



# Citizen's Guide to Historic Preservation

2003

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 defines **historic preservation** as the protection, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, or culture."

Historic preservation touches our lives in many ways: a family vacation to the Civil War battlefields of Gettysburg, or class trip to the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall. *"People travel in massive numbers to commune with the past, where we all gain solace, pleasure, and inspiration from contact with our roots,"* stated Arthur Frommer, a noted travel expert. History teaches us about our past, and you can find these treasures within many of our local neighborhoods. The Howell Living History Farm was restored to teach families about 19<sup>th</sup> century agriculture. The Hackensack Water Works Plant was recently saved by citizens who care about land, water conservation, and history. Looking up at the magnificent City Hall in Trenton, reminds people about the great accomplishments of Trenton, and it inspires community members to achieve this again.

Historic preservation enhances our lives today and ensures that future generations will have that same opportunity to learn. This guide aims to empower citizens to research the history of a site, consider registering sites on state or national registers, and motivate community interest.

## What is Historic Preservation?

Historic preservation is a diverse field that conjures up many different images. Some see it as a means to protect our cultural heritage and sites of significant architectural and cultural value. Others see an alternative to sprawl, and a means to more efficient planning mechanisms. Still others see economic benefits for a community.

*"Preservation today is in the business of saving special places and the quality of life they support... I believe you can't have smart growth without preservation."*  
Richard Moe, President, National Trust for Historic Preservation

*"Historic preservation action is smart growth—no land is consumed; buildings, neighborhoods, and existing communities are revitalized; cultural resources are enhanced; quality of life is improved; and these efforts are supported in the NJ State Plan."* Pat Huizing, former Executive Director, Preservation New Jersey

*"Why pursue historic preservation? Try to think beyond preserving individual landmarks, but instead protecting the character of your community. Today there is a great desire to protect the uniqueness of a town or neighborhood, before our communities are engulfed in suburban sameness."* Ron Emrich, Executive Director, Preservation New Jersey.

This guide provides an informational overview of federal and New Jersey historic preservation procedures and regulations but is not comprehensive. For more detailed information please refer to the listed resources and websites on the back page.



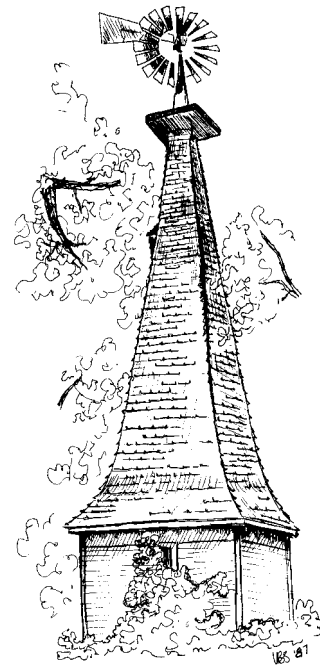
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[www.beesinc.org](http://www.beesinc.org)

## What is the National Register of Historic Places?

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of significant historic sites in the country that have been deemed worthy of preservation. Created by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, it is administered by the National Park Service, under the Department of the Interior. National designation honors and acknowledges the significance of a property to its community, the State, and the Nation. To be eligible for listing, properties generally need to be at least 50 years old and considered of exceptional importance. The New Jersey Register of Historic Places Act of 1970 created the State Register. It is closely modeled on the National Register and has the same criteria. Currently, there are 51 National Historic Landmarks on the New Jersey Register, which is administered by the NJ State **Historic Preservation Office (NJSHPO)**, within the NJ Dept of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). [www.state.nj.us/dep/hpo/](http://www.state.nj.us/dep/hpo/)

There are four basic criteria by which sites are evaluated when being considered for the National Register:

- A. Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. *Local examples include the Old Barracks, in Trenton, the Monmouth Battlefield, in Manalapan, and the Washington Crossing State Park, in Hopewell, NJ, which are all associated with the American Revolution. (Visit: [www.nps.gov/crossroads/](http://www.nps.gov/crossroads/))*
- B. Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past. *NJ examples include the Grover Cleveland House and the Albert Einstein House, both in Princeton, and Thomas Edison's laboratories, in Menlo Park, NJ.*
- C. Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction. *Examples include the Cape May Historic District, the epitome of late Victorian architecture, and the Trenton Bath House, designed by architect Louis I. Kahn and now the site of the Jewish Community Center, Ewing, NJ.*
- D. Yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history. *Examples include the Abbott Farm Historic District, a Native American archaeological site in Trenton, and the Mount Rose Distillery, a former thriving applejack brandy and cider distillery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that has revealed industrial and archaeological artifacts, in Hopewell, NJ.*



