

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
National Register of Historic Places



National Level of Significance

Guidelines for establishing significance at the
national level



Why the Rush for National Significance?

- Numbers of new and amended nominations claiming National significance is climbing
 - Total number of NR listings at the national level of significance as of 2008 is 7,923, including approximately 2400 NHLs (9% with NHL included; 6% NR nominations alone).
- Save America's Treasures (SAT) program
- NHL Increased Interest



What's the Magic Formula?

- Context
- Comparative Analysis



It is All About the Context!

- Context
- Context
- Context



Where Can We go to Find Context?

- Existing contexts
 - NHL Theme Studies
 - <http://www.nps.gov/nhl/themes/themes-all.htm>
 - Nation-wide multiple property documents
- NRIS database
 - Other NR or NHL listed properties



No existing context

- Must provide the context
- Must be based on scholarly research and evaluation
- Must have a comparative aspect
- Must show exceptional importance within the theme
- More than one property of a type can be nationally significant, but not all properties associated with a national theme are automatically nationally significant!

National Register of Historic Places
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EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

Examples

- **CHILOCCO INDIAN AG SCHOOL, OK**
 - CHILOCCO INDIAN AGRICULTURAL SCHOOL
 - Kay County, Oklahoma
 - National Significance
 - The Chilocco Indian Agricultural School is significant at the national and state levels under National Register Criteria A and C, in the areas of Ethnic History: Native American, Education, Politics/Government, and Architecture (State level).
 - Founded in 1883-84, the Chilocco School was one of the first, large off-reservation boarding schools established by the Federal government for the education of Native American students. Established in the mold of the earlier Carlisle Indian School (PA), the non-reservation schools sought to provide Indian children an opportunity to integrate into the general "approved" society through intense vocational education removed from the influence of Indian family and tribal culture. An important instrument of the federal government's often controversial efforts to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream culture, the schools assisted in bringing many younger Native Americans into the twentieth century by providing the means for them to interact with and be a part of the larger American culture. The government boarding schools also often provided the first place where many Indian people learned of the existence of, and the diversity of, other Indian tribes and their separate, "special" treatment by the government. Many believe that more than any other institution these schools, actively or passively, created an environment that cultivated and strengthened the idea of an "Indian" identity apart from one's individual tribal identity.
 - The Chilocco School occupied a unique place within the non-reservation boarding school system as a significant leader in agricultural vocational training, among many other areas. The site's large acreage and suitable climate and soils encouraged extensive agricultural education programs. The Chilocco campus, featuring numerous handsome stone buildings, remains among the most intact collections of historic educational facilities associated with the non-reservation boarding school system.
 - Non-reservation Native American boarding schools in Kansas (Haskell) and Pennsylvania (Carlisle) are currently designated as NHLs. Both schools retain less cohesive collections of buildings and lack the distinctive agricultural focus of the Chilocco School. All of the schools embody the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century policies of the Federal government toward the education of Native American children, and the larger missions of assimilation and acculturation. The limited number of large, permanent, off-reservation boarding schools represents a distinct subgroup within the themes of Native American educational and cultural history, distinct from the programs for on-reservation and mission- or locally-operated schools.
- Paul R. Lusignan, Historian

Examples

■ HEWLETT-PACKARD HOUSE & GARAGE, CA

- The Hewlett-Packard House and Garage are nationally significant under National Register Criteria A and B in the areas of Engineering. The Palo Alto property was the site of Dave Packard and William Hewlett's first successful collaboration, which led to the founding of the highly influential Hewlett-Packard firm and the eventual rise of the Palo Alto area as a significant technology research center. Although the work completed in the garage workshop was not of particular note from an engineering or technological point of view, it did represent the first tentative steps in what would emerge as a vital entrepreneurial process that integrated the resources of a significant local research center (Stanford University) with the practical application of manufacturing and design efforts by recent graduates, engineers and researchers. The symbiotic relationship between young entrepreneur/engineers like Hewlett and Packard and the nearby research institution would revolutionize local technological research, leading eventually to the establishment of the Stanford Research Park and the internationally important "Silicon Valley" high technology research area.

