

SOUTHWEST MISSION

INTERNATIONAL EFFORT AIMS TO BOOST RESEARCH, HERITAGE TOURISM

The remains of the early Spanish presence in the American Southwest are among the region's most striking landmarks. Their missions have come to be a defining part of the Southwest, as expressive of its history and culture as desert and mesa are of its nature. The ornate architecture, built amid such stark surroundings, speaks of ambition, power, and the long reach of the Spanish crown. Today, many of these sites are fragile relics. Some are endangered. An international, multidisciplinary effort to preserve them is underway, however, involving federal and state governments, academic institutions, independent research organizations, and nonprofit groups.

NPS grants have seeded the initiative, headquartered at the University of Arizona. The first step was a database. "There are literally hundreds of sites," says Jeffery, "so it's a massive undertaking." Still under construction, the database nonetheless



TODAY EACH OF THE MISSIONS IS ARCHITECTURALLY AND CULTURALLY RICH. WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THAT THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF THEM ACROSS THE REACHES OF NORTHERN MEXICO AND THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES, THE SCALE OF THE LEGACY IS APPARENT.

includes an expansive inventory with an interactive map. One of the key tasks is to gather information in one place, available for all with a stake in the legacy. Jeffery says, "We want to marry historical evidence with the condition inventory we're building."

THE MISSIONS INITIATIVE, COSPONSORED BY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE AND ITS COUNTERPART IN MEXICO—the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia—will promote research, education, preservation technology, and heritage tourism. Entities with an interest in the missions are distributed widely on both sides of the border, making the preservation picture complex. While some sites are under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, some are managed by state and local governments, with others owned by conservancies, private parties, or the Catholic Church. Most are south of the border, from California down the Baja Peninsula in the west and from Texas to Tamaulipas, Mexico, in the east.

What's envisioned is "a self-sustaining multi-institutional entity" that unifies diffuse research and preservation, says the University of Arizona's R. Brooks Jeffery. According to Pat O'Brien, a National Park Service liaison, the initiative has already started to bear fruit.

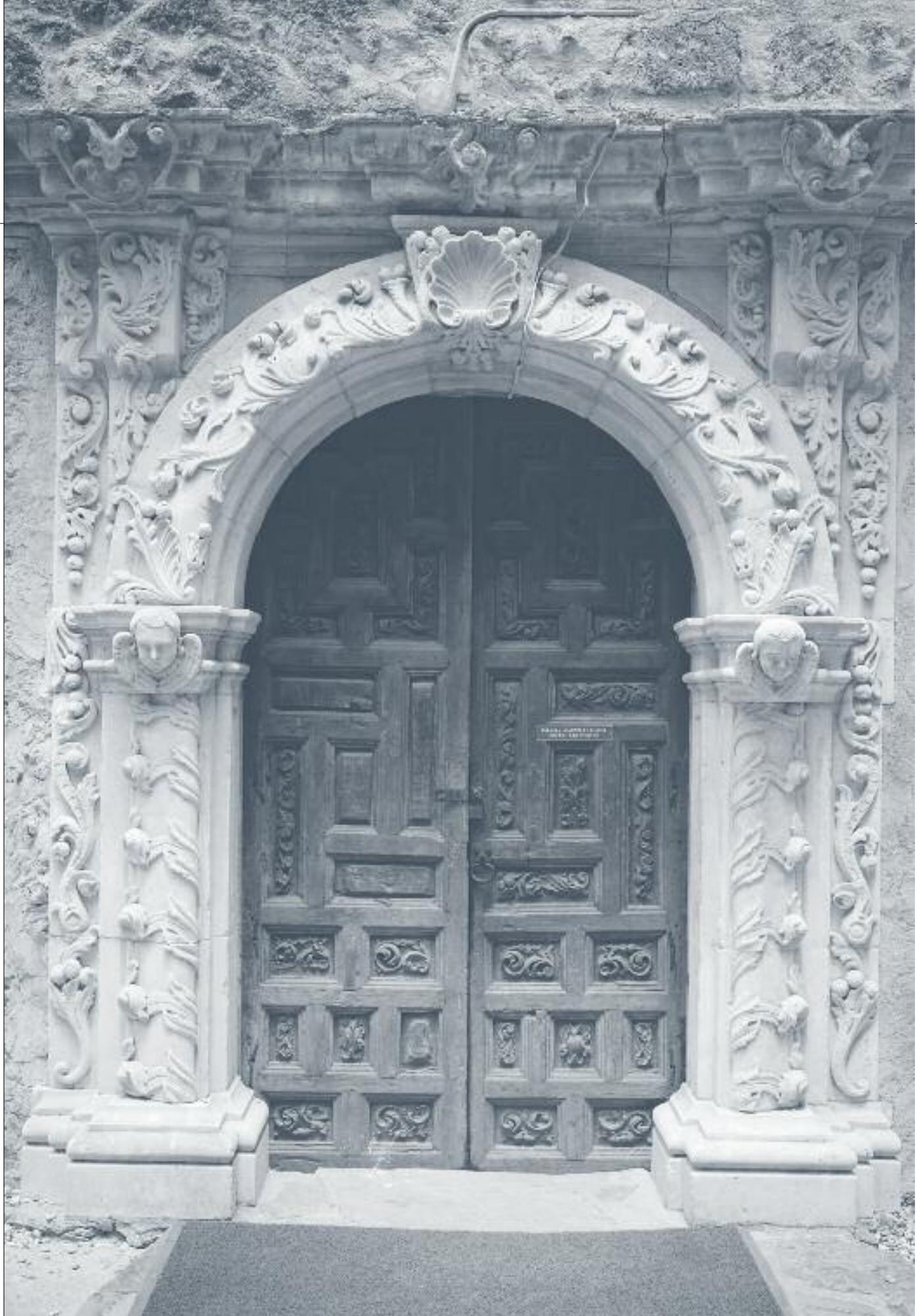
AS THE SPANISH MILITARY PROBED THE NORTHERN REACHES OF NEW SPAIN, PRIESTS WERE USUALLY ALONG. GOLD AND silver were a primary reason for Spain's presence, but it was also intent on enlarging its empire. The missions were part of the strategy, imposing order in the harsh wilderness while converting indigenous people to Christianity. Some missions featured ornate churches, others spare chapels, but all served to anchor the Spanish presence. The villages that grew up around them established orchards and crops. Routes whose ruts are still visible carried people and goods into the furthest parts of what is now the southwestern United States. Known as caminos reales—royal roads—they formed a lifeline from one settlement to the next. When Mexico won its independence in 1821, many of the churches were converted to other uses. Today each of the missions is architecturally and culturally rich. When one considers that there are hundreds of them across the reaches of northern Mexico and the southern United States, the scale of the legacy is apparent.

