



# Preserving African American Historic Places

By Brent Leggs, Kerri Rubman, and Byrd Wood



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**The National Trust for Historic Preservation** works to save America's historic places for the next generation. We take direct, on-the-ground action when historic buildings and sites are threatened. Our work helps build vibrant, sustainable communities. We advocate with governments to save America's heritage. We strive to create a cultural legacy that is as diverse as the nation itself so that all of us can take pride in our part of the American story.

**ON THE COVER:** The African Meeting House in Boston tells the story of the abolitionist movement in America. Photo: Museum of African American History/Shawmut Design & Construction

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# Preserving African American Historic Places



## INTRODUCTION

by Brent Leggs

In 2004 my job as research assistant for the Kentucky Heritage Council was to inventory Rosenwald Schools in Kentucky. I traveled across the state to document what were the most advanced, architecturally designed school buildings constructed for African American students between 1917 and 1932. This innovative school construction program was developed by the founder of Tuskegee University, Booker T. Washington, and was partially funded by philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears Roebuck & Company. During this survey process, I learned that my mother and father both attended Rosenwald Schools in rural Kentucky.

I was always excited when I found a Rosenwald School standing. Many times, however, nothing was left. It was as if these places had never existed; only landscapes remained, rich with memories of students walking to school. In many cases entire communities had disappeared. People had left rural areas for the big city, leaving significant parts of the history of African Americans behind. I realized these stories would be all but erased from memory if we didn't act to protect them.

My experience has shown me that the preservation of historic African American sites often happens on an informal basis. Each time someone gives to a church's building fund, that person is helping rebuild historic fabric. Whenever volunteers mow the grass at a historic cemetery,

**At the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tenn., visitors can tour the Lorraine Motel, where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was killed. The museum features interactive multimedia and state-of-the-art exhibits on the Montgomery bus boycotts, the strikes by Memphis sanitation workers in the 1960s, and Dr. King's dream for America.**

Photo: National Civil Rights Museum

they are conserving an important cultural landscape. When relatives gather at the family farm for a reunion or to celebrate Juneteenth (June 19, 1865, when emancipation was widely announced), they are honoring their past.

To be sure, some significant sites associated with African American history are

formally recognized and serve as permanent reminders about our ancestors and their journey in America. For instance, the African Meeting House in Boston relates the story of the abolitionist movement in America. The Lorraine Motel

make preservation happen. It presents an overview of traditional preservation networks and their roles, offers tips on how to get preservation underway in your community, and looks at the various legal and financial tools that help protect

*Cultural Resources Management* 23, No. 8-2000, page 5.) For instance, visitors can walk up the narrow and crooked steps to the slave galleries inside St. Augustine's Church in New York City and see where African Americans were forced to sit during religious services for much of the 19th century. At this place, visitors can experience tangible, authentic history.

Preservation contributes much to a forgetful society. It empowers black youth by revealing historical themes besides slavery, including entrepreneurship, civil rights, entertainment, sports, education, and political activism. The extensive archives of Madame C. J. Walker (1867–1919), a successful African American businesswoman and philanthropist, teach us about the entrepreneurial spirit of African American women. The site where hip-hop was founded in the Bronx brings life to the story of a revolution in music. Seeing firsthand the homes of civil rights activists and the Alabama churches that served as their gathering places reminds a younger generation how a nonviolent movement changed this nation.

By preserving historic sites that tell the story of African Americans in this country we draw attention to the contributions of both ordinary and extraordinary people. Such stories might otherwise be lost because urban renewal and the out-migration of blacks destroyed or led to the abandonment of many African American communities. By saving African American landmarks we can stimulate revitalization and foster interest in places that today seem to exist without history or meaning. Indeed these places can serve as anchors reviving our sense of community.

**The slave galleries at St. Augustine's Church in New York City have been preserved, allowing visitors to experience first-hand where slaves were required to sit during church services.**

Photo: Richard Rivera

## “THE GENERAL RULE IS THAT while property may be regulated to a certain extent, if regulation goes too far it will be recognized as a taking.”

in Memphis, where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated, is a monument to the civil rights movement.

But relatively few places that are important to or representative of the African American experience enjoy this level of recognition.

Preserving a historic building, neighborhood, or landscape takes more than just a connection to place or a love of history. It requires a basic understanding of preservation tools, nonprofit management, strategic planning, real estate, business practices, project management, and finance.

To help you and your community get started in preservation activities, this booklet introduces you to the world of historic preservation, explaining some of the key players and procedures that

historic properties. There are a variety of approaches to preserving historic places and each one requires different levels of expertise, resources, and commitment. Because there is no one-size-fits-all method, this booklet includes six case studies to illustrate various strategies for preserving and honoring historic places associated with African American history.

### Why Preserve?

Why should we care about historic African American theaters, churches, schools, residences, gardens, neighborhoods, main streets, burial grounds, parks, hotels, juke joints, and recording studios?

African American scholar James Horton says that a single visit to a history site makes a life once lived real. (“On-Site Learning: The Power of Historic Places,”





### Early and Ongoing Efforts

We can take inspiration from earlier preservation champions and their accomplishments.

The first site associated with the black experience in America to receive recognition at the national level was the birthplace of agricultural scientist George Washington Carver in Diamond, Mo., dedicated as a National Monument in 1943. Other sites soon followed, such as the site where Booker T. Washington was born into slavery, a National Monument near Hardy, Va., protected in 1956; Tuskegee University, a National Historic Landmark designated in 1965; and Hampton University listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1969.

In the 1960s, grassroots activists new to preservation established the first wave of historic preservation activity in the black community. Without any formal training in historic preservation, these champions saved many African American historic places through an organic learning process, resilience, and unwavering commitment for their mission.

For instance, when community activist Joan Maynard learned in the late 1960s about Weeksville, a once-vibrant but later forgotten African American village in Brooklyn founded in the 1830s, she felt compelled to revive some of its buildings as tangible reminders of its people and their accomplishments. She was motivated by the desire to instill pride in current African American

residents in the area, especially young people. Marshaling help from students, community groups, and preservationists, she accomplished her goal when three houses of Weeksville opened to the public in 2005. The Weeksville Heritage Center she once led continues to expand and thrive. (Read more about this on page 18.)

Believing in the importance of home ownership and citizen engagement as keys to improving communities, urban leader Carl B. Westmoreland founded the Mount Auburn Good Housing Foundation in Cincinnati in 1967 with just \$7,000 in seed money from a single donor. The historic neighborhood of Mount Auburn, often considered Cincinnati's first suburb, was primarily an African American neighborhood facing disinvestment. Starting with the repair of buildings that were most damaging to the neighborhood, the foundation eventually renovated more than 2,000 homes and businesses there. Today Mount Auburn is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and has been transformed into a safe and vibrant community.

Since then a new wave of African American preservationists has gotten involved in saving places all across America. These new advocates include retirees, architects, nonprofit consultants, historians, and recent graduates of historic preservation programs. They are advancing preservation by establishing networks that foster cross-mentoring

**The extensive collection of photos and documents in the Madame C.J. Walker Family archives tells the story of her remarkable life. These historical photos show her home, Villa Lewaro, which is located in Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y. It was designed by Vertner Tandy, the first registered African-American architect.**

Photos courtesy A'Leia Bundles/Madam Walker Family Archives/madamcjwalker.com

and stronger professional relationships.

Several organizations are working to identify African American sites in different regions of the country. The African American Heritage Preservation Foundation ([www.aahpfdn.org](http://www.aahpfdn.org)) was established in 1994 as a resource group for organizations mostly in the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast. In at least seven states, all-volunteer commissions or committees work in partnership with state government agencies to identify black heritage sites within their state. Other nonprofit efforts devoted to the protection of African American historic places include the Florida African American Heritage Network ([www.faahpn.com/faaph](http://www.faahpn.com/faaph)) as well as dedicated programs of several statewide and local nonprofit preservation organizations.

In fact, from Maine to California, individuals and nonprofit organizations are working to protect and restore African American landmarks and historical artifacts. They are revitalizing our historic neighborhoods, conserving



The slave dwelling at Sotterley Plantation, an 18th-century tobacco plantation located on the banks of the Patuxent River in Maryland, has been carefully restored.

Photo: the Slave Dwelling Project, Joe McGill

landscapes rich in beauty or cultural meaning, showcasing valuable collections, researching and documenting places, interpreting our history in new and creative ways, and striving toward financial sustainability and their own organizational longevity.

