

# Developing the Next Generation of Preservation Professionals

The Teaching with Historic Places program allows the national historic preservation programs to reach out to new audiences, providing guidance on ways to integrate historic places into the teaching of history, social studies, art, and other subjects. In the process, the program also can implant in the minds of young people that historic preservation and cultural resources stewardship might also be a career to pursue.

Like many of the arts and humanities, historic preservation is often not viewed as a viable long-term career. To an outsider, it may seem to have an uncertain future and to not be as remunerative as other career choices. While young people are encouraged to pursue careers in law, medicine, computer science, and business, few are urged to pursue careers in fields like history, archeology, museum management, historic architecture, and ethnography.

Unlike 30 years ago, the professional path to preservation careers today is much better defined. Several dozen undergraduate and graduate programs in historic preservation are available to those who wish to undertake specialized studies in this field. Research and analysis conducted in academic programs help students develop important skills needed to succeed in the field. Internships and other work assignments provide experience in the real world of preservation work. Consequently, many young people enrolled in preservation degree programs develop their resumes and are entering the field at all levels of government and in the private sector.

Meanwhile, new topics, such as diversity studies, computer technology, and land use management, illustrate that historic preservation is greatly influenced by broad societal changes.

As the concerns of the preservation field increasingly address historic properties associated with diverse cultural groups, the need for diverse professionals is all the more critical. Diverse professionals can provide new insights into the preservation and interpretation of historic properties. They can attract new supporters to the national historic preservation program, including political support from people who once regarded the field as an elite, non-diverse one. The participation of diverse professionals also demonstrates the inclusiveness of the preservation field.

In order to address the challenge of diversity, the National Park Service (NPS) established the Cultural Resources Diversity Initiative in 1998. One of its major purposes is to develop ways to attract diverse individuals to historic preservation professions. Providing an introduction to the preservation field as a profession is an important activity. In addition, NPS staff members are working with diverse organizations, colleges and universities, and communities on education and training projects.

The Cultural Resources Diversity Internship Program is an important component in this overall effort. Operated in cooperation with the Student Conservation Association

*Heritage Matters publicizes information on the National Park Service's Cultural Resources Diversity Initiative. Courtesy National Park Service.*



(SCA) and selected intern sponsors, the diversity internship program began in the summer of 1999 with three diverse interns assigned to work on cultural resources projects in NPS offices. In 2000, 12 diverse interns were hired through SCA to work on projects in NPS offices, national park units, state historic preservation offices, and the U.S. Forest Service. These positions provide the intern with an introduction to the preservation and cultural resources stewardship field. In turn, we hope, the student will consider this line of work for a life-long career.

The bi-annual newsletter, *Heritage Matters*, was established to cover news of the nation's diverse cultural heritage and focus attention on the many diversity-related activities that are occurring nationwide in the NPS, state and local governments, and the private sector. *Heritage Matters* is circulated to the National Park Service's traditional partners and to minority colleges and universities and interested organizations.

New training programs will be conducted in order to increase the access of diverse communities to historic preservation programs and approaches and to assist them with preserving their diverse cultural heritage. NPS is cooperating with the African American Heritage Preservation Foundation, the National Building Museum, and Howard University to expose junior high school and middle school youth in Washington, DC, to issues relating to the revitalization of African-American cultural heritage. In another program, NPS is working with the National Conference of Black Mayors and Howard University to develop a training program for mayors of small, southern communities to assist them with using historic places in urban revitalization efforts. In addition, NPS is cooperating with Delaware State University to develop a training program on researching and preserving underground railroad sites in the mid-Atlantic states. Delaware State is the first historically black college or university to establish a master's level degree program in historic preservation.

The conference, "Places of Cultural Memory: African Reflections on the American Landscape," is another activity of NPS, scheduled for May 9-12, 2001, in Atlanta, Georgia. Cosponsored with the National Park Foundation and the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, the conference features distinguished scholars and preservation practitioners who will present scholarship illustrating the influence of African her-

itage and traditions on the built environment of the Americas, including what is now the United States. It is anticipated that this conference will attract scholars of African and African-American studies to a major NPS program and will introduce preservationists to current scholarship on documenting "Africanisms" in urban and rural areas of the nation.

The activities described here are by no means the only diversity activities of NPS' cultural resources programs. Many other NPS offices and park units are daily identifying and preserving the nation's diverse cultural heritage, interpreting diverse dimensions in historic places, and working with diverse communities to further preservation activities in the nation. When NPS activities are viewed against the backdrop of the burgeoning diversity preservation work being undertaken in cities, towns, rural areas, and suburban communities across the nation, a truly rich mosaic of cultural assimilation and cultural identity is taking shape. Diversifying the preservation profession is an important aspect of this overall effort.

Some wonder how we can attract young people to the preservation profession when many more lucrative careers are competing for new talent. My response is that we are not trying to attract every young person. We are trying to find those who will meet and fall in love with the profession, just as we did many years ago. We want to ensure that every person interested in a career in history and heritage will be aware that historic preservation and cultural resource stewardship is a career that one can prepare for and enter.

Perhaps a decade from now, the typical historic preservation program in government or in the private sector will address diversity topics as commonly as such programs now address early-20th-century bungalow neighborhoods, late-19th-century industrial historical structures, and the homes of major literary figures. This program also will employ a diverse staff as historians, architectural historians, archeologists, and landscape architects. Only then will the historic preservation field reflect the true promise of the United States as a place where people of all cultural groups work toward the common goal of defining the uniqueness of the American experience.

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