



GET YOUTH INVOLVED

to Build a Better Preservation Ethic – and Nation

By Milford Wayne Donaldson, FAIA

A wise person once noted that the best time to plant a tree is 50 years ago. The next best time is today. The national historic preservation community has always depended upon volunteers and local action to preserve America's heritage. We need to get those acorns that we should have planted a half-decade ago planted now.

The National Alliance of Preservation Commissions is uniquely situated to partner with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation (National Trust), federal agencies, SHPOs and other key players in historic preservation to reinvigorate the preservation community by bringing more young people into the field. As the 40th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) approached in October 2006, the ACHP thought it was a good time to take stock and see what worked well and where improvements were necessary.

October 2006 at the Preserve America Summit. Preserve America is a federal initiative that encourages and supports community efforts to preserve and enjoy our cultural and natural heritage. Part of the 2006 summit was a contingent of young people, organized and sponsored by what was then known as The History Channel's (now officially known as HISTORY) *Save Our History* project, who were considering historic preservation issues from their perspectives and informing Summit participants and the larger preservation community. (see <http://www.preserveamerica.gov/youthsummit.html>)

A series of panels were held prior to the anniversary, and participants gathered in New Orleans, Louisiana, in

Subsequent to the Summit and informed by all the panels that studied various aspects of the nation's preservation

Prior to the Preserve America Summit in New Orleans in October 2006, an expert panel of educators and historic preservationists held a two-day brainstorming session in Detroit to discuss how to create a stronger and more widespread national preservation ethic. That panel's recommendations, melded with findings from other groups, led to the recommendation to work across the national preservation community to bring more youth into preservation activities with strategies such as youth summits and service learning partnerships with local schools.



infrastructure under NHPA, a number of recommendations emerged. One of them is critically important to the future of historic preservation. It was: *Engage youth in historic preservation by promoting programs that involve them in hands-on preservation activities and through the possible establishment of an ongoing youth summit as part of the Preserve America initiative.*

At the Preserve America Summit and in subsequent programs the ACHP has participated in and used as models, the inspiration, energy, and insight of fully engaged youths has been transformative.

The ACHP has promoted several paths to involve young people in historic preservation. One has been to urge federal agencies to engage young people in their youth programs (notably the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture) as well as other preservation and affiliated entities such as the National Trust, the Small Museum Association, the American Association for State and Local History, the Partnership for the National Scenic and Historic Trails, State Historic Preservation Officers and many others. The ACHP recommends using programs such as Service Learning in partnership with local community schools. Another approach has been to stimulate a series of local youth summits involving partnerships with preservation organizations, federal, state, and local government entities, schools, and others to help with preservation projects. The aim of these efforts is to create a more diverse and younger group of Americans who are involved in historic preservation activities, volunteerism, public service, and create a wider national historic preservation ethic.

While this sounds like a great centralized strategy, actually these educational and involvement efforts are all largely local in nature.



At Harper's Ferry Middle School, WV, a project by 70 students who created six video podcasts on the eve of the 150th anniversary of John Brown's Raid in 2009 was unveiled by the partnership that created the effort that resulted in student-to-student interpretive materials for Harper's Ferry National Historical Park. The ACHP, the National Park Service, the middle school, and the Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership (JTHGP) worked on the project. The JTHGP is working on similar Of the Student, By the Student, For the Student efforts to create interpretive materials and involve youths from many other school districts and 13 National Park Service units contained within the JTHGP Heritage Area.

The ACHP is participating with other federal agencies and their partners to integrate programs such as service learning and youth summits for preservation into this energetic and effective effort.

For more information on youth summits, see <http://coloradoyouthsummit.org/> and <http://historiccorps.org/>.

Service learning is an effective and efficient strategy that can begin as early as kindergarten. For more information on service learning and historic preservation, visit <http://www.achp.gov/youth.html> and <http://www.hallowedground.org/Education/Service-Learning-Programs>.



Young intern participants in the 12th Conference on National Scenic and Historic Trails helped accomplish three service projects at Traveler's Rest National Historic Landmark along the Lolo Trail, where the Lewis and Clark Expedition camped on both its westward and eastward journeys. The actual campsite was bisected by this gravel road, which was replanted in native vegetation. The Lewis and Clark Expedition camped in military fashion, and its main camp fire was placed just to the left of the person at the far left of the picture.