Yet there is still much to be done.

### Challenges

Preservation is rewarding, but challenging, work. Some challenges will especially come into play when dealing with African American sites; others are typical for all types of preservation projects.

There is a common perception among the general public that historic preservation is only about saving sites associated with rich white men's history. Historically, there's truth in that perception; preservation began as an attempt to memorialize the founding fathers. In the past few decades, however, more focus has been on sites that tell the story of all Americans—African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Pacific Islander Americans, women, and gays and lesbians.

African American heritage is often found in small, unadorned structures. For the most part these are not as grand or visually impressive as traditionally recognized places such as the homes of

political leaders or wealthy industrialists. Many are in poor condition or have been extensively altered. In spite of this, they can offer a tangible and rich reminder of African American heritage.

Often the individuals most interested in saving African American sites are new to preservation. They work to raise concern within a black community that is just learning the value of preservation and also cultivate broader support through conventional means.

And, as is true with many preservation projects, there are the barriers of time and money. This type of work takes patience and persistence. It can take years, sometimes 10 or more, to bring a building back to life and see it maintained in productive use. It requires a financially sustainable organization with an effective board. Leaders, staff, and volunteers must remain committed to their preservation project and stay focused on the long-term goals. It took more than a decade and a committed board to save the Scrabble School, a historic Rosenwald School in Rappahannock County, Va. Today the building houses the Rappahannock Senior Center and the Scrabble School Heritage Center thanks to the hard work of volunteers and former students.

Of course, raising funds and manag-

ing finances almost always causes concern as well. Unfortunately, grant options are limited and the process for obtaining them is very competitive. Most of us don't have rich friends to fly in and save the day with a big check. This means that anyone tackling a preservation project must think like a businessperson and develop a workable, flexible plan.

### Join In and Help Save History

After reading this publication, I hope that you will be ready to begin your preservation projects. You will be armed with some basic information that will help you rise above the challenges that you might face in your local communities. Although there will still be much to learn, you will feel grounded in the fundamentals of historic preservation and ready to identify, designate, and bring back to life significant historic resources that wait for our care and respect.

It is important to remember that there are many ways to get involved in a preservation project. You might be a strong fundraiser or have valuable contacts in the business community. Maybe you're an architect, engineer, or business professional who can offer your services for free. Perhaps you're willing to sit on a board, head a committee, or lead a walking tour. Supporting this movement can be as simple as volunteering or as complex as leading a nonprofit group through a restoration project or strategic planning process.

On your preservation journey, remember that together we are a strong and influential preservation community. By saving and honoring a collection of distinct and unique sites, we are helping to reshape America's collective memory. Each place saved that is part of the black



The 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., the site of racially motivated bombing in 1963, remains an active congregation located in the Birmingham Civil Rights District.

Photo: Jason Wallis for Jason Wallis Photography

experience in America—whether it tells a story of amazing accomplishments or human tragedy—provides an authentic representation of our existence.

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION OVERVIEW

In many ways, managing a preservation project will be similar to other kinds of community projects you may have taken part in—such as raising funds for school programs or the public library, serving as the leader of a youth group, organizing activities and social services for seniors, or conducting community clean-ups.

But there is a difference. When you take part in a preservation project, you can connect with, and gain encouragement and help from, a well-established network of local, state, and national preservation professionals and advocates. And you can draw on and apply existing methods and tools of the preservation field. For that reason, it is a good idea to

familiarize yourself with the fundamentals of historic preservation in America.

## The Federal Historic Preservation Program

Spurred by the alarming loss of historic properties and neighborhoods in the wake of “urban reform” and the push to construct interstate highways, Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) in 1966. While the act has been amended a few times, this is the federal preservation law under which the United States still operates today. NHPA accomplished four things of tremendous importance to promote and guide preservation nationwide:

- It created the National Register of Historic Places (discussed on page 13).
- It led to the appointment, in every state and territory, of a state historic preservation officer (SHPO) with responsibility for encouraging and assisting preservation efforts at the state level (see page 6).



- It established a program of grants to aid preservation to help states carry out the preservation responsibilities mandated to them by NHPA.
- It created an independent federal agency called the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, which advises the president and Congress on federal preservation policy, and comments on projects undertaken with federal involvement that could have an adverse effect on nationally designated historic places or places eligible for such designation. This role is discussed further on pages 8 and 15.

Federal preservation policy is carried out at the national level by the National Park Service, in the Department of the Interior, and at the state level by the SHPOs.

But what has made the American preservation movement a true success story is that the federal government is not the sole player. Public-private partnerships have been crucial to many preservation projects. Many preservation activities are, and have always been, undertaken solely by private individuals or groups (who may or may not think of their work as “preservation”), with no government involvement of any kind. Other efforts are led by statewide and or local nonprofit organizations. Often there is collaboration between public-sector and private, nonprofit partners—and perhaps for-profit partners as well, such as real estate developers.

The main public- and private-sector groups that drive the nation’s historic preservation movement are discussed below.

### What Do We Preserve?

Historic preservation is primarily concerned with protecting, maintaining, and supporting the continued use of physical places, and understanding and sharing the reasons why these sites are significant. A project might be as focused as working to restore a single historic theater marquee or modest cottage, for example, or as broad as

turning a massive industrial site into a mixed-use development, or establishing guidelines on how residents can maintain the historic character of an entire neighborhood.

Typically, preservation projects address:

- Individual buildings/properties. This is the most common type of preservation project for a citizens group to undertake, and often the reason the group came into being in the first place.
- Landscapes, such as a public park or a cemetery.
- Clusters of properties in close proximity, for example a row of houses or Main Street businesses; an entire residential or commercial neighborhood; or a property that includes both structures and landscapes, such as a farmstead, educational campus, or industrial site.
- Groups of properties related by theme or type. A community might wish to study and protect, as a group, all of its historic schools, churches, or theaters, for example. Or it may want to honor the sites (homes, businesses, churches) associated with its founders, or places associated with historic events such as civil rights activities.

Of course, there are numerous other aspects of cultural heritage besides buildings and physical places that are important to study and honor: holiday and daily traditions, regional crafts and skills, food specialties, local dialects and stories, artifacts such as photographs and furniture, and more. While not directly considered “historic preservation,” efforts to save and appreciate non-tangible heritage fill in the details of the community’s story, and bring greater understanding of the historic physical places that preservationists work to protect. And so a preservation project may involve looking at other types of cultural expressions, or working closely with others who do this.

## PRESERVATION NETWORKS: YOUR POTENTIAL COLLEAGUES AND PARTNERS

You don’t have to go at it alone! When participating in a historic preservation project, you are part of a nationwide network of organizations and individuals who share your concerns. Some groups, especially local and statewide ones, may be eager to serve as project partners or to coordinate their efforts with yours. Others can offer advice, printed and online resources, training opportunities, and even access to funding. Get to know these related organizations to find common ground.

### State Government

#### State Historic Preservation Office

State historic preservation offices (SHPOs) are the state-level, public-sector preservation partners. By federal law, there is a state historic preservation office in all 50 states and in all territories. Depending on the government structure, this office may be found in different departments, such as Archives and History, Economic and Community Development, or Natural Resources. Each SHPO plays a central role in administering the national historic preservation program and provides technical assistance to citizens, communities, and organizations. These offices have a variety of responsibilities, which include identifying historic properties, considering National Register nominations, reviewing federal projects for their impact on historic properties, and administering tax credit projects and grant programs.

Some SHPOs sponsor and/or support volunteer commissions or committees specifically concerned with identifying and protecting African American heritage within the state. Such groups are found in Alabama, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, and South Carolina. In Georgia, for example, the African American Programs Coordinator in the SHPO provides staff services to the all-volunteer Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network.

The SHPO will often be your first and best source of information for making use of the preservation tools described later.

**Local Government**

**Preservation Commission**

A local preservation commission (also sometimes called the architectural review board or historic district commission) is the principal public-sector preservation organization at the local level. If a neighborhood has adopted a local preservation ordinance (discussed on page 16), that ordinance will be overseen by a local preservation commission. These commissions have a wide range of responsibilities and powers, depending on the state and local laws. However, typically, the local preservation commission is the governmental agency that approves or denies proposed changes to designated historic properties that are subject to review in the community. It can also designate local historic districts.

