

PRESERVATION AND ACADEMIA:  
THE NEED FOR INTERFACE

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Summary of Remarks

Introduction

Ordinarily my introduction would be brief and perfunctory. In this case, however, I want to do more than identify myself and tell where I work. Since the audience is likely made up of academicians who have had little, if any, direct contact with the National Park Service (NPS), I think it is important that you have a clear understanding of a historian's duties and responsibilities in my particular branch of the NPS. You need to know that neither I nor any of the other people in my branch (historians and architects) have anything to do with the historic resources in the parks. Another branch of the NPS has responsibility for that. Instead, my branch of the NPS is involved with historic properties that are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Our most important program for preserving these is the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 which offers tax benefits to property owners who rehabilitate their buildings for income producing purposes. This brings up another important point. While I occasionally have the opportunity to do some research and writing, most of my work is administrative and involves reviewing applications from owners of historic properties who are seeking tax benefits. Thus, I function as a public historian in the fullest sense of that term.

NPS Relationships with Academia

Given the nature of the work in my particular area of the NPS, there are no broad, ongoing research agendas. By the time a property owner comes to us seeking tax benefits for an historic rehabilitation project, most of the questions regarding the historic character of that property have already been answered. With few exceptions, properties already have been listed officially in the National Register of Historic Places individually or as part of a historic district. Much of our time is spent determining if the work an owner is proposing for his or her property is acceptable. To improve the quality of historic rehabilitation projects, the NPS has developed several series of publications for property owners, architects, contractors, and others involved with such projects. The newest of these is called "Tech Notes" and it contains brief case studies on a variety of technical issues. Such publications are prepared both in-house and by outside institutions including universities. Georgia Tech has prepared several works on historic window repair

and is preparing publications on other subjects. It has also assembled and field-tested a computerized data base system for determining the repair priorities and cost estimates for endangered National Historic Landmarks, the most important category of National Register properties. We have also worked with Clemson University in developing a data base system to track the hundreds of ERTA (Economic Recovery Tax Act, 1981) projects we receive annually. We are only beginning to understand the kind of information that can be pulled from this system and its applications. From this, it can be seen that NPS research needs are specific and geared towards solving problems that cannot be solve in-house due to a lack of manpower or expertise.

#### NPS Programs and Opportunities for Research

I believe the preservation programs managed by the NPS offer excellent research opportunities for historians. For example, the computerized data on the Economic Recovery Tax Act program for this region could be manipulated in a variety of ways to examine the impact of preservation in towns and cities. Specific categories of buildings--industrial, commercial, residential, etc.--could be studied as well. More detailed information on buildings that have been rehabilitated can be found in our microfiche collection and our files. The Washington NPS office is in the process of computerizing all National Register listings for the whole country. Numerous research possibilities will result from this project. A word of caution, however. The NPS is not structured for the purposes of academic research. We are not a library or archival repository. Other than provide you with access to the data, there is a real limit to the services we can offer. Your best approach would be to come see us, get familiar with our materials, and then use those that suit your particular research needs.