Fortunately for the preservation community and the ACHP, the Obama Administration has launched an effort called America's Great Outdoors to bring the benefits of authentic experience of natural and cultural places to the nation's youth. Many exciting things are taking place and the program is evolving at a rapid pace. America's Great Outdoors is particularly interested in reaching younger Americans who are more urban and less readily acquainted with the nation's rich heritage regarding public lands, stewardship, conservation and cultural and historic preservation than the generations that came before them. The effort seeks to engage, employ, and educate young people (see www.youthGO.gov).

These are grassroots activities that depend upon volunteers forming alliances with federal agencies, natural and cultural preservation nonprofits, and local schools to create opportunities for place-based learning, stewardship, and civic participation. Preservation commissions are natural partners in spurring such efforts, since the volunteer stewards that characterize commission memberships are precisely the sort of people who are likely to initiate these projects.

The ACHP has discovered that involving youth in educational and volunteer activities is one of those cases of a rising tide lifting all boats. Organizations involved primarily in environmental or natural conservation activities benefit historic preservation by their efforts. Preservation commissioners find that working to introduce youth to historic preservation also offers the benefits of civic involvement, community pride, and serves as a conduit to interesting young people in the professions typically occupied by preservation commissioners. Plus, partnering with local schools

inevitably involves parents and a larger segment of the community in historic preservation matters.

The natural and cultural preservation communities realize that they need to connect with and include more young people to create a stronger preservation ethic that will not only endure but grow. You could say that the necessity of bringing young people to historic preservation is somewhat parallel to the first rule of initiating Section 106 consultation: It needs to start as early as possible in order to be most effective and useful.

For those who may not be familiar with Section 106, in a nutshell it is a law that requires federal agencies to consider the effects of projects carried out, approved, or funded by them on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places (historic properties), and provide the ACHP with a reasonable opportunity to comment on them. While Section 106 requires federal agencies to attempt to negotiate measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the adverse effects of their undertakings on historic properties, it does not mandate in favor of preservation.

Oversight of the Section 106 process under the NHPA is the bread and butter activity of the ACHP. There are approximately 100,000 federal undertakings that go through the Section 106 processes every year. The vast majority are handled by State Historic Preservation Officers on the state or local levels, often with commissioners or review boards involved either by direct involvement or consultation and education. Most 106 cases are relatively routine and/or do not pose significant threats to historic places, and never need the direct attention of the ACHP membership. However, several hundred cases do directly involve the ACHP staff each

The Colorado Preserve America Youth Summits initiated by Colorado Preservation, Inc., that have spread to other states, done in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service, were recognized by the ACHP as exemplary ways of involving youth in historic preservation activities. Participating in the award ceremony were (from left) Harris Sherman, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, Department of Agriculture; Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior; Ann Pritzlaff, ACHP member who initiated the summits; and Milford Wayne Donaldson, FAIA, ACHP Chairman.



year. Further, when a Section 106 process involves a National Historic Landmark, the federal agency leading the process must notify the National Park Service and may be required to minimize harm to that landmark.

Among the more significant current contemporary preservation concerns that are reflected in Section 106 cases are downsizing city centers and sustainability issues, conventional and emerging alternative energy development and related transmission corridors, and how federal agencies handle government-to-government consultation with Indian tribes. In fact, the ACHP has created a special section, the Office of Native American Affairs, because this issue and related concerns like dealing with Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs) are of such key importance to the federal government and the larger preservation community in the USA. Section 106 is an essential and important tool for local communities.

The NHPA itself resulted in 1966 from widespread local concern that federal activities – notably highway construction and urban renewal – were heedlessly destroying too many important historic resources. The U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National Trust, with local historic preservation partners across the nation, were instrumental in urging Congress to enact the legislation to “stop the federal bulldozer.” Section 106 is an important tool that continues to function in this way.

The ACHP would be pleased to work with you in starting up some of these youth involvement efforts in your communities, and we would be pleased to provide any additional information you might desire. The best place to start is at our Web site, www.achp.gov. Or directly contact Bruce Milhans, communications coordinator, at bmilhans@achp.gov, 202-606-8513, to reach the right person at the ACHP to provide the information you need.

The ACHP has recently published an updated “Protecting Historic Properties: A Citizen’s Guide to Section 106 Review” that is available to local preservation interests. It is available at the ACHP Website at: <http://www.achp.gov/docs/CitizenGuide.pdf>.

The ACHP offers Section 106 training tailored for differing needs and professional backgrounds several times a year. The class schedule is available at <http://www.achp.gov/106select.html>.

Other useful materials about Section 106, and its regulations, can be found at: <http://www.achp.gov/work106.html>.

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