Commissions may also sponsor subgroups that work proactively to identify local historic places and seek formal designation for them. In Huntington, N.Y., for example, the African American Historic Designation Council, which is part of the local historic preservation commission, works to identify and research historic sites having ties to African American heritage in the town and,

**FIND STATEWIDE AND LOCAL PRESERVATION PARTNERS**

Go to these websites for links to:

**Your state historic preservation office:** [www.ncshpo.org](http://www.ncshpo.org)

**Your state historic preservation office, and nonprofit statewide and local preservation organizations in your state:** [www.preservationnation.org/contacts](http://www.preservationnation.org/contacts)

**Local and statewide Main Street organizations:** <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/the-programs/coordinating-program-list.html>

when appropriate, makes recommendations for local landmark designation.

**Statewide and Local Nonprofit Organizations**

**Statewide Preservation Organizations**

Statewide preservation organizations are private nonprofit groups that undertake preservation activities within their state and network nationally with each other. Most statewide organizations carry out a variety of activities to promote preservation: they advocate for preservation-friendly legislation in the state government, provide technical assistance, offer

training and educational programs, sponsor award programs or “most endangered places” lists, and publish newsletters.

Several have programs that focus specifically on African American sites. For instance, the African American Landmarks Committee of Indiana Landmarks ([www.indianalandmarks.org/AboutUs/Initiatives/Pages/AALC.aspx](http://www.indianalandmarks.org/AboutUs/Initiatives/Pages/AALC.aspx)) advocates for the preservation of historic African American sites through surveys, technical assistance, educational programs, and financial support.

**Local Preservation Organizations**

Local nonprofit preservation organizations can be found in large cities and small towns across the country. Much like their statewide counterparts, they advocate for local preservation issues, publish newsletters, and sponsor tours, lectures, and award programs. Some local nonprofits—such as the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, Baltimore Heritage, and the Preservation Society of Charleston—have programs specifically devoted to the protection of African American historic places.

**Main Street Programs**

Statewide and local Main Street programs are another preservation partner. These programs, found in more than 1,200 communities across the country, combine historic preservation and eco-

PRESERVATION RESOURCES		
	Private Sector	Public Sector
Federal/ National	National Trust for Historic Preservation	Advisory Council on Historic Preservation National Park Service
State	Statewide Preservation Organization	State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPO)
Local	Local Preservation Organizations Main Street Organizations	Local Preservation Commissions Certified Local Governments



conomic development to restore prosperity and vitality to downtowns and neighborhood business districts.

### Federal Agencies

#### National Park Service

The National Park Service, within the U.S. Department of the Interior, is the principal federal agency responsible for preservation law and activities. The National Park Service administers vital national preservation programs, including the National Register of Historic Places, the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives, and grant programs. (The first two are explained in more detail on pages 13 and 17.)

The National Park Service is also the key agency that manages National Historic Landmarks, nationally significant historic places designated by the Secretary of the Interior because they possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States. African American National Historic Landmarks include such sites as the African Burial Ground in New York City (see page 22); the Mary McLeod Bethune Council

House in Daytona Beach, Fla.; and the Maggie L. Walker Home in Richmond, Va.

The National Park Service program called Technical Preservation Services for Historic Buildings provides numerous online resources that describe appropriate treatments for historic buildings (“The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards”), explain the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentive, and offer practical instructions on how to make physical repairs to structures (*Preservation Briefs* and *Preservation Tech Notes*).

Other National Park Service programs of interest include the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, which offers classroom lesson plans, guidance for museums and sites, internships, and networking opportunities.

Learn more about these and other Cultural Resources Programs of the National Park Service at [www2.cr.nps.gov](http://www2.cr.nps.gov).

#### Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) is the other key national partner in the public sector. The

**Fort Monroe in Hampton Roads, Va., a former army base that was a safe haven for slaves during the Civil War, was designated a National Historic Monument in November 2011.**

Photo: National Trust for Historic Preservation

council is an independent federal agency that advises the president and Congress on preservation policy. The agency’s main function is to review and comment on proposed projects that would affect properties included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places if the federal government is carrying out, approving, or funding the project. While your group is unlikely to have direct contact with the ACHP, that agency could play a role in your project, as described on page 15.

#### National Nonprofit Organization: The National Trust for Historic Preservation

The National Trust for Historic Preservation works to preserve resources at the national level. The National Trust,

In the 1950s Addisleigh Park was one of New York City's premier African-American enclaves. In 2007 the Historic Districts Council, in partnership with the Addisleigh Park Civic Organization, launched a project to document the architectural and social significance of Addisleigh Park.

Photo: Historic Districts Council



founded in 1949 is a privately funded nonprofit organization that works to save America's historic places.

The organization offers a wealth of information and help to preservationists, property owners, heritage tourists, and other interested citizens, provided online, in print, and at its annual conference as well as other training sessions. For more information go to [www.preservationnation.org](http://www.preservationnation.org).

The website offers a range of resources for those working to save or interpret African American historic places, at <http://www.preservationnation.org/african-american-heritage>. These include case studies, profiles of people preserving historic sites, news, and links to organizations pertaining to African American historic places.

## HOW TO ORGANIZE A PRESERVATION EFFORT

Strong, well organized local action is the key to successful preservation efforts.

Often a preservation project comes into being because there is an immediate threat to a place: a beloved house, school, or public building is in the way of a development project, for example, or is deteriorating dangerously due to "demolition by neglect." In cases like this, an informal group of citizens may come together

quickly to protest and take action.

In other cases, citizens may be more generally concerned about protecting the historic character and appearance of their community or preventing further loss of beloved local places and the history these places represent.

It's not uncommon for a group organized to respond to a specific threat to later evolve into an ongoing group with wider concerns, or for the broader-based group to suddenly be confronted by a crisis that calls for immediate action.

## OTHER RELEVANT NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

**The Association for the Study of African American Life and History:** [www.asalh.org](http://www.asalh.org)

**The National Organization of Minority Architects:** [www.noma.net](http://www.noma.net)

**The Planning and the Black Community Division of the American Planners Association:** [www.planningandtheblackcommunity.org](http://www.planningandtheblackcommunity.org)

**The Association for African American Historical Research and Preservation:** [www.aaahrp.org](http://www.aaahrp.org)

**The Association of African American Museums:**  
[www.blackmuseums.org](http://www.blackmuseums.org)

**The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture** [www.nmaahc.si.edu/](http://www.nmaahc.si.edu/)

## Structure a Working Group

Before forming a preservation-related group in your community, find out first if any preservation organizations exist in your locality. If such groups exist, explore the possibility that one of them will assume a leadership role in your preservation efforts and coordinate the activities of other groups pursuing similar goals for the same historic resource. This arrangement avoids duplicating efforts and provides a forum for achieving consensus on the proper course of action.

If no preservation organization exists in your area, explore the possibility of forming one to deal with both immediate and long-term problems. The group

could function on either an ad hoc basis or through a more formal structure.

Ad hoc groups often form to solve imminent problems, such as opposing the demolition of a historic building or supporting the establishment of a historic district. These informal associations operate with no legal documents and members of these organizations may be individually liable for the actions of the group.

Many preservation groups start out as an informal committee or an ad hoc group before establishing a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. For example, in 1987, concerned citizens from historic Eatonville, Fla., near Orlando, came together to prevent Kennedy Boulevard from being widened from two to five lanes. The road expansion project would have destroyed the historic character and significance of this community, the oldest incorporated African American municipality in America, and hometown

of writer, folklorist, and anthropologist Zora Neal Hurston. This initial advocacy effort led to the establishment of the Association to Preserve the Eatonville Community, a nonprofit preservation organization that continues to protect the historic town. The organization has since completed a historic resource survey of the town and established a cultural festival, fine arts museum, and youth program all named for and honoring Hurston.

Groups with more long-range objectives usually seek a more formal structure and organize as a corporation. Corporations have the advantage of limited liability of members for any of the organization's actions. While incorporation for profit is possible, most historic preservation organizations are established as private, tax-exempt nonprofit corporations. The greatest advantage to being a nonprofit is eligibility to receive grants, ability to raise private funds, and

qualify for tax-exempt status.

The status and activities of nonprofits are regulated by Section 501(c) of the Internal Revenue Code. To find out more about becoming a nonprofit and strategies for nonprofit management go to <http://www.irs.gov/Charities-&-Non-Profits>.

### Recruit Effective Leaders

Preservation projects require strong, capable leaders who can assume many different roles and responsibilities. Depending on the scope of the project these people may need to manage volunteers and boards, cultivate donors, be spokespersons for the organization, and, quite often, handle administrative tasks such as answering the phone and drafting letters.

