

# HABS

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY



### What is historic architecture?

Historic architecture encompasses a wide variety of building types and styles, reflecting American values, ambitions, lifestyles, and folkways. It ranges from high-style, architect-designed structures to the vernacular forms that are the product of local building traditions and indigenous materials. America is a vast nation and our architectural heritage is also represented by a rich array of regionally and ethnically derived forms. These include adobe-constructed Native American pueblos and Spanish missions in the Southwest, wood-frame Cape Cod houses and brick mill buildings in the Northeast, and sod houses and early skyscrapers in the Midwest. Our heritage spans eras of development from the ubiquitous log constructed settlers' cabins to mass-produced post-war suburban development. In short, our historic resources embrace all forms, from the distinctive and monumental to the more humble and day-to-day.

### Why should we record historic architecture?

There are many important reasons for recording historic architecture. Some of our greatest achievements as a society are manifested by structures innovative in their construction technology, beautiful to behold, and evocative of our shared experience. Whether it is the communities in which we live or the monuments that we hold dear, for many, historic structures engender a sense of pride and of belonging. The study of historic architecture enables us to recreate former patterns of everyday life and to examine cultural values as expressed through our built environment. Architecture can serve as a mechanism to help shape society's ideals, whether it be through designs that inspire better living or those that help promote social reform. Historic structures can also serve as tangible reminders of important persons and events. Our architectural heritage is a legacy left to us by previous generations and we in turn have an obligation to safeguard it for the next. If we cannot save these structures, then we can at least create a lasting record.

BACKGROUND IMAGE

Free Library of Philadelphia, (former) Manayunk Branch, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; cornice detail; Joseph Elliott, photographer, 2008. It was built in 1908 with funding from Andrew Carnegie who believed in the power of public libraries to favor hard work over social privilege by providing equal access to knowledge.

Pear Valley, Northampton County, Virginia; front elevation; James Rosenthal, photographer, 2011. This ca. 1740 yeoman planter's cottage is a rare, intact survival of a once-common rural Virginia building form.

## DOCUMENTING AMERICA'S ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

### The Historic American Buildings Survey

In an effort to preserve our nation's architectural legacy, in 1934 the National Park Service formed a unique alliance between the public and private sectors through a tripartite agreement with the Library of Congress (LoC) and the American Institute of Architects (AIA). The Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) was thus established to create a public archive of measured drawings, historical reports, and large-format black-and-white photographs of important and/or representative examples of our built environment. Then, as it is now, the program was motivated in part by the need to mitigate the effects of rapidly vanishing historic resources upon America's built environment as well as upon its history and culture. While creating a lasting record for future generations, the rich HABS archive of period-specific architectural details also aids in the restoration and interpretation of historic properties. Prior to the formation of HABS, architects trained in the École des Beaux Arts methods prepared drawings of colonial-era buildings in folio volumes as a means of understanding and promoting historic architecture. Although important, these activities occurred only on a limited, local or regional



Margaret Esherick House, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; exterior view of front facade; James Rosenthal, photographer, 2009. The house was designed by renowned architect Louis Kahn for Margaret Esherick and built in 1961. Its aggressively Modern form includes concrete construction, open floor plan, and a playful geometry of oversized windows.

basis. The HABS surveys implemented for the first time the comprehensive examination of historic architecture on a national scale and to uniform standards.

The significance of the HABS program resides in the broad scope of the collection and its public accessibility, as well as in the establishment of national standards for recording historic architecture. As was stated in the 1933 proposal for the creation of HABS, the collection represents "a complete resume of the builder's art," from the monumental and high style to the vernacular and utilitarian. Priority is also given to endangered structures for which no record would otherwise exist. The HABS records are available to the public copyright-free and on-line through the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress. The collection is a resource for architectural historians, restoration architects, preservationists, scholars, and those of all ages interested in American history and architecture. HABS is also responsible for the development of guidelines for the production of the drawings, histories, and photographs, and the criteria for preparing them for inclusion in the collection, recognized as the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Architectural and Engineering Documentation*.

According to HABS methodology, the three components of the documentation—drawings, history, and photography—work together to create a comprehensive understanding of the structure. Drawings include plans,

Free Library of Philadelphia, Central Library, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; stairway detail; Joseph Elliott, photographer, 2008. Built 1917-1927 as the flagship of the Free Library system, it was designed by noted practitioners of the Beaux Arts style, Horace Trumbauer and Julian Abele.



