

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Historical Documentation Programs



Historic Contexts

A Basis for Evaluating the Significance of
Historic Properties

What is a historic context?

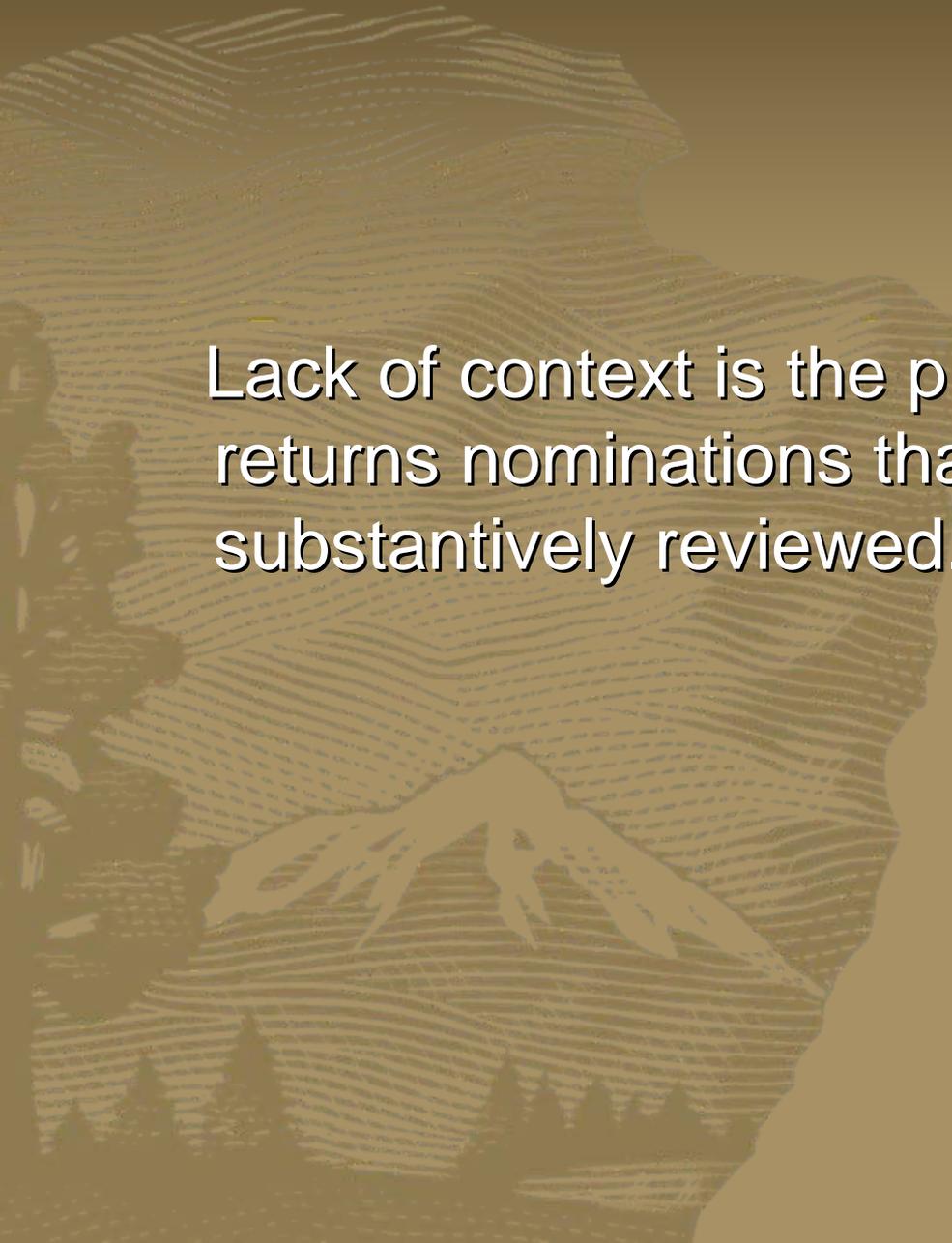
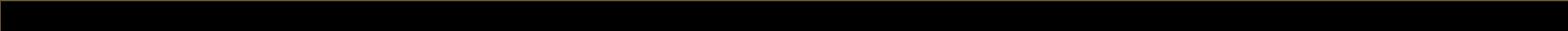
- History
- Historic theme
- Time frame
- Geographic area

Important? You bet!

