

## States Take Preservation Beyond NHPA

**F**or 30 years State Historic Preservation Offices have delivered historic preservation services to the nation. Responsible for implementing the federal-state program created in 1966 by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the states have been the bridge between the National Park Service on one hand and governments at all levels and the public on the other. The act created a program based on national standards and a framework to direct federal investment in historic properties. States collect information through surveys, prioritize needs through planning, and deliver the services and monies to communities and historic property owners. They translate National Park Service program directives into a broad range of preservation activities. Over the years, the program has matured, expanded, and grown more complex.

Community-based public and private efforts to preserve historic sites, such as the 1853 movement to save George Washington's home at Mount Vernon, Virginia, have a long history in the United States. Although state and local programs existed prior to the NHPA, they primarily were historic

site management and marker programs. The U.S. Conference of Mayor's 1965 report, *With Heritage So Rich*, played a major role in the passage of the NHPA. The NHPA led to the creation of active state historic preservation programs in the 50 states and six territories. States passed legislation establishing programs and state liaison positions to receive federal grant assistance for statewide survey, planning, and

preservation projects. The State Historic Preservation Offices were placed variously in independent commissions, a broader cultural or historical agency, or a natural resources agency. A few were placed in housing and economic development agencies. This federal-state partnership program has been challenging and productive.

Starting with little definition of the states' role, amendments to the NHPA better defined the responsibilities of the State Historic Preservation Offices. Local governments and Native groups were invited to participate in the program through amendments passed in 1980 and 1992. Historic preservation funds to the Certified Local Governments (CLGs), administered by the states, help establish and strengthen local programs. Many communities have supplemented federal monies with local investment including Main Street projects, loan programs, property tax incentives, and heritage tourism development. Today there are over 2,000 local historic preservation commissions in the United States. Historic preservation funds have helped Indian tribes, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians develop cultural programs and identify significant properties. To date, Native groups have completed over 200 cultural projects under the tribal Indian grant program.

In the 1970s, an investment tax credit program for rehabilitating historic properties started. Changes in federal tax laws in 1986 reduced the tax credits for rehabilitating depreciable historic properties. Even at a substantially lower use level, the rehabilitation tax credits today are a leading historic preservation development tool. In fiscal year 1995, state offices provided technical assistance for 529 projects that generated \$467 million in construction investment, created 7,472 jobs in construction and 6,538 jobs in other areas, and increased revenue to state and local governments by an estimated \$7 to \$11.7 million. Some states have found additional funds to leverage investment in historic places. Arizona, for example, has a lottery-funded \$10 million annual recreation, heritage, and environment grants program established by ballot initiative in 1990.

State Historic Preservation Offices are integral partners in the review and compliance (Section 106) process. In addition to facilitating the process, they promote state and local interests



*The Distant Early Warning Line Station, Bullen Point, AK, is one in a series of stations of the late 1950s and 1960s located across Alaska and Canada. These stations monitored enemy planes over the North Pole by providing for radar equipment to be located in the radome, which opened and scanned the skies. The Alaska State Historic Preservation Office worked with the Department of Defense in documenting and evaluating these important historic places from the Cold War period. Historic American Buildings Survey photo.*

during consultations on federal undertakings. The inventories maintained by the SHPO are a critical resource to all the parties in the compliance process. The process has proven successful and is often the only process that raises historic properties as an issue in federal undertakings. In FY 1995, the states reviewed 83,000 federal projects, 10,400 of which impacted historic and archeological properties. Only a very small percent of these projects could not be resolved and were considered by the full membership of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Most of the work was accomplished at the state level with consultation between the SHPO, federal agency, and Advisory Council staff.

When the NHPA was passed, it was believed that a survey for all historic properties could be done in just a few years. Thirty years later survey continues. Historic and architectural significance and National Register eligibility are dynamic. States have helped broaden the criteria from a program that has origins in high style architecture and associations with famous people to include aircraft, traditional cultural properties, vernacular architecture, cemeteries, and Cold War sites.

With the decline in federal funding for preservation and reduced tax incentives, states have had fewer resources with which to initiate National Register nominations. Many states have focused instead on a customer service activity that responds to requests from the general public, local governments, and federal agencies. Listing is an important component of many community historic preservation programs. A typical example is Idaho which has several of its 24 CLGs actively working on National Register nominations each year. Nationally, the number of National Register listings has increased approximately 1,500 per year. As state offices put priority on districts with multiple buildings over individual properties, the number of contributing resources listed has climbed by 30,000 per year.

While historic preservation program responsibilities have increased, funding has not. In 1979, state programs received approximately \$60 million in federal matching funds, twice what it is today. Grants to preserve historic properties were eliminated between 1982 and 1989. States could use federal preservation funds to identify, evaluate, and list properties on the National Register, but they could not provide grants to preserve them. The approximately \$30 million in the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) is apportioned among the 56 state programs and barely covers the costs to provide the basic required activities. The modest reduction of 5% to state programs this year meant serious loss of investment in historic properties. The HPF is not only matched by state and

local governments, it stimulates private investment in historic preservation. A 1994 University of Rhode Island study documented that \$1 from the HPF resulted in \$63 in non-federal historic preservation investment.

In the 1990s, state historic preservation programs have been taking preservation beyond the NHPA. States have been creatively seeking new sources of funds for historic preservation projects. Many have found partnerships with the tourism industry rewarding. Most state programs have become more active in education. A number of states have started Archeology Weeks. Other states have fostered stewardship programs. The state offices have been conducting public relations campaigns to connect non-profit groups and private owners. With less public funding available, state preservation programs are encouraging private and community-based investment in historic resources.

Each state program is unique. Most State Historic Preservation Offices have state program responsibilities and positions in addition to the federal liaison responsibilities. Through its organization, the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers and individually, the states work with the National Park Service to keep the federal program flexible enough to reflect state priorities and needs in implementing the national program. States have helped preservation reach audiences not involved in historic preservation in 1966. As George Percy, Florida State Historic Preservation Officer, said at the National Trust for Historic Preservation's 1995 annual meeting, we must make preservation relevant and accessible to persons not involved in the field. Florida is engaging the broader public through heritage education, tourism programs and marketing, and popular public information in an effort to expand a fundamental appreciation of history.

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the NHPA, historic preservation faces many challenges. How will computers change our lives in the next five years? Can preservation survive the government downsizing? Can preservation be relevant to the next century? Can historic preservation help communities revitalize themselves? Can historic preservation help conserve world resources by recycling older buildings? Can historic preservation contribute to a renewed sense of belonging to nations torn apart by poverty, economic dislocation, and rapid change? As these questions are addressed, the states have much to contribute to the dialogue.

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