Carnahan Store, Cane River Heritage Area, Natchitoches, Louisiana; front elevation, with scale stick; Jack E. Boucher, photographer, 2002. Community stores such as Carnahan's are rapidly disappearing, and in fact, this one has since been lost to a fire.

elevations, sections, details and other character-defining elements that best communicate architectural importance and patterns of use. HABS undertakes careful field investigation through a process of hand measuring. In the case of exceptionally large structures, and where accessibility is an issue, hand-measuring is supplemented by the use of three-dimensional laser scanning. Measurements are recorded with pencil on graph paper and augmented by digital photography, and the drawings are then produced using Computer Aided Drafting. Field analysis is supported by primary source research to create a written report that outlines the architectural and historical context in which the structure was developed and later evolved in order to convey its significance. Large-format, black-and-white photographs record texture, details, and spatial relationships not easily conveyed by drawings or the written word. They are often supplemented with color photography, particularly when color is an important feature. Thorough field work and research are an important part of the HABS process, aimed at providing not just a permanent record, but an approach to the study and understanding of historic structures. Equal to HABS's concern for the learning potential of its methodology is the need to maintain the quality, reliability, uniformity, and long-term archival sustainability of the records, as mandated by the *Secretary's Standards*.

BACKGROUND IMAGE

Magnolia Plantation, Overseer's House, Cane River Heritage Area, Natchitoches, Louisiana; southeast (front) elevation and section drawing; Irby and Gallagher, delineators (Tulane University), 1986. This fine example of a raised Creole cottage once served as a slave hospital.

## DOCUMENTING AMERICA'S ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE



SOUTHEAST  
ELEVATION

OVERSEER'S

## HABS Partners and Programs

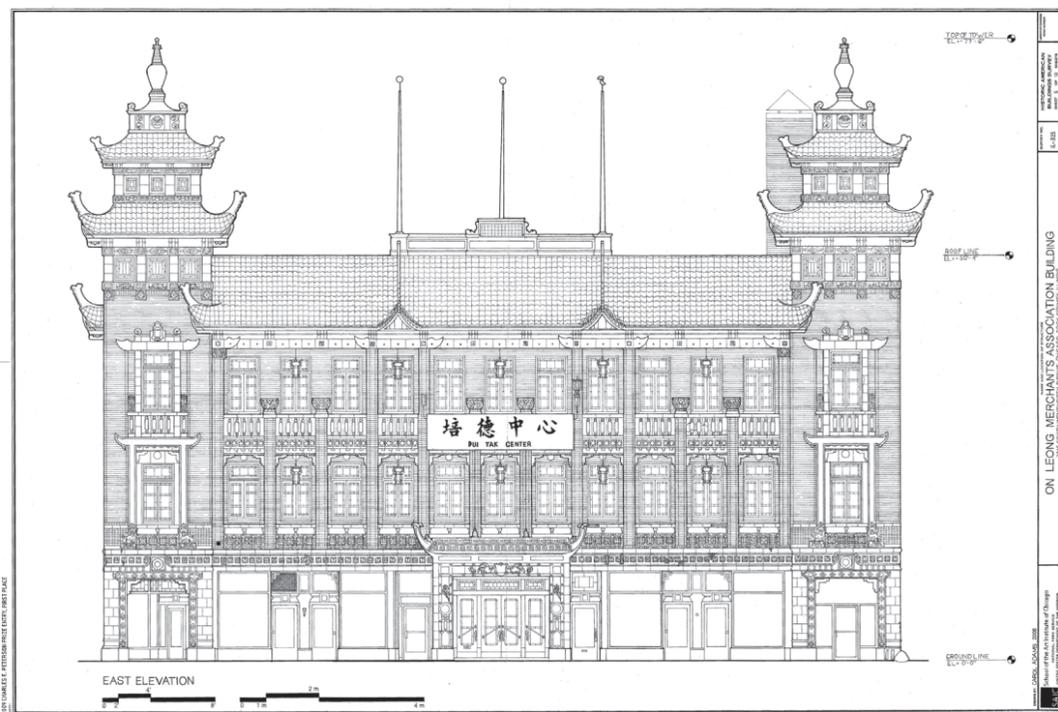
Under the terms of the tripartite agreement, the AIA provides advice and support through the lens of private-sector architectural practice and education, the LoC maintains the collection under state-of-the-art conditions and provides public accessibility, and the NPS (HABS) develops guidelines, field tests new technologies and techniques, and produces standard-setting documentation. While providing no historic designation and carrying no regulatory power beyond mitigation, HABS documentation is used by government agencies, State Historic Preservation Offices, local preservation organizations, and private institutions to rehabilitate, interpret, manage, and promote historic properties. Documentation regularly appears in exhibitions and brochures, magazines, scholarly journals, and in full-length books such as the Norton/Library of Congress Press, Visual Sourcebooks in Architecture, Design & Engineering series.