By human nature, we gravitate toward the people we know and ask them to be active in our work. This usually means we ask our family and friends

## REHABILITATE OR RESTORE?

### Four Standard Approaches to the Treatment of Historic Properties

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (known as the Secretary's Standards) are used to determine the best approach to preserving and reusing historic buildings. The guidelines recommend responsible methods and approaches and also list treatments that should be avoided. Being familiar with the Secretary's Standards and understanding the four different categories of intervention—preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, or reconstruction—is essential for anyone working at a historic site. For example, to qualify for preservation-related tax credits or grant funding, it is almost always a requirement that these guidelines be followed.

- Preservation focuses on the maintenance and repair of existing historic materials and retention of a property's form as it has evolved over time.
- Rehabilitation acknowledges the need to alter or add to a historic property to meet continuing or changing uses while retaining the property's historic character.
- Restoration depicts a property at a particular period of time in its history, while removing evidence of other periods.
- Reconstruction re-creates vanished or non-surviving portions of a property for interpretive purposes.

Source: The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings. For more information go to [www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/rehab/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/rehab/index.htm)

to help, but often they are new to historic preservation and nonprofit management. So also approach people in your community who have the experience, skills, and contacts through their jobs or community involvement.

### Develop a Vision

“Vision” is the strategic direction for a project. Before taking on a preservation project or even forming a nonprofit organization, interested individuals should ask themselves several difficult and important questions that will help define their long-term mission and preservation intentions.

One of the first and most important responsibilities is to form a visioning team. The team should include experts from historic preservation and the business community with training in real estate, nonprofit management, architecture, planning, law, business, and fundraising.

If your organization has been formed to preserve a specific historic site, for example, your visioning team might address the following questions:

- Why are you preserving this historic place?
- Why should anyone care? Why does your place matter to the community?
- If we preserve this place, how can it be put to use?
- Is the proposed reuse financially sustainable?
- How might the spatial limitations of the building influence reuse?
- Are there zoning or other restrictions on the use of the building?
- Is the property significant enough to attract heritage tourists?
- How will the organization commemorate the history of the site? What’s your interpretation strategy?
- What are the organization’s limitations—financial, staffing, etc.
- Is there an endowment already secured or will the organization have to obtain capital?
- What are the approximate funds needed and how might they be secured?

## PLANNING: A ROAD MAP TO SUCCESS

### Having a clear vision and well-established goals are essential to success in preservation projects. Let’s look at one common scenario:

A small nonprofit has been working for seven years to restore a historic building that will become a museum dedicated to the history of African Americans in the community. The first phase of its restoration is expected to cost \$450,000. Unfortunately the organization never prepared a business or fundraising plan. It has an operating budget of less than \$10,000 per year, and a board composed mostly of family members who are new to preservation and nonprofit management.

Not only is the work to finish the restoration an ongoing challenge, but also the entire project is in jeopardy. Board members realize they have now assumed many roles: real estate developers, preservation planners, project managers, business investors, board directors, volunteer managers, budding historians, and community leaders. If the organization had taken the time early in the process to develop a strategic plan, it might have avoided its financial and capacity problems.

### Let’s look at a more successful scenario:

A group of local residents is working to restore the home of a prominent civil rights leader. They first engage a preservation professional to outline the steps for saving the building. Next they prepare a strategic plan detailing planning activities required over the next six months. Thanks to their connections in the community, they obtain free services from an architectural firm to assess the building’s condition and to prioritize work needed to stabilize the structure.

At this stage of development, the group sets achievable, short-term goals to advance their project. Now that they understand the cost of securing the building, they explore options for the building’s use and evaluate their feasibility. Once a financially feasible option is selected, they form a nonprofit. Not having strong board management experience, they hire a fundraising consultant to build the board’s capacity and guide their fundraising efforts. They phase their construction project over two years, allowing time to raise funds. Success comes from properly planning, building their capacity as nonprofit leaders, and staying focused on the most important tasks needed for saving the building.

- Who are your champions in the community supporting the project?
- Is the organization committed for the long term? Is there a project manager or established board with capacity to drive this project?

### Recruit Partners and Supporters

Preservation efforts are most successful when they have strong community interest. Preservation organizations should seek a broad spectrum of community supporters, including elected officials, representatives of business and professional groups, museum and design leaders, historians, and residents.

Think creatively about who else might help you succeed. For example, local businesses might provide “in kind” donations, such as building or office supplies. High school or college students might do research about your site or neighborhood to earn class credit. Church and youth groups might provide hands-on help. The



local media might consider your project a good story to report, which will help you drum up further support.

### Conduct Thorough Planning

In the early stages of a preservation project, it’s imperative to understand what you want to do with the historic resource you’re preserving and how best to accomplish that goal. This allows you to go forward with a project that people can rally behind and support.

New organizations should know up front that attracting new partners and keeping funders invested requires a well-run organization. This requires lots of work. Funders, in particular, need to see that your project is managed with a high degree of professionalism.

Planning documents are an essential roadmap to your preservation future. You will use them to organize the process of evaluating your ideas as well as the cost of them, and determining what kind of human and financial resources are needed to make the project a reality. There are several types of planning exercises that will help guide your work:

- Strategic planning
- Preservation planning
- Business planning

### Strategic Planning

Strategic planning involves establishing a vision for your organization’s future, clarifying its mission, defining its values and operating structure, and describing programs to achieve the mission. It’s basically an internal work plan outlining the tasks an organization needs to accomplish within a certain timeframe. Specific program plans are then developed to support the overall strategic plan. They might include fundraising, board development, and public outreach.

**Anne Spencer (1882-1976) was a poet, civil rights activist, teacher, librarian, wife, mother, and a gardener. Her home and garden in Lynchburg, Va., is a Virginia Landmark and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.**

Photo: Jane Baber White

It is sometimes helpful to obtain the help of an outside consultant when developing a strategic plan.

A strategic plan sets out the direction for the organization with a focus on the organization and its people, rather than the historic property being addressed. It establishes a one- to five-year timeline for getting work completed. It’s one of the ways an organization remains accountable, and it can be used as a benchmark to measure how well staff and volunteers are accomplishing their goals and tasks.

### Preservation Planning

Like planning for the organization, planning for the building is equally important. Preservation planning involves evaluating how to make changes to historic buildings in ways that respect and retain their historic character. The plan guides decisions regarding, for example, additions or exterior modifications, new uses, systems and mechanical upgrades, and/or changes to comply with building and safety codes.

The preservation plan is typically prepared prior to construction and should be conducted by qualified individuals within the organization or hired from the outside. Based on the history of the building, the plan reviews any previous alterations and construction work, existing condition assessments, changes to the building over time, and historic and/or architectural significance of the building. The plan assesses the appropriate treatment, whether it is a preservation, restoration, or rehabilitation project. (See sidebar on page 10.)

A preservation plan is less expensive than a “historic structure report” and considered a shorter, less comprehensive version of it. However, the preservation plan may identify the need to conduct a full-blown historic structure report.

### Business Planning

Business planning involves describing how you deliver your products and service, identifying your potential market, and analyzing the risks and rewards of



your business model. Preserving historic places is mostly mission-based work, yet it is important to remember that non-profits are businesses too. Understanding the financial implications of preserving a historic building is essential in making the right decision for your organization.

## PRESERVATION TOOLS

You don't have to "reinvent the wheel." Over the decades, preservationists have developed numerous strategies for accomplishing their work. Here are some that are well known to those in the preservation field. Consider how you might apply these to your own project. Your SHPO can provide guidance on how to do that.

### Historic Resource Surveys

Much useful information may already exist about the historic place(s) of concern to your group. For example, the site(s) may have been included in a historic resource survey. Such surveys are conducted on behalf of the local or state government by either professionals with training in history, archeology, or architectural history and/or by volunteers or students.

A historic resources survey can take many forms. It might be an overview of an entire community or neighborhood; a thematic study focusing on specific

**The Lyric Theatre in Lexington, Ky., was once a venue for big name acts like Count Basie, Ray Charles, and many more. Renovated in 2010, the theater is now a thriving arts and cultural center.**

Photo: Lyric Theatre & Cultural Arts Center

property types, such as African American churches or Rosenwald Schools; or a listing of archeological resources. In Queens, N.Y., for instance, Addisleigh Park was surveyed in 2007 to document a 1950s African American suburban-style neighborhood. It was an enclave for wealthy African Americans such as Lena Horne, Ella Fitzgerald, Jackie Robinson, James Brown, and Joe Louis just to name a few.