Sharing technology is to be a major part of the initiative, too. The group Cornerstone, for example, works with adobe conservation on both sides of the border. A recent adobe and plaster workshop—sponsored by the group with the National Park Service and Mexico's INAH—was filmed for a bilingual DVD. As older craftspeople pass on, transferring their skills to coming generations is critical, a fundamental goal of the NPS Vanishing Treasures Program, also part of the effort.

Left: Bacadéhuachi mission in Sonora, established around 1645 by the Jesuit missionary Cristobal Garcia and one of many in northern Mexico featured in heritage tours. Right: A guide on the roof.

LEFT AND RIGHT: JIM GRESHAM





LEFT: JET LOWENSPHAB, RIGHT: DAVID DICKENSHETSHPHAB

THE INITIATIVE GOT ITS START WITH A PUSH FROM SUPERINTENDENTS AT Tumacácori National Historical Park in Arizona, San Antonio Missions National Historical Park in Texas, and New Mexico's Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument and Pecos National Historical Park. "Because of constantly shrinking budgets and diminishing staff, they wanted to pool their efforts," says O'Brien. "They wanted to connect with independent and government groups too."

The initiative plans to foster state-of-the-art interpretation illustrating how the missions, far from existing in isolation, were very much a part of their surrounding communities, a fact that is still true today.



Heritage tourism—a key part of the interpretive strategy—will benefit communities on both sides of the border.

Tucson-based La Ruta de Sonora demonstrates some of the potential. Focusing on heritage and ecotourism, the company conducts trips on both sides of the border. A tour of missions established by the 17th century Jesuit, Father Eusebio Kino, also includes Native American petroglyph sites, desert ecosystems, and modern border towns.

Tours run by the Southwestern Mission Research Center are exemplary, too. The educational nonprofit sponsors popular three-day excursions into Sonora, where tourists visit eight Mexican towns and their Spanish colonial churches. The guides are experts in regional history and anthropology. Mexico's INAH is setting an example as well, with community workshops for local people on taking advantage of heritage tourism. The initiative seeks to further all these efforts, and others like them.

WHILE SPANISH COLONIAL RESEARCH IS DYNAMIC, MUCH OF IT IS INDEPENDENT. The Spanish Colonial Research Center, a joint NPS-University of New Mexico effort that has spent 22 years developing a database of colonial documents and maps, could be central to increased

research collaboration. It is what Director Joe Sanchez calls "anything and everything about the whole Spanish colonial enterprise." The Mexico-North Research Network, a consortium of U.S. and Mexican educational and cultural institutions, would likely be key too, as would the Mission 2000 project at Arizona's Tumacácori National Historical Park, a searchable database of baptisms, burials, marriages, and notable events recorded in mission registers. "It is an opportunity to erase political boundaries," Jeffery says, "to get this information out of the ivory towers."

THE INITIATIVE ALSO AIMS TO PROMOTE STANDARDS FOR DOCUMENTING AND



Left: Entrance to Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo, an 18th century church built by the Spanish in what is now San Antonio, Texas, photographed by the NPS Historic American Buildings Survey. Above left: Hill of the Cross, adjacent to Mission San Xavier del Bac, a national historic landmark outside Tucson built toward the end of the 1700s, photographed for HABS during the Depression era. Above right: Mission San Xavier del Bac in another Depression-era HABS photograph.

monitoring sites, which is especially important given the multitude of jurisdictions involved. Published material will be in both English and Spanish. There will be regular conferences, too. Says Jeffery, "A passion for me is talking about preservation case studies so we can disseminate success stories from both sides of the border. Not just technical stuff but funding and marketing and site steward strategies."

Initiative planners will convene in June at the meeting of a federal/academic consortium on ecosystems in Washington, DC.

For more information, contact R. Brooks Jeffery at the University of Arizona, rbjeffer@u.arizona.edu. Visit the Missions Initiative web site at www.statemuseum.arizona.edu/oer/missionsini/index.shtml.

Theatrical Return

DC Streamlines Once Again Shower the Street with Light

WALKING BY THE ABANDONED ATLAS THEATER ON H STREET IN WASHINGTON DC SEVERAL YEARS AGO, ONE WOULD HARDLY HAVE predicted a theatrical future for it. Some may not have realized that the building *was* a theater—the ticket booth was gone, the Carrera glass broken or missing, and the marquee unlit for ages. And the inside didn't look much better.

“There was nothing here except odd bits of skid-row style paraphernalia,” says Patrick Stewart, executive director of the Atlas Performing Arts Center, the group that purchased the building in 2001—a move spearheaded by Washington lawyer and theater aficionado Jane Lang. In the three decades since the theater's closure, everything from its cinema days was gone, except two decorative plaster grilles that once framed the theater screen.

Today, however, it would be hard to imagine it as anything but what it is, with colorful show posters in the windows and the blue neon of the Atlas sign showering the street with light, announcing itself to passers-by.

After a \$20 million rehabilitation, the 58,000-square-foot-structure is thoroughly up to date, with a 280-fixed-seat theater, a 225-seat black box theater, some lab theaters, a production shop, and plenty of support space. Plus, several dance studios occupy the adjacent original storefronts. The rehab work, completed by the Washington-

Anwar Saleem, executive director of H Street Main Street, a nonprofit aimed at restoring economic vitality. A long-time resident and business owner, Saleem describes the Atlas as an “anchor.”

Stewart likens the center to Washington's other multi-service arts venue, the prestigious Kennedy Center, albeit on a much smaller scale and



OPERATED BY THE WASHINGTON-BASED K-B MOVIE CHAIN, THE THEATER WAS PART OF A BUSTLING COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR IN THE CITY'S NORTHEAST QUADRANT, NEAR CAPITOL HILL, UNTIL BECOMING A VICTIM OF WHITE FLIGHT IN THE '50S AND '60S. AFTER RIOTS DEVASTATED THE AREA IN 1968, THE THEATER NEVER QUITE RECOVERED, AND CLOSED ITS DOORS IN 1976.

based Core architecture and design firm, involved raising part of the roof 12 feet for stage rigging, excavating the basement, and repairing much of the building's original brick. Color abounds in design touches such as the deep red gouged pressed wood wall in the entrance hall and azure blue terrazzo accent tiles in the flooring. And as a reminder of the site's theatrical past, the two plaster grilles, now completely restored, hang in the promenade hall.

Seven years later, after lots of fundraising and with the renovation work finished, it's one of the hottest spots in the city, all with the help of National Park Service-administered historic preservation tax credits, available for many historic preservation projects if a building is income-producing and the work is approved as meeting standards set by the Secretary of the Interior.

BUILT IN 1938, THE ART DECO THEATER WAS DESIGNED BY JOHN JACOB ZINK, A THEATER ARCHITECT WHO BUILT AROUND 200 movie houses, several of them in the DC area. Operated by the Washington-based K-B movie chain, the theater was part of a bustling commercial corridor in the city's northeast quadrant, near Capitol Hill, until becoming a victim of white flight in the '50s and '60s. After riots devastated the area in 1968, the theater never quite recovered, and closed its doors in 1976.

But the theater wasn't alone—none of the area recovered, instead becoming poverty-stricken and infested with drugs and crime. Dozens of structures along H Street remain abandoned, but a three-block stretch is slowly revitalizing, the Atlas a cornerstone in the comeback. “It's definitely helping ignite an economic spark,” Stewart says. “New businesses are having a great impact on H Street in bringing back entertainment, culture, and nightlife,” adds

without the federal funding—or the \$16 parking spot. Four international theater groups and the award-winning dance troupe Joy of Motion occupy the site. Stewart hopes the center stays a star in the “Atlas District,” as some have taken to calling the area. “The idea is that you can open the paper on Friday evening and always find something going on here,” he says.

The tax incentives program has been key in revitalizing thousands of properties. For more information, go to www.nps.gov/hps/tps/tax/index.htm.

Above and right: The Atlas Theater in its restored glory.

