in the National Register. Given the above statistics, however, they obviously are under-represented in the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register has and will continue to take steps to increase the number and representation of archeological properties in its inventory. *National Register Bulletin 36: Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Historical Archeological Sites and Districts* is available now. Although the examples used in the bulletin are historical archeological properties, the guidance also applies to nominating prehistoric properties. The new National Register nomination forms are easy to complete. All of the text sections are printed on the continuation sheets, and the form is available on computer diskette. Archeologists find that the multiple property nomination format is especially useful, given the nature of archeological sites and districts. In addition, agencies that interpret their cultural resources have discovered that multiple property cover documents are excellent sources of synthesized information.

Those who drafted the National Historic Preservation Act saw the National Register as a planning tool: its main purpose being a listing of properties at the federal, state, and local level that are worthy of preservation. For archeological resources, this is the most important aspect of the National Register. In order to make wise decisions about preservation and long-term management of resources, decision-makers must know which archeological resources are important and, more importantly, why they are important. Listing archeological properties in the National Register can provide this information.

Notes

¹ National Trust for Historic Preservation, *With Heritage So Rich* (Washington, DC: The Preservation Press, 1983), 194.

² Thomas King, Patricia P. Hickman, and Gary Berg, *Anthropology in Historic Preservation: Caring for Culture's Clutter* (New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1977), 34-35; Ruthann Knudson, "Ethical Decision Making and Participation in the Politics of Archaeology," in *Ethics and Values in Archaeology*, ed. Ernestene L. Green (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 259; James (Mike) Lambe, Legislative Liaison, National Park Service, Personal Communication, 24 January 1994.

³ In order to "allay fears of bureau archeologists that the new OAHF would be controlled by historians," "Archeology" preceded "Historic Preservation" in the name. James A. Glass, "The National Historic Preservation Program, 1957 to 1969," (Ph.D. diss. Cornell University, 1987), 220, fn 45.

⁴ Barry Mackintosh, *The National Historic Preservation Act and the National Park Service: A History* (Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, History Division, 1986), 1-4.

⁵ Glass, "The National Historic Preservation Program," 324-325; James A. Glass, *The Beginnings of a New National Historic Preservation Program, 1957 to 1969* (Nashville, TN: The American Association for State and Local History and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, 1990), 23; Mackintosh, 24.

⁶ Minutes of the Historic Preservation Task Force, 28 November 1966, National Register administrative history files, National Park Service, Washington, DC: 1.

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⁷ The National Park Service has included both the prehistory and historic periods in “history” since at least 1936. Verne E. Chatelain, Acting Assistant Director, National Park Service, introductory statement in minutes of 23 January 1936 meeting of the (Educational) Advisory Board. National Park Service, History Division, National Historic Landmarks files, Washington, DC: 1-3.

⁸ Glass, “The National Preservation Program,” 456.

⁹ Glass, *The Beginnings*, 363, fn 56.

¹⁰ Richard W. Sellars, a National Park Service historian, characterized Park Service archeologists as “not in power, as far as Washington goes, and yet independent and sort of carrying on their own programs.” Robert Utley agreed that this was an accurate description of the archeologists and their participation in the Park Service’s historic preservation program—especially in the early days of OAHP. See Richard Sellars and Melody Webb, *An Interview with Robert M. Utley on the History of Historic Preservation in the National Park Service—1947-1980*

(24 September 1985 - 27 December 1985), Professional Papers No. 16, Southwest Cultural Resources Center, Santa Fe (1988): 80-81.

¹¹ National Register criteria A, B, and C also are based on the 1966 national significance criteria used by the National Park Service’s Historic Sites Survey. In 1967, for example, when the criteria were established, national significance Criterion 1 read as follows: Structures or sites at which events occurred that have made a significant contribution to, and are identified prominently with, or which outstandingly represent, the broad cultural, political, economic, military, or social history of the Nation, and from which an understanding and appreciation of the larger patterns of our American heritage may be gained. Criterion 1 became Criterion A. Note that prior to 1960, Criterion 1 referred to “broad aspects of prehistoric and historic American life.”

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Research, Stewardship, Visibility, and Planning

Four Reasons to Nominate Archeological Sites to the National Register

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Today, archeological sites make up only a tiny fraction (substantially less than 10%) of the more than 62,000 historic properties included in the National Register of Historic Places. In Virginia, for example, there are more than 26,000 recorded archeological sites—only 142 are listed on the National Register under Criterion D. There are four major reasons why archeological sites should be nominated to the National Register: research, stewardship, visibility, and planning.

Research: The utility of the National Register in anthropological, archeological, and historical research has been poorly explored. The Register is a natural resource for cross-cultural, geographical, functional, or comparative studies. Jurisdictional boundaries that would hamper multi-state investigations are easily overcome with databases such as the National Register Information System (NRIS). If, for example, you were researching the archeology of 18th-century military sites in Virginia, you could easily learn through the NRIS that the Old Dominion contains 14 out of 165 recorded military sites in the original 13 colonies.

Stewardship is an important goal for the private landowners and public sector land managers of signifi-

cant archeological sites. Listing on the National Register assures these land trustees that the archeological site on their property is worthy of protection and preservation. National Register nominations spell out exactly what is important about an individual site and where that site is located within the owner’s property. For land owners and managers, this is an invaluable service.

Visibility: Historic buildings enjoy a unique advantage over most archeological sites, they are generally visible—and hence inherently more understandable—to the tax paying public. The National Register is an effective means to elucidate the importance of “underground” resources. Could thieves have excavated over 250 holes on the Yorktown, VA, battlefield recently, if the general public was more aware that our historic places also contain important archeological remains?

Planning: The National Register is a unique preservation planning tool that decision-makers at the local, state, and federal levels can use to effectively manage our archeological heritage. Knowledge about the potential extent and character of archeological resources within a given project area would greatly improve the chance that sites would be preserved early in the development process, rather than being an unfortunate discovery during construction.

Listing archeological properties in the National Register of Historic Places serves a variety of constituencies, including archeologists (research), land owners (stewardship), the general public (visibility), and land use decision-makers (planning).

As the only nationwide database that documents the quantity and quality of our country’s cultural resources, the National Register should be an important tool in the preservation of archeological sites. However, until the miss-representation of archeological properties within the National Register is corrected through more nominations, the potential of this information resource is limited.

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