Your SHPO or local government will know if your building or neighborhood was the subject of an earlier survey. If not, or if the survey is out of date, your group might like to undertake its own survey.

All states have standard recording forms, and many have guidelines for completing survey work. Survey forms can be obtained from your SHPO, which can also provide valuable advice about methods to use, sources of background data,



and professionals in various preservation-related fields who might be consulted.

### Historic Designation

Properties that meet a set of criteria for integrity and significance may be listed in any of three types of registers: the National Register of Historic Places, a state register of historic places, or local designation of historic landmarks and districts.

### National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the official U.S. government list of historic and cultural resources worthy of preservation. Administered by the National Park Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior, the National



The Abyssinian Meeting House in Portland, Maine, once served as an early African American meetinghouse. Following extensive research by local advocates, the site was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2006.

Photo: Gregory Farmer, Agricola Corporation

Register is managed in each state by the SHPO. The National Register lists properties important to the history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture of the United States. Sites do not need to have just national significance—they can be of local or state importance. The National Register includes buildings and structures such as houses and bridges, sites such as battlefields and burial grounds, districts or groups of buildings such as neighborhoods or school campuses, and objects such as fountains and monuments.

Most sites listed in the National Register are more than 50 years old. Properties less than 50 years old must be exceptionally significant to be considered eligible for listing. In New York City, for example, the apartment building at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the Bronx, known as the birthplace of hip-hop, is now considered eligible for the National Register even though it is not yet 50 years old.

In the United States, more than 87,000 individual buildings and historic districts are listed in the National Register, with more than 1,700 historic buildings and districts formally recognized for their contributions in African American history and design. These sites include:

- The John Coltrane Home on Long Island, N.Y., a 1952 suburban-style

home where he wrote his well-known composition “A Love Supreme.”

- Berkley Square in Las Vegas, a 1950s subdivision consisting of 148 ranch-style homes designed by African American architect Paul R. Williams.
- The Daisy Bates House in Little Rock, Ark., which provided a safe haven for the Little Rock Nine, the students who desegregated Central High School in 1957–1958.
- The home and gardens of poet and civil rights activist Anne Spencer in Lynchburg, Va.

Benefits of National Register listing include national recognition of the property’s significance, eligibility for certain federal and state tax benefits, and qualification for federal preservation grants when funding is available. It may also trigger regulatory review of threats or proposed changes to the property if federal money is involved; this, called Section 106 review, is discussed on page 15.

There are many misconceptions about listing a property in the National Register. Listing does not affect what owners may or may not do to their property. Owners of property listed in the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose, provided that there is no federal involvement. They have no

obligation to open their property to the public, to restore it, or even to maintain it, if they choose not to do so.

While the SHPO formally nominates properties for listing in the National Register, anyone may prepare a nomination, including individuals, local organizations, and local governments. Completed nomination forms are sent to a state review board for consideration. If the state board and the SHPO concur on the listing, the nomination is forwarded to the National Park Service. Once approved, the property is officially entered into the National Register and the SHPO notifies the owner.

### State or Local Registers of Historic Resources

Many states and municipalities have state or local registers of historic resources. A cluster of significant structures may be designated as a local historic district or individual structures may be designated as landmarks. For example, the 1948 historic Lyric Theatre, in an African American neighborhood in Lexington, Ky., is listed as a local historic landmark.

Being listed in a state or local register is not necessarily the same as being listed in the National Register. Federal, state, and local recognition programs differ in the degree of protection they provide, if any. In some states, listing in a state register may trigger regulatory protection from state government actions or determine whether a property owner qualifies for special tax treatment.

The primary strength of a local designation program is that it is tailored to the specific community and is based on locally developed criteria. Local designation can offer the most protection

because it may trigger review of proposed changes to historic resources by a local preservation commission (as will be described next) and may impose significant restrictions on demolition requests.

### Designation Challenges

Designating African American sites can be difficult. Many of these sites lack extensive documentation and may have been altered over time. Solid historical research, possibly supported by a local college or university, can help to make the case for significance.

Designating sites that are in poor condition or that have lost much of their original building material can also be a challenge. A thorough assessment of the building by an architect or contractor can help establish the site's level of integrity and validate the site's significance.

For example, the Abyssinian Meeting House in Portland, Maine, was in a severely deteriorated condition by the time local activists realized its significance as an early African American meetinghouse. Original materials had been replaced and historical documentation was difficult to find. Public records, historic maps, and other forms of research were largely unavailable. Extensive research was required to get the site listed in the National Register in 2006 and also included in Maine's State Register of Historic Places.

### Regulations

#### Section 106 Review

As was mentioned before, if the proposed project is being undertaken by a federal agency or involves federal approval or the use of federal funds, a federal agency, called the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), must be given the opportunity to review and comment on any undertaking that will affect a resource included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. This process, spelled out in Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), is called Section 106 review.

In 1987, for instance, the General

## EASEMENT PROTECTS HISTORIC WINKS LODGE IN DENVER, COLO.

In the early part of the 20th century, African Americans were unable to find nearby lodging for enjoying the beauty of public parks. One lodge in the Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest west of Denver, however, was planned and organized by prominent Denver African Americans to specifically cater to African American tourists. Constructed in 1928 by Wendall (Winks) Hamlet, Winks Lodge consisted of rustic stick-and-shingle style structures. The lodge hosted thousands of vacationers and was a destination for many famous African American literary artists and musical entertainers, including Count Basie, Lena Horn, Zora Neale Hurston, and Duke Ellington.

Through an acquisition grant from the State Historical Fund, Beckwourth Outdoors purchased the lodge in April 2006. To protect the funder's investment and the physical character of the landmark in perpetuity, an easement is currently being placed on the property. This legally binding contract restricts current and future owners from making changes to the building, so the historic appearance will be retained for years to come. The terms of the easement contract are between the easement-holding organization, the property owner, and the funder.

Today the lodge provides year-round outdoor activities for children and adults and educates the public about the contributions made by people-of-color in the West. Recognized for its significance as a private commercial and entrepreneurial endeavor, as well as its significance in the larger social arena of discrimination and segregation, Winks Lodge was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.

**Colorado's Winks Lodge, built in 1925, catered to African-American vacationers visiting the Rocky Mountains.**

Photo: National Trust for Historic Preservation



## NOT EVERY HISTORIC SITE NEEDS TO BE A MUSEUM

Museums can be financially difficult to sustain without invested partners and a variety of funding sources. In a world where people have numerous options for entertainment, competing for the public's attention and their money can be challenging. Yet restoring a site as a museum can be a financially sustainable strategy for nationally significant landmarks that possess authentic collections.

When considering whether or not to restore a building for the purposes of opening a museum, preservation advocates should ask themselves the following questions:

- Are people familiar with the site you are preserving? Is there interest from the public?
- How authentic is your site? Are there artifacts and authentic collections available to interpret?
- Is there adequate parking for visitors?
- Are there spatial constraints that limit reuse?
- Are there other sites nearby competing for the same visitors?
- Do you have a strong board/leadership in place?
- Is there an endowment that will provide adequate income to maintain and staff the site?
- Are there both human and financial resources to open and manage a museum?

If your site is not a good candidate to become a museum, think creatively about other uses. The restored property might be sold or rented to a residential, commercial, or nonprofit user, for example, with an engaging exterior sign that tells passers-by about its history. It could become a center for arts or youth programs, a B&B, or a fieldwork training site for hands-on restoration projects. The site's history could also be highlighted through occasional tours and open-house events.

Services Administration (GSA) planned to construct a 34-story office building in Manhattan. Owned by the federal government, GSA had to comply with the National Historic Preservation Act requiring a Section 106 review process of historic and archeological resources. Today, a portion of this site is the African Burial Ground designated a National

Historic Landmark in 1993.

Here's an illustration of how Section 106 works: If a state highway department, using federal funds, is planning to widen a highway that runs through a historic district that is listed in the National Register, the highway department may not carry out the project until it gives the SHPO and other

consulting parties the opportunity to review and issue comments about any adverse effects to the historic district. The SHPO's recommendations are not binding. However, if the SHPO's review indicates that the project will have an adverse effect on the historic district, the SHPO will work with the highway department and other interested parties to gain agreement on how to change the project to eliminate or lessen the impact.