■ ARROYO TERRACE HISTORIC DISTRICT, CA

- The Park Place/Arroyo Terrace Historic District is nationally significant under National Register Criterion C, in the areas of Architecture and Art. The small, cohesive residential district set overlooking the Arroyo Seco contains some of the nation's finest examples of Arts & Crafts- inspired architectural design, by many of the era's most influential designers. The district includes seven works by the renown partnership of Charles and Henry Greene, including Charles' private home and studio and the remarkable Theodore Irwin (Duncan-Irwin) House. Among the largest single concentration of the firm's highly-respected work dating from the early years of their career, the district's homes are invaluable to the study of the architects' expansive influence on American architecture in the early twentieth century.

■ ELFERS BARN & FIELD, ID

- The Juren Henry Elfers Barn and Field are nationally significant under National Register Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage/Native American and Military history. The Elfers property was the site, in 1877, of a series of reprisal killings by Nez Perce warriors unhappy with Native American treatment at the hands of government forces and local settlers. The murders precipitated the outbreak of full hostilities between the government and the non-treaty Nez Perce bands who were being forcibly relocated to designated reservation lands. The Elfers site, itself illustrative of the growing incursion of Euro-American settlers onto former Native American lands, is directly connected with events associated with the broad patterns of U.S. Indian policy in the West during the late nineteenth century. The local events that occurred at the farm would play out on a national stage as part of the last and perhaps most dramatic conflict between Native American society and government/military policy in the period—the Nez Perce War.

Examples

- **WILL ROGERS HIGH SCHOOL, OK**

- The Will Rogers High School is nationally significant under National Register Criteria A and C in the areas of Education and Architecture. Completed in 1939, the richly detailed brick and terra cotta school is an extremely well preserved example of early twentieth century Art Deco-style design. The building's high quality materials and distinctive plan were the work of a collaboration of talented local and regional architects, artists, craftsmen, and educational planners, with the result that the completed school lay beyond the standard scope of PWA/New Deal/Depression era commissions. Owing in large part to the building's envisioned role as a model progressive school, the design was intended to create a world-class example of modern educational design, which was widely recognized in contemporary literature as well as in later architectural studies. The building's physical form and curriculum reflected the educational philosophies of the "progressive" educational movement, which educators in the 1920s and 30s promoted as an alternative to the static educational systems of the nineteenth century. The Tulsa school system served as an important test lab for implementing and evaluating progressive movement programs during the period and the Will Rogers High School was held up as a nationwide model for integrating progressive school programs with school plant design.

Examples

■ WHITE EAGLE PARK, OK

- White Eagle Park is significant at the state level under National Register Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage/Native American, Religion, Performing Arts, and Social History. Dating to the establishment of the Ponca Reservation in 1877-78, the site has been the location of significant cultural practices associated with the religious and social life of the tribe since their relocation from Nebraska. Used as a ceremonial and social event center, as well as a dance ring and powwow grounds, the park continues to represent a site of critical importance to the Ponca Nation and their tribal identity. While elements of the physical facilities have changed over the years, the site's value to the community as a means of maintaining their unique cultural identity has remained constant. A key element of the significance of the site as a Traditional Cultural Place (TCP) is not just that varied cultural activities have been conducted here over a long period, but that the site itself is imbued with cultural importance owing to its associations with the earliest settlement and encampments of tribal members in their new Oklahoma home.
- SLR-- The appropriate level of significance is: *state*
- The national influence of the intertribal powwow, while intriguing, is not sufficiently documented or explored at this time to merit national level significance for the Oklahoma property. Additional scholarly research and context development is necessary to assess national significance.