SECOND FLOOR PLAN



Today the documentation is produced by a combination of HABS staff working with sponsors, by students, and by professionals either in compliance with Section 106 mitigation or through donations to the collection. HABS works in cooperation with groups in both the public and private sectors to help underpin preservation efforts including rehabilitation, community development, advocacy, and historical interpretation.

In the 1950s, HABS began the summer program that still operates today. Students and young professionals gain practical field experience as part of a summer recording team. Duties involve on-site field work and preparation of measured drawings and written historical reports for the HABS collection. Student participation is also encouraged through the annual competition for the best set of drawings to HABS standards known as the Charles E. Peterson Prize. The prize honors one of the founders of the HABS program and is intended to increase awareness, knowledge, and appreciation of historic buildings throughout the United States.



On Leong Merchants Association Building, Chicago, Illinois; East Elevation Drawing, Carol Adams, delineator, 2008. Built in 1927 in Chicago's Chinatown neighborhood, the building features traditional Chinese architectural details and symbolism executed in multi-colored terra cotta. It was part of a set of drawings completed by the School of the Art Institute of Chicago that won the Charles E. Peterson Prize in 2009.

Ellis Island, Statue of Liberty National Monument, New York Harbor, New York; Window Details, Contagious Disease Hospital Office Building; Luis Pieraldi and Paul Davidson, delineators, 2009. In 1892, Ellis Island opened as the first Federal immigration station; from 1892 to 1954, over twelve million immigrants entered the United States via this location.



The Woodlands, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; view from dining room service hall through doorway into entry vestibule; Joseph Elliott, photographer, 2003. Built between 1770 and 1789, this is one of the finest domestic examples of Neoclassical architecture in the nation.

Cyclorama Building, Gettysburg National Historical Park, Pennsylvania; First and Second Floor Plans; Brian Carnahan, Robyn Chrabaszcz, Amanda Loughlin, and Noelle McManus, delineators, 2004. This dramatic Modern visitor's center was designed by internationally-known architect Richard Neutra as part of a high profile Mission 66 Initiative.



Weaverville Joss House, Weaverville, California; roof detail, Jack E. Boucher, photographer, 2002. Constructed 1873-1874, this is the oldest continuously used Chinese temple in North America and includes fittings imported from China. It was part of a settlement established by Chinese immigrants who came here to work in the gold mines.



Barela-Reynolds House, Calle Principal, Mesilla, New Mexico; view of Oratorio, facing west, James Rosenthal, photographer, 2005. Erected of adobe bricks ca. 1850, this is one of the earliest structures built in this New Mexico border town following its takeover by the U.S. government in 1846.

BACKGROUND IMAGE  
Barela-Reynolds House, Calle Principal, Mesilla, New Mexico; view of north façade with adobe brick drying in the foreground, James Rosenthal, photographer, 2005.

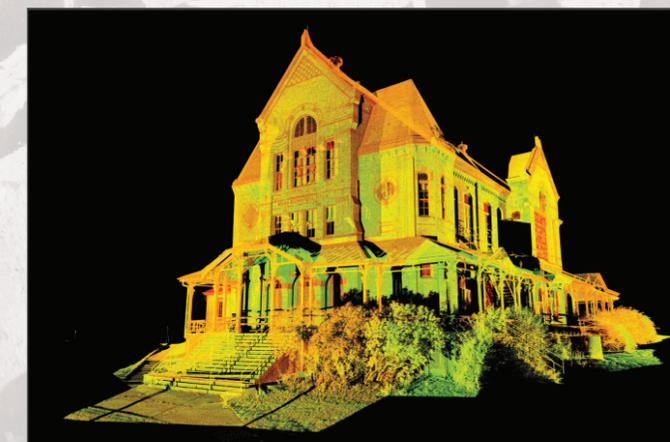
Through initiatives such as the summer recording program and the Peterson Prize, HABS continues to work to educate the next generation of preservationists, while at the same time augmenting the collection.

HABS also encourages participation among architecture professionals through the Leicester B. Holland Prize, an annual competition that recognizes the best single-sheet measured drawing of a historic site, structure, or landscape prepared to program standards. The prize honors Leicester B. Holland (1882-1952), FAIA, and co-founder of the HABS program in the 1930s. While also promoting awareness for historic architecture, the prize is designed to reinvigorate the art of architectural delineation and composition in the tradition established by the École des Beaux-Arts.

For more information about the HABS program, or to access the HABS Guidelines for Drawings, History, or Photography, visit our website at <http://www.nps.gov/history/hdp/>.

Visit HABS/HAER/HALS on Facebook at <http://www.Facebook.com/HeritageDocumentationPrograms>

The HABS/HAER/HALS Collection is available through the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division via the internet at <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/>.



Three-dimensional laser scan image of Ward Memorial Hall, Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; HABS office.