### Local Preservation Ordinances

More than 2,300 municipalities have enacted ordinances creating local preservation commissions (sometimes called architectural review boards or historic district commissions). These are local government agencies that can approve, deny, or otherwise regulate exterior changes to all buildings designated within that municipality for their historic or architectural significance as individual landmarks or contributing structures in a local historic district. Depending on the local laws upon which the local ordinance is based, a commission's ruling may be merely advisory rather than legally binding. It should be emphasized: the commission does not regulate buildings or neighborhoods in the National Register of Historic Places unless they are also designated as local historic resources.

Local preservationists seeking to protect a historic building or neighborhood should determine whether their community has enacted a preservation ordinance, appointed a preservation commission, and designated the structure or area in question as a local historic resource. If the structure or neighborhood has been designated, preservationists should work to advocate that procedures in the local ordinance governing the process to alter, move, or demolish the structure(s) are followed carefully. If the structure or neighborhood has not yet been designated, preservationists should encourage its designation by working with the local preservation commission as well as the local and/or statewide preservation organization.

## Financial Incentives

Along with laws and regulations that mandate preservation, a variety of programs offer financial incentives to private and nonprofit owners to encourage them to voluntarily maintain and appropriately restore or rehabilitate their historic properties. Nonprofit property owners that do not pay taxes or have limited tax liability can sometimes sell these benefits to for-profit entities or create for-profit divisions of their own organizations to take advantage of these programs.

## Tax Incentives

Tax incentive programs have been established at the federal, state, and local levels to encourage the rehabilitation of historic structures. Perhaps the best-known incentive to preserve a historic property is the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentive (also known as the federal rehabilitation tax credit). This incentive gives commercial property owners either a 10 percent or 20 percent tax credit on rehabilitation expenses.

“Certified historic structures” are eligible for a 20 percent credit. Certified historic structures are buildings that are listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or are in a registered historic district (a National Historic District or a state or local district that is appropriately recognized by Secretary of the Interior) and that contribute to the historic significance of that district. Non-certified properties from 1936 or earlier are eligible for the 10 percent credit.

Only properties that are income-producing, i.e., used for industrial, commercial, or rental residential purposes, qualify for the tax credit. The federal tax credit is not available for rehabilitation of property that will be used as a residence by the owner. To learn more visit [www.nps.gov/history/tps/tax-incentives.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/tps/tax-incentives.htm).

**Now restored and open as a house museum, Louis Armstrong's home attracts thousands of visitors each year.**

Photo: Lisa Kahane, copyright Louis Armstrong House Museum

## Easements

Easement programs have been established to protect important open spaces, building facades, and interiors from inappropriate changes over time. An easement is a partial interest in a property that the property owner donates or sells to a qualified “easement holder.” This legal agreement is carried to all future owners as a deed restriction or covenant.

Owners of historic properties who donate a preservation easement to a qualified public or private preservation organization may be eligible for a charitable tax deduction. In exchange, the easement holder is normally given the right to review and approve proposed exterior changes. In some instances, easement holders may also control changes to interior features of a building.

## Other State and Local Incentives for Rehabilitation

Many state and local governments have enacted laws that offer tax relief to owners of historic buildings. These incentives may be available for both income- and non-income producing properties. Some

of the various state laws include income tax deductions, a tax credit or abatement for rehabilitation, a special reduction for property tax, sales tax relief, tax levies, and property tax exemption. To find out more, contact your SHPO.

## CASE STUDIES

### Louis Armstrong House Museum, Queens, N.Y.

[www.louisarmstronghouse.org](http://www.louisarmstronghouse.org)

Keeping a house museum in operation requires reliable funding and a sound business model. In many cases a partnership with another entity, such as an educational institution, ensures the long-term viability of a site. The Louis Armstrong House Museum is owned by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and administered by Queens College through a long-term license agreement.

Opened in 2003, the Louis Armstrong House Museum, a National Historic Landmark, was the home of Louis Armstrong (1901–1971), one of the world's most famous trumpet players and beloved entertainers. Each year approximately 12,500 visitors flock to



the house to see his Japanese-inspired garden, restored blue kitchen, and golden bathroom fixtures and to hear his personal recordings playing from a hidden audio system installed during restoration.

But to get to this stage, strong partnerships and a collaborative vision were needed.

In 1983, after Armstrong's wife Lucille died, the Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation gave the house to the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and arranged for Queens College to administer the house. The foundation also donated the musician's extensive personal collection of home-recorded tapes, scrapbooks, photos, trumpets, and other materials to Queens College with the provision that the college preserve and catalog the materials and make them available to the public. After several years of processing and cataloging, the Louis Armstrong Archives opened to the public in 1994.

College then worked with an architect to complete a master plan for adapting Armstrong's house as a museum.

As part of the restoration the garage was converted into a welcome center, and a portion of the basement converted into office and exhibition space. An additional third floor was removed, because it was a new addition since Armstrong's death, and it did not comply with New York City building codes; and the laundry room was turned into a handicapped accessible bathroom.

Through New York City Council capital improvements grants, supported by the Queens Borough president, \$1.8 million was raised for restoration.

The partnership between the City of New York and Queens College, which is well known for its program in materials conservation and music history, has translated into success for the museum.

The Louis Armstrong House Museum maintains the site, hiring a gardener, contractors, tradespeople, and conserva-

Revenue from ticket sales isn't enough to cover costs, however, so additional support comes from the Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation and profits from retail sales in the museum store.

The museum has now completed designs for a new \$17.5 million visitors' center at a vacant lot across the street. The new center, which is scheduled to open in 2014, will include a state-of-the-art exhibit area, the museum store, and office space. Both the garage and basement at the house will be restored back to their original appearance.

Director Michael Cogswell emphasizes the need for partnerships and collaboration, saying: "Just as in a jazz band, in which each musician has a specific musical role, the success of the Louis Armstrong House Museum is due in great part to a wonderful collaboration between the City of New York, Queens College, and the Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation."

**Weeksville Heritage Center,  
Brooklyn, N.Y.**

<http://www.weeksvillesociety.org>

To be successful, a preservation organization requires strong, visionary leaders who can help the organization adapt to change. These leaders should also be able to maximize the power of history and the arts to attract new and younger audiences. In its more than 40 years of operation, the Weeksville Heritage Center has been able to do just that.

The Weeksville Heritage Center (formerly Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford Stuyvesant History) was founded in 1968 to celebrate the history of the free 19th-century African American community of Weeksville by preserving three of its remaining buildings. Today it has expanded its reach and serves as a modern arts and cultural organization.

To get to this point, however, the center has had to adapt to changes in the surrounding neighborhood and face a major leadership transition.

The history of Weeksville dates to the

## **THE ABILITY TO effectively preserve and protect a community's historic resources also requires the commitment to monitor designated resources and enforce violations when they occur.**

In 1994 the Louis Armstrong House Museum convened an 18-member advisory board of museum officials, archives experts, and community leaders to consider the future use of the house. Recognizing that public participation during the planning process adds value to preservation efforts, the advisory board also hosted monthly open houses for neighborhood residents to offer their input. During the preceding decade, the demographics in the neighborhood had changed from predominately African American to Latino. The director of the museum noted neighbors were very supportive even though many were unfamiliar with Armstrong and his music.

The New York City Department of Design and Construction, the Department of Cultural Affairs, and Queens

tors. Besides managing the Armstrong Archives, Queens College pays the site director's salary, offers design services, prints the museum's newsletter and brochures, monitors the house with college security, and more. Students from the School of Library Studies and School of Music at the college help manage the collections.

When the museum opened in July 2003 the line extended out the door. Thanks to a renewed focus on marketing, the museum administrators hope to increase the number of visitors to the site. These marketing efforts include an increase in print ads, new collaborations with other cultural organizations to increase visibility, and wider use of social media to engage a larger network of potential visitors.

The Weeksville Heritage Center in Brooklyn, N.Y., has expanded its focus beyond the traditional house museum model and serves as an arts and cultural organization for the surrounding community.

Photo: Weeksville Heritage Center

end of the Civil War when James Weeks, a free African American, purchased land at the edge of Brooklyn. This settlement soon developed into a thriving community of African Americans—laborers, laundresses, craftsmen, doctors, entrepreneurs, and professionals—who worked in New York City. A self-reliant community, residents established an orphanage, schools, an elderly home, two newspapers, and an anti-slavery society.