- Provides a background for understanding why a property exists.
- Provides a basis for comparing one property with related properties.
- Makes a case for eligibility.

Neglected? YES.

- Concept is not universally understood.
- Detailed history may conceal lack of context.
- With a catchy history or glam architecture, eligibility may seem self-evident.
- SHPOs may not be sticklers for context.
- Technical reviewers at NPS may not catch its absence.



Lack of context is the primary reason NPS returns nominations that have been substantively reviewed.

Components of a Context

- Introductory statement
- Background history
- Historical development of the theme
- Significance of the theme

Evaluating Significance Within the Context

- Relevance of the property to the theme;
- Ability of the nominated property to illustrate the theme;
- Comparison with other properties that represent the theme;
- Whether sufficient integrity exists to represent the theme.

Roddis House

Marshfield, Wisconsin



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Example 1: Individual house eligible under Criterion C: Architecture

The Roddis House is significant at the local level as an example of the Dutch Colonial Revival style. The recently completed (2005) intensive survey report for Marshfield identified the Roddis House as the single example of the style that was individually eligible. Overall, the survey identified 16 intact examples of the style in the city. The examples are evenly divided between side gambrel variants and pre-1920s front gambrel examples.



Reference to survey.



Number of the style considered eligible locally.



Results of survey.

Roddis House, con't.

The front gambrel houses tend to be fairly modest houses with full width front porches. While the surveyed examples tend to have good to average architectural integrity, they lack the higher end features and the quality of design of the Roddis House. The mostly later side gambrel examples are fairly typical of house designs found throughout the county that were widely illustrated in the press and promoted in builders' catalogs. Again, while the overall integrity of these examples tends to be good, they lack the individual architectural distinction of the Roddis House. As a result, the Roddis House is the most architecturally distinctive extant example of the style in the city of Marshfield.



Description of surveyed examples and distinguishing qualities of the Roddis House.



The style in a slightly larger geographic context.



General integrity of the style, compared to integrity of the nominated property.

James E. Pepper Distillery Lexington, Kentucky



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Example 2: Industrial building eligible under Criterion A: Industry

- Nominated under “Industry” Area of Significance.
- Period of Significance, 1934-1958.
- Context: Bourbon Production in Lexington, KY, 1895-1958.

Chuck Berry House

St. Louis, Missouri



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Example 3: House eligible under Criterion B: Performing Arts and Ethnic History/Black

Contents of Section 8:

- Justification for Living Persons Listing
- Berry's Childhood and Early Musical Influences
- Marriage and Home at 3137 Whittier Street
- Formation of the Chuck Berry Combo and Development of Musical Style
- Chess Records, "Maybellene" and Beyond
- Chuck Berry's Impact on Popular Music and American Culture
- Conclusion

La Hacienda Historic District Phoenix, Arizona



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Example 4: Historic District eligible under Criteria A and C: Community Planning and Development and Architecture

- District reflects early north/northeast suburban expansion of Phoenix prior to WWII and post-war housing boom; POS: 1926-1954
- Section 8:
 - Growth of Phoenix 1920s to 1960, factors contributing to Phoenix growth, and patterns of Phoenix growth.
 - Development of the La Hacienda and Mayfair subdivisions.
 - High profile residents and their contributions to Phoenix and Arizona.
 - Architectural significance handled well.
 - La Hacienda as a mirror of the rest of Phoenix, but with unique characteristics (see Concluding Statement).

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