

From the Secretary

In our daily lives, the canon of “unlimited low-density growth” has torn our towns and communities apart. Schools and markets, once within walking distance, have been stretched to driving distances. Banks and restaurants are reduced to drive-thru windows. We live a sea of subdivisions, strip malls that run Main Street out of business, parking lots that lap at the walls of our schools and workplaces, and generic buildings that further degrade our sense of place and attachment to the land.

All over the country, people are standing up for their heritage, and for the identity that sets them apart from the rest of the world. From Charleston to San Francisco, New Orleans to Chicago, neighborhoods have defined themselves through laws that protect their local heritage. Philadelphia preserves its architectural mosaic that stretches from colonial-era brick buildings like Independence Hall, to Modernism’s PSFS

(Philadelphia Saving Fund Society) building. New Orleans’ wrought iron balconies of the Vieux Carré still firmly anchor the character and identity of that bayou city. With the help from the National Park Service, urban, older suburban, and rural areas have remained rooted, and impart their identity to the people who live and work there.

Many people have discovered the truth that, to know where you’re going, you have to know where you’ve been. They know exactly what makes each neighborhood unique, what gives a place its identity, and by celebrating, cherishing, and restoring what makes their neighborhoods or landscape unique, they strengthen their own identities.

—Bruce Babbitt
Secretary of the Interior

From the Director

The American people feel themselves at their best in historic places. Historic places are landscapes and shrines, places of wonder and reverence, but they are more than places. They have been and they are containers of experience. They remind ourselves how proud we are to be Americans together; we feel the thrill at being the common owners of magnificence.

This is a good time to affirm the importance of the real, the tangible, the continuous and, perhaps most important, of those experiences we have in common. Historic places are those places in which we feel more intensely that we belong, and that we belong together.

The people of the Service act as partners in localities in every region of the country in conservation and preservation, toward the sustaining and renewal of community. It is for our generation to provide the Service with the tools to do that work better, to aid without owning, to

encourage, to endorse, and to improve the ability of the American community to protect itself through common undertakings. States, localities, conservancies, and land trusts can work more effectively through cooperative agreements, through Main Street renewal, through easements protecting the integrity of neighborhoods and pueblos.

All over America, in towns and villages, people are banding together to guide a common future. Historic places are common ground.

—Roger G. Kennedy
Director
National Park Service