Over time, as the surrounding city of Brooklyn expanded, Weeksville was largely forgotten. In 1968, however, three, wood-frame residential buildings were identified as originally belonging to Weeksville. When urban renewal plans threatened these early homes shortly after their rediscovery, local preservationists successfully fought to save them. They were led by neighborhood activist Joan Maynard, who became the first executive director of the Weeksville Heritage Center. The New York Landmarks Commission declared the houses Local Historic Landmarks in 1971. Today they are open to the public as house museums.

The center has 14 staff members (six full time), directing programming, research, curating, fund development, and administrative needs. Along with the 14-member volunteer board, 8 to 10 volunteers work on site during the week, up to 20 or so for special events such as Family Day.

Like any organization, the Weeksville Heritage Center has faced financial and staffing challenges over the past decades. In 2001, besides budget problems, the organization faced a major transition following the retirement of the founding executive director. The board needed to find a new leader who



could drive the organization into the 21st century.

To address these issues, board members embarked on a strategic planning process and started by asking themselves some hard questions:

- Was a museum the best strategy to achieve relevance, stronger civic engagement, or impact?
- How could they market and promote their site?
- How could the organization move forward with two major construction projects and still keep the doors open?
- How could this be achieved with the current staffing and resources?

Since Weeksville is surrounded by a neighborhood with limited resources, board members wanted the site to meet the needs of people in the immediate area. By talking to neighbors and stakeholders early in the planning process, the board and staff determined that all programming had to be relevant and viable.

A new director, Pam Green, was hired to lead the organization in this new direction. Working together, the board and staff decided to focus their efforts on

becoming a major arts and cultural institution, built on the history of Weeksville. A primary focus was to engage residents who live near the property and in the New York City area. The society began offering free concerts and movies on the grounds in the summer. A new multimillion dollar educational and cultural arts center, with office, performance, event, and gallery space, is expected to be completed in 2012.

Pam Green notes that it is important to find a way for sites to connect to the surrounding neighborhood. “Be observant, look around, and think creatively about what your site can offer,” she explains. At Weeksville, for example, a gardening initiative for schoolchildren evolved into an organic gardening program for the entire community. Now during the summer, local residents have access to fresh local vegetables—something they can’t find at nearby convenience stores.

As the organization looks ahead, the board and staff take cues from the past. They have learned that good planning provides a road map to success. They no longer run on impulse, but are strategic in their actions. Most importantly, the organization

## The Black Heritage Trail in Portsmouth, N.H., tells the story of African Americans in this coastal city.

Photo: National Trust for Historic Preservation

has successfully evolved over its 40-year history from a historical society, to a trio of house museums, to one of the largest African American arts institutions in New York. It continues to work on meeting the needs of the local residents and serves as a community center that also celebrates the known and unknown contributions of African Americans to the history of America.

### Black Heritage Trail, Portsmouth, N.H.

[www.seacoastnh.com/blackhistory/trail.html](http://www.seacoastnh.com/blackhistory/trail.html)

Heritage trails that link a number of sites through a walking or driving tour can highlight a broad range of themes in a single trail—such as sites associated with regional food and crafts, with the local blues music scene, and with civil rights activities. Alternatively trails can focus on just one particular subject such as pre-Civil War sites. The Black Heritage Trail in Portsmouth, N.H., links a number of sites that tell the story of African Americans in this coastal city.

Portsmouth is a small New England city of nearly 21,000 people. African Americans have made up just 2 to 4 percent of the population since the 1700s; the number is about 3 percent today. Yet there is a rich history associated with African American life in the region. Visitors today can learn more about this history by following the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail, a walking and driving tour of 24 historic sites associated with Portsmouth's African Americans. Sites include the building where Rev. Martin Luther King preached when he was a student while at Boston University and the wharf where enslaved Africans arrived by ship as early as 1645.

The genesis of the trail was in 1993 when the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation created a diversity com-



mittee given the task of writing a black history booklet for elementary school teachers. Based on research begun by one of its members, the committee identified numerous historic sites around Portsmouth that told the history of Africans and black Americans from the Colonial era to the modern civil rights movement. From here the committee expanded the research and began developing a historic marker program to make Portsmouth's forgotten history more visible.

The committee enlisted the support of a foundation board member who helped the diversity committee apply for nonprofit status, making the organization eligible for grants. A board member who was an attorney helped identify potential donors. His law firm hosted the committee's first fundraiser. The committee also mailed fundraising appeal letters locally.

Two years later, the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail, Inc., was launched as a nonprofit organization offering self-guided, citywide walking tours, workshops, and public programs. Its founding president, Valerie Cunningham, a university administrator with an interest in history but no preservation experience, was put in charge of making this program a success.

Each site on the trail has a bronze historical marker with a short description of the historic event or person associated with the site. The description is based on careful research conducted by the committee for the school booklet. Valerie

Cunningham emphasizes the importance of accurate historical research. She notes that if an organization is responsible for keeping history and sharing it with the public, making false or romanticized claims is damaging.

The organization has placed 24 markers throughout Portsmouth so far, and it continues to identify and research new sites, particularly in the West End of the city. Owners must give approval for a marker to be placed on their property. The city must approve markers on public sites such as government land or buildings.

The Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail is fairly inexpensive to operate with an annual budget of approximately \$15,000, which covers expenses for volunteers, office space, printing, and insurance.

A local paper, the Portsmouth Herald, helped promote the trail by running articles and photographs about each site. This free publicity was very helpful in allowing the new nonprofit organization to share black history and its program with the public.

Today the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail is branching out and exploring different multimedia options to enhance the viewer's experience via its website, such as an interactive, downloadable map of the heritage trail. Valerie Cunningham has retired from her volunteer position, and the organization has recently hired a paid director with the intent of extending the trail across the entire state.

In its almost 20-year history, the organization has moved from a vision of a few dedicated researchers to a replicable model for other heritage trails in the region. The nonprofit group has merged with the Portsmouth Historical Society to attain greater institutional support and to expand its audience.

**Project Row Houses, Houston, Tex.**  
<http://projectrowhouses.org>

In many cases, the restoration of buildings associated with African American history has a welcome spinoff effect. A restored storefront or church, for example, can turn around a blighted neighborhood and stimulate reinvestment. Sometimes projects can grow and evolve in ways that change whole communities.

Houston's Project Row Houses (PRH) is one such project. It has not only turned 22 derelict row houses into a thriving live-work artists' community and learning center, but has continued to enhance the community by providing complementary new and restored spaces to address other community needs.

Project Row Houses was started in 1993 by a group of African American artists who wanted to establish a positive, creative presence in their community.

The artists' dream turned into reality in 1995, when fellow artist and community activist Rick Lowe came across 22 abandoned 1930s shotgun-style houses in Houston's Northern Third Ward, one of the city's oldest African American communities. Spearheaded by Lowe, this group of artists envisioned a new community where rehabbed houses would serve as anchors for a socially active community.

With a \$130,000 loan from two art patrons, Isaac and Sheila Heimbinder (he was the former president of the major, multistate homebuilder U.S. Home Corporation), the project got underway. Project planners also came up with the idea of partnering with seven different arts institutions, each adopting one of the Public Art houses for renovation.

The rehabilitation and site clean-up work was done by community and corporate volunteers working mostly on weekends over a three-year period. To maximize resources, the actual rehabilitation work had to be carefully scheduled. For example, all of the new front porches were constructed over one weekend, and all of the houses were scaffolded for painting another weekend, followed by the painting a week later.

In 1994, thanks to funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the organization was able to hire a director who helped raise funds, build corporate partnerships, engage the local community, and establish internal operations for

Seven of the original shotgun houses now serve as art spaces, hosting nationally and internationally acclaimed artists from around the world. Others are residences, a library, media lab, art gallery, and office space. Project Row Houses now has a staff of 10 people, augmented by numerous volunteer performers, artists, educators. Some 150 artists have participated in exhibition projects there.

In 2003 PRH established a subsidiary organization, the Row House Community Development Corporation, to address housing and related community and economic development needs by providing low-income rental housing. Through a partnership with the School



**Houston's Project Row Houses has turned 22 derelict row houses into a thriving live-work artists' community thanks to the help of community and corporate volunteers.**

Photo: Eric Hester, courtesy of Project Row Houses



management. Additional funding from the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation and corporate sponsors such as Chevron supported renovation of the exterior of another 12 buildings. In addition, Trinity United Methodist Church, the first African American Church in Houston paid for the restoration of one of the houses.

of Architecture at Rice University, new affordable housing was designed to complement the existing historic shotgun houses. Another program offered by the center is the Young Mother's Program, which provides housing and counseling for young women between the ages of 18 and 26 who attend college and need affordable housing.