Example

■ WILLAMETTE FALLS LOCK, OR

- The current documentation does not provide sufficient context or comparative discussions to justify national significance. In order to support a finding of national significance the documentation must clearly present information regarding the broader patterns of American history associated with the nominated resources as well as the universe of comparable nationwide examples.
- Criterion C. What other extant systems were the Willamette Falls Locks compared to in order to establish and justify national significance? Where does the information come from regarding the status of this facility as the “oldest continually operated, multi-lock system in the U. S.?” The current documentation does not appear to provide any bibliographic citations for national contexts or comparative studies outside of regional histories. Furthermore, the case seems to emphasize the *continuous operation* of the lock system as a vital element of its significance, but it is unclear how continued operation represents a significant historic engineering aspect under Criterion C. The significance of the property under Criterion C would appear to lie more in its existence as an example of specific type of engineering technology from a distinct period in American history. The nomination needs to define that period, identify the characteristics that marked that period, and show how the Willamette system best exemplifies that period in comparison to other extant examples.
- The case is made all the more difficult by the fact that the system has undergone considerable alteration and rehabilitation over the years. The documentation should provide a much stronger analysis of how the original (historic) technology of the engineering complex is still conveyed despite changes to features such as the lock gates and mechanisms, the depth of the chambers, and the changes to the wall systems. (The HABS/HAER photographs for the site show considerable reconstruction work during the 1980s, which was not well represented in the current nomination narrative; see http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/habs_haer/)
- Establishing national significance under Criterion C requires a much more thorough discussion of the historic context for lock and canal design during the historic period and a much stronger comparative analysis of the subject property to other similar resources. (Particularly if National Historic Landmark Status is anticipated or desired in the future.)
- Criterion A. Similar to Criterion C, the current documentation fails to establish the economic or commercial significance of this particular facility beyond the state level. How was this property significant within the broad patterns of national economic development, settlement, and transportation? The current narrative relates information regarding Oregon’s historic patterns of development, but fails to place these in any sort of broader regional or nationwide context, nor does it compare these sites with other historic locations that may have made similar contributions. The case is made more difficult in light of the acknowledged secondary economic status of river-borne (steamboat) traffic during the late nineteenth century, as the railroads rapidly supplanted such water systems.
- Establishing national significance under Criterion A requires a more detailed discussion of the broad patterns of history as they relate to the contributions of such resources and a stronger comparative analysis of extant properties. The current documentation fully supports the significance of this property at the state level.

Example

■ OKMULGEE COLORED HOSPITAL, OK

- The additional documentation submitted by the SHPO presents well researched and reasoned arguments justifying several changes to the original 1984 listing for the Okmulgee (Black) Colored Hospital. These include changing the listing name to better reflect the historic designation of the property, the addition of Criterion C and Architecture as an area of significance; new geographical data (UTM Coordinates), and a much stronger statement regarding the background and establishment of the local institution--setting it within the broader context of important national patterns associated with twentieth century medical and social history. However, the case is not sufficiently documented for considering the significance of this particular property at the national level. While the creation and operation of the hospital may have reflected important national trends and patterns of history, the documentation fails to show how this particular example represented either an important singular resource whose creation or operation represented nationally significant events or precedence, or a sufficiently rare or extraordinary example of those themes in comparison to other extant examples. The lack of a comparative context and analysis precludes an assessment of national significance at this time. (The level of National Register significance remains local.)

- Significance: The level of significance is: *local*.

- The case was not sufficiently documented to consider the significance of this property at the national level. A mere relationship to important national themes is not sufficient justification for considering a property at the national level of significance. The documentation must show that in the context of those national themes, this particular property played a unique role of outstanding importance on the national stage. The current documentation establishes with great clarity and detail how the Okmulgee Colored Hospital represented broad national trends and patterns of history as they were played out in the local community at the local level. But there is no evidence that the events in Okmulgee had a substantial impact on events, persons or the patterns of history at the national level. National contexts will often have associated properties that are locally or statewide significant representations, as well as those of national significance. As an example, the establishment of Carnegie-funded libraries was clearly a pattern of national importance to the social and educational development of the U. S., but most of the buildings associated with that theme and context are assessed at the local level, as examples of the local impact of broad nationwide programs, patterns and initiatives. The same is true for the Okmulgee Hospital—the building is an excellent reflection of events happening across the country and how they came to influence and impact local social history. Much attention is given in the current narrative to the fact that there is not a great deal of information known about the extent of existing resources associated with the theme of twentieth-century, African-American medical care. It is exactly the lack of such a comparative context, however, that makes assessing the relative rarity or unique nature of the Okmulgee Hospital all the more difficult. A case for a national level of significance will almost always depend on a critical analysis of the extant resources associated with a particular theme in order to identify those resources that best reflect the national context. If we knew that the Okmulgee Hospital was one of the very last remaining examples of colored hospital development in this country, then perhaps a case for national level significance could be crafted to reflect the rare status of the resource as the last vestige of important national events. Or evidence might point to an important precedent set by the creation or operation of the Okmulgee facility that had significant, far-reaching impact on operations in other communities. The evidence currently on hand, however, only allows us to identify the Okmulgee Hospital as a rare local manifestation of important historic national patterns and trends.