In addition to individual listing of properties, sites can be listed as a part of an historic district. *A local example is the Delaware and Raritan Canal Historic District, which runs through six counties from the Delaware River to the Raritan Bay.*



## The Implications of a Historic Designation

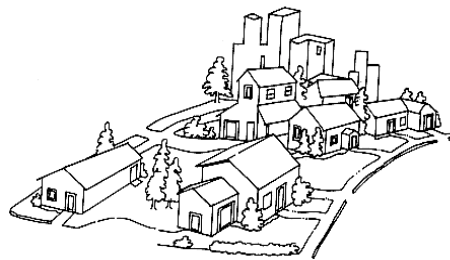
### *Intangible Benefits*

Perhaps the most valuable benefits that are gained by the historic designation of a property are intangible. Historic sites are often regarded with honor by their communities. In turn, communities respect the owners or people that invest in these wonderful properties and in the local heritage. For many people, the greatest profit comes from the knowledge that a site that has made a significant contribution to our history is being preserved for future generations.

### *Economic Benefits*

In 1997, the Center for Urban Policy Research of Rutgers University published the results of a study on the economic benefits of historic preservation, and concluded that re-investment in historic properties revitalizes communities, creates jobs, promotes tourism and other commercial ventures. Heritage tourism in New Jersey contributes over \$400 million each year. Loans provided by the New Jersey Historic Trust to improved properties generated over \$222 million annually or four times the amount in income.

The Rutgers study found that by revitalizing communities and promoting tourism, historic preservation has tremendous potential to improve the local and state economy. A survey by the Travel Industry Association of America (TIAA) found that more than 65 million Americans visited a historic site, museum, or festival while traveling in 1997. Historic rehabilitation also increases property values for the community and leads to higher tax contributions. (see also "Partners in Prosperity," a summary of the study, at [www.njht.org/ec\\_study.htm](http://www.njht.org/ec_study.htm)).



### *Financial Benefits for Property Owners*

According to the NJSHPO, "The Tax Reform Act of 1986 permits owners and some lessees of historic buildings to take a 20% investment tax credit on the cost of rehabilitating income producing properties." In order to participate in this program, owners of *registered* properties must comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Information on the tax issues and rehabilitation standards are provided at the national Park Service website for cultural resources: [www.cr.nps.gov/helpyou.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/helpyou.htm). In addition, "The New Jersey Historic Trust funds restoration projects for structures owned and leased by nonprofit organizations and government agencies. In 2003, the NJ Governor signed legislation to enable \$11.3 million in grants to be divided among 60 historic sites across the state. The grants will help restore sites that are currently listed, as well as financing restoration planning work for others. For private homeowners, however, there are no grant or loan programs to support the restoration of a historic property.



## Protection and Restrictions—National vs. State vs. Local

There is a significant difference between the constraints implied by inclusion on the National and State Registers and those of local preservation ordinances. The latter vary greatly among municipalities—some towns do not yet have ordinances, while in others, they are a driving force in issues of planning and zoning.

National and State regulations do not guarantee that a property is maintained or even preserved from destruction. On this measure, municipal level regulations are often considered the most effective protection of historic resources.

National & State Registers	Local Preservation Ordinances
Protect historic sites from projects involving federal or state funding, licensing, or permits (such as highway or building construction)	Some ordinances require review and approval by the Historic Commission before demolition permits are considered.
No restrictions on private property owners'	May affect private property owners' actions on

A municipality can implement its own historic preservation ordinance and appoint a historic preservation commission. Towns can incorporate historic preservation into their Master Plan to protect individual landmarks or whole districts, and combine it with efforts that focus on farmland or open space preservation. Most ordinances require review and approval by the Commission for a Certificate of Appropriateness when exterior renovations are being considered for historic landmarks.

*Activities that typically require a Certificate of Appropriateness are the demolition or relocation of the structure or changes to its exterior. Interior changes, painting of the exterior or interior, and general maintenance and repairs generally do not require oversight.*

Historic Preservation Ordinances in New Jersey come in many varieties and address various topics, including:

1. The composition and function of the Historic Preservation Commission.
2. The "visual compatibility factors" that must be taken into account when assessing a proposed change to a historic structure. These factors include height, size and number of windows, the "rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets," setbacks, materials, roof shapes, walls, fences, the scale of the building, and the "directional expression of front façade."
3. The creation of a historic business district or town center, to provide commercial uses to compliment and enhance retail and service use and historic character in the Town Center area. Structures built within this zone must comply with specific permitted uses and site and architectural requirements.
4. They may also address compatibility standards for non-historic buildings within the historic district.

Thus, while the owners of historic properties incur some restrictions on their actions, they play a vital role in ensuring the longevity of their historic property, helping to fulfill the aims of the historic preservation ordinance, and supporting the planning objectives for their community. Even if a property is ineligible for national or state designation, it may still have significant local importance and should be incorporated into local planning measures.



## Is my property historic? How can I apply to be on the National Register? How do I start?

When considering making an application to the National Register, it is most important to contact your State Historic Preservation Office to better understand the procedural requirements. While there are plenty of resources to encourage the application process, it is amazing what progress can be achieved by any interested citizen. ANYONE can nominate a site for designation and submit an application to SHPO.

Even if your property is not deemed eligible for State or National recognition, the process of historical research and a show of advocacy and interest for the ideals of historic preservation are valuable and worth recording for future generations.

### ***Step 1: Investigate the history of the property***

**Search the Library.** Review books about the municipality in which the property is located. These books often reference specific sites, as well as general characteristics of the area, and may have useful photographs.



**Contact Local Historical Societies.** Often the Historical Society for a community is run by dedicated volunteers who are eager to share their knowledge of local history. If your town has a Historic Preservation Commission (created by a Historic Preservation Ordinance), they would be another helpful source.


**Consult Maps.** Historical maps are a great resource, because they often depict extant buildings or identify former property owners. Sometimes, the property boundaries that existed a century ago remain today. These maps can be found at libraries, the State Archives, or by contacting your local historical society.

**Research Deeds.** The current owner of the property should have a copy of the deed of title, which details when and from whom the property was purchased. This may include an Abstract of Title, which contains a property history. To assemble a property history, go to the County Clerk's Office to look in the Deed Books and the Grantor/Grantee Indexes (which succinctly record the buyer and seller and are especially useful for transactions from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries). The property Block and Lot are essential information to research the deed.



**Look for Wills.** Wills can often be an important source of information as you piece together the story of a property. For some land transactions, especially those from the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, there is no deed because the land often passed from father to son and stayed within the family. Thus, wills can provide valuable information, as well as enhance the human history of the property. The State Archives maintains indices to wills, which are organized by county and will lead you to the appropriate role of microfilm. Reviewing the old-fashioned handwriting can be enjoyable and tedious.

**The State Archives.** The New Jersey Division of Archives and Records Management is a valuable source of information for genealogical and property researchers. Their catalog is listed on their website, and their holdings include Census Data, Tax Ratables, Road Returns, Deeds, Mortgages, and Maps. (Visit: [www.state.nj.us/state/darm/links/archives.html](http://www.state.nj.us/state/darm/links/archives.html))



***Step 2: Has anyone tried to register or survey this property in the past?***

The files of the State Historic Preservation Office (NJSHPO) are open to the public by appointment, and an introductory training session is available. By examining the large U.S. Geological Survey maps that record all properties eligible for the State or National Register, it will be obvious whether the area has ever been considered for inclusion on the Registers.

There are also maps that show recorded archaeological and cultural resources. Further information on archaeological sites is available by contacting the New Jersey State Museum. In addition to the maps, there are binders of survey files, which catalog cultural resource surveys conducted from 1975-1991. It is advantageous if your property has been included on a survey, because there will likely be a short report that details the architecture and approximate age of buildings, photographs and/or sketches, and a statement of the significance of the property.

The NJSHPO is also the repository for files on all sites in New Jersey that are on the State or National Register, as well as those for which applications are pending. It is also advantageous to read through successful applications for properties similar to your own.



***Step 3: The built environment...how did the buildings get there?***

Finding information on the buildings themselves, as opposed to the land, can vary greatly from one property to the next. Unfortunately, the older the building, the more difficult it will likely be to find specific information. The National Register Bulletin "Researching a Historic Property" suggests several sources for discovering information about the age and architectural details of a property. Some of these sources are listed here, along with some potential pitfalls:

1. Architectural/construction drawings may be found with the owner, with the firm that designed or built the structure, or they may never have existed (for instance, if it was