**In busy downtown Manhattan, the African Burial Ground commemorates an unmarked cemetery, which was uncovered during the construction of a new federal office building.**

Photo: National Park Service

After 18 years in operation, managing more than 60 buildings across 10 city blocks, long-term preservation and maintenance is a priority. PRH is developing a grocery/café, and has purchased other properties surrounding the row house complex to prevent the threat of inappropriate development, now that the neighborhood is thriving again.

Project Row Houses has become a national model where art and historic preservation have brought new life to the community and a renewed sense of pride by meeting community needs.

Rick Lowe explains that PRH has been a success because the organization leaders have learned to plan before they work, hire the best staff motivated by

the arts and community-based work, and select talented board members who share the organization’s vision. He advises others undertaking renovation projects to not grow “too fast too big,” to encourage community involvement, and to manage operations with strict financial controls.

**African Burial Ground National Monument, Lower Manhattan, N.Y.**  
[www.africanburialground.gov/ABG\\_Main.htm](http://www.africanburialground.gov/ABG_Main.htm)

Sometimes the physical evidence of a place’s history has deteriorated or has simply disappeared. This raises a complex question: What is the best approach

for interpreting a site that lacks tangible and visible history?

That was the challenge in 1991, when construction workers for a new federal office building in downtown Manhattan discovered an unmarked and forgotten burial site of free and enslaved African Americans dating from the 17th and 18th centuries. Over the years, this unmarked cemetery had been covered over by development and landfill.

Today the site is commemorated both physically, with parts of it restored and open for public visits, and symbolically in an adjacent visitor center with evocative interpretation.

Following an extensive archeological study conducted by Howard University researchers, the construction of the federal building went forward, and a small section of the site was allocated to commemorate the burial ground. The discovered remains were given a permanent resting place at the African Burial Ground Memorial Site. To help visitors understand the significance of the site, an interactive visitor center, which has four exhibit areas, a theater, and bookstore, was installed in the first floor of the adjacent Ted Weiss Federal Building.

The site, which was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1993 and a National Historic Monument in 2006, opened to the public in October 2007. It is managed by the National Park Service, and supported by Howard University, the Schomburg Center for Research and Black Culture, and other public agencies. At least five full-time park rangers staff the site, with more added for busy visitation periods and special events. Some 20 volunteers help with interpretation and with running the reception desk, bookstore, and events.

The visitor center features art work

**A heritage trail doesn’t need to be a walking or driving tour. A new organization in Massachusetts, Cycling Through History, is developing a network of bike routes that will guide individuals, families, and groups on a multimedia journey through places showing the rich African American history of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. A network of 10- to 400-mile bike routes is being mapped. Riders will be able to upload a video of their bike tour and download tour directions and site information to their mobile phones and other devices from the organization’s website: [www.cyclingthroughhistory.org/](http://www.cyclingthroughhistory.org/).**

that was commissioned to bring life to the stories and people who once inhabited the site. Frank Bender, for example, drew on his forensic and fine arts skills to create a poignant bronze sculpture depicting three of the individuals buried at the site. Muralist Tomie Arai created a mural to commemorate the African Burial Ground site and honor the ancestors of New York's African American descendant community. The artwork truly integrates both African and black heritage together in a beautiful, spiritual, and thoughtful way.

A granite memorial was installed to mark the site where the remains of the slaves were reburied. The memorial features design elements that symbolically relate the struggles and daily life of 18th-century slaves in New York.

**Ware Creek Rosenwald School located in Blounts Creek, N.C., was restored to serve the Blount's Creek community. It is used largely for educational purposes, as satellite classroom space for the community college, literacy foundation, and other community activities.**

Photo: Alethea Williams-King

This combination of art and historic preservation can revive communities by adding aesthetic beauty to a place, and also evoking a feeling of remembrance often difficult to attain at an archeological site.

**Ware Creek Rosenwald School, Blounts Creek, N.C.**

<http://warecreekschool.org>

Preserving an important local building, telling its story to present and future generations, and keeping it in active community use are the driving goals at the heart of many preservation projects.

The restoration and creative reuse of the Ware Creek Rosenwald School is an inspiring example. After it was no longer needed as a school in 1954, community members continued to care for the building. It has since found a new purpose as a community center, historic site, and adult education center.

The Ware Creek Rosenwald School, a three-teacher schoolhouse in Blounts Creek, N.C., was built in 1921. It functioned as a segregated public school until the early 1950s when the board of education closed it due to school consoli-

**In the early part of the 20th century, thousands of Rosenwald Schools were built across the South to provide education for African American children. Today many of these beloved historic schoolhouses, although in various states of disrepair, still stand as evidence that equality for blacks started with education. To find out more about the National Trust's efforts to preserve these important landmarks go to: <http://savingplaces.org/treasures/rosenwald-schools>**

ation. In 1954 community members purchased the building so that it might remain a community resource. For the next 40 years, the community, former residents, and others supported and



maintained the school.

With help from the North Carolina state historic preservation office, volunteers researched the significance of Rosenthal Schools. A student intern helped prepare a condition assessment report to guide restoration work. The building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1996.

In 1990 the volunteers incorporated as a nonprofit group, the Ware Creek Community Development Program, Inc., which allowed them to seek external funding to help renovate the building.

The organization received funding from the state of North Carolina and the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation and embarked on an extensive renovation of the building. This included installing a new roof, reconstructing brick foundation pillars and exterior chimneys, reglazing original windows, and replacing exterior boards, damaged ceiling boards, and entry steps. The building was also rewired.

In 2008 a grant from the Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation allowed the organization to complete the second phase of renovation. This included installing central climate control and storm windows, and carrying out major plumbing repairs.

The project was successful thanks to a network of dedicated volunteers who donated their time and resources to interview contractors, prepare contracts, conduct on-site meetings, oversee repair work, and research and write grants.

The Ware Creek Community Development Program has plans to offer additional adult education programs and set up a gift shop. It is also conducting an oral history project of school alumni.

Alethea Williams-King, president of the Ware Creek Community Development Program, Inc., has a special connection to the school. In 1919 her grandfather and other residents petitioned the local board of education for funding to build this schoolhouse. King notes that her father also helped to build the school and was instrumental in raising funds to purchase the school in 1954.

Williams-King offers this advice to other preservation advocates; her six Ps:

1. Power of prayer built these schools and will continue their preservation.
2. Preservation work isn't for impatient people; impatience makes judgment errors at every turn.
3. Prevent backtracking and correcting mistakes by setting priorities to address the most crucial building needs.
4. Partner with people, even a small team of committed players, and organizations that support your goals.
5. Preservation matters more when you learn the site's full story.
6. Protect your organization's mission from misguided and misinformed individuals.

Such wisdom can guide and inspire any community preservation project.

## MOVING FORWARD

Today the future of historic African American sites and the stories they tell is in our hands.

We've learned from our predecessors that strategic planning, careful research and documentation, and an understanding of the business of preservation are the building blocks to a thriving heritage site that the public supports and appreciates.

As more African American preservation professionals, business leaders, and community activists contribute to projects to protect and honor such places, our work will become more sophisticated. We must learn to employ innovative models that support the long-term stewardship of historic sites. These models might include merging organizations to maximize economies of scale or establishing co-stewardship agreements with stronger, more financially capable organizations.

As new audiences become engaged and new partnerships are formed we will see increased financial and political support. We will also find new ways of telling our story as artists help re-imagine how history is communicated to the public, and new media draw in audiences of all ages. But most importantly, African American historic sites will become true community assets that showcase the best practices in preservation, stewardship, and financial sustainability, while also preserving the memory of our ancestors.

## RESOURCES

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has produced numerous books designed to assist community preservation efforts, on such topics as organizational development, fundraising, and preservation laws and procedures. These publications are available through Amazon.com.

*Self-Assessment Guide for Community Preservation Organizations*

*Basic Preservation*

*Doing Away with Demolition-by-Neglect Guide to Tax-Advantaged Rehabilitation*

*Laypersons Guide to Preservation Law*

*Fundraising Basics for Preservation Organizations*

*Investing in Volunteers: A Guide to Volunteer Management*

*Feasibility Assessment Manual for Reusing Historic Buildings*

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