

| BY C. FORD PEATROSS |

WITH OVER A QUARTER MILLION IMAGES representing more than 30,000 sites and structures, the Historic American Buildings Survey's collection at the Library of Congress is an unequalled repository of the nation's history, a treasure from its beginnings during the Great Depression. In the early days, states, towns, researchers, and historical societies paid 25 cents each for 8 x 10 glossies of places special to their heritage. In the 1960s and '70s, transferred to microfilm, the collection saw even broader use, and today it is on the web. From skyscrapers to slave cabins, from cathedrals to kivas, the breadth of America is online and free to the public, captured in time through measured architectural drawings, historical research, and large-format, museum-quality images, at high resolution. **AT THE LIBRARY IT IS** part of our mission to preserve this material and make it accessible to as many people as we can. In a survey a few years ago, the HABS collection—together with its companion collections from the Historic American Engineering Record and the Historic American Landscapes Survey—was among the ten most used of our digital holdings. **AS DIRECTOR OF THE LIBRARY'S** Center for Architecture, Design and Engineering, Prints and Photographs Division, I view this material from a rare perspective: that of an insider. I'm well acquainted with how the collection took shape, and with who uses it today. Charles Peterson, the National Park Service architect largely credited as the creator of HABS in the 1930s, was instrumental in developing the justification for the program. But his personality and presence, even now, overshadows the role of another important individual: Leicester Holland, the library's chair of fine arts—a pioneer aviator, classical archeologist, and medieval scholar who chaired the Committee on Historic Buildings of the American Institute of Architects. Holland started the Pictorial Archives of Early American Architecture, collecting gift images from photographers in the 1920s. Today, as then, the genius of the architectural collections is in the cataloging system, which Holland had well underway by the time Peterson came on the scene. **HOW DO YOU CATALOG** an image of a building? The name of a structure can change over its life. The identity of the architect is often uncertain, the client vague and sometimes unknown. The firm ground is the physical location. Holland came up with a system of state, county, city or vicinity, and finally, building name, which he had up and running by the

time the HABS material started pouring in. It is one of the reasons the program got off to such a quick start. **WHEN THE LIBRARY MOVED TO DIGITIZE** in the 1990s, the Kellogg Foundation offered to send K through 12 teachers here over a series of summers, to determine which materials would best serve classroom needs. HABS and its companion collections ranked near the top of the list, digitized thanks to the generosity of the foundation and other donors. The digitization caused a revolution over the last decade, with teachers creating online lesson plans incorporating the materials. What energizes students—what they didn't have in the pre-electronic age—is immediacy. In the past, textbooks filtered everything. Now students have a direct connection. An eighth grader examining

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photographs of the Alamo, a sod house, or Thomas Jefferson's Monticello can see immediately how people lived. As a result, the students do better work. And the teachers, evaluated on how well they promote primary research, get better grades, too. Everybody wins. **FOR THE PAST 33 YEARS**, I have watched this collection adapt to a changing world. That is its strength. Yet it is still largely untapped in terms of potential. Architects have always used the collection. Historians use it, genealogists, a broad range of researchers. **IT IS THE UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTERS**, though, that are particularly satisfying. It was never in the planning, but sometimes someone discovers Dad's house here. It makes people realize that the material offers something wonderful for everyone. Dad's house. Our house. **THE HABS COLLECTION CAPTURES** the story of America, some of it gone, some of it, happily, still with us. Making the collection available to the wider world is something I find incredibly satisfying, and a privilege.

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ARTWORK ON THE GROUNDS OF SPRING GROVE CEMETERY IN CINCINNATI, OHIO. NANCY GROW

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An Island in Time

Taking in a complicated history through a tour of perhaps the most compelling cultural landscape ever documented in the 75-year life of the Historic American Buildings Survey. **BY BRIAN JOYNER**

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Front cover: Oakland Plantation, built in 1827, in Louisiana's Cane River National Heritage Area. **Back cover:** The Coincoin-Prudhomme House, also in Cane River, one of the few remaining examples of a raised Creole cottage with Norman architectural influences. It is also believed to have been the home of Marie Thérèse Coincoin, a former slave who had her own slaves after becoming a plantation owner. JACK BOUCHER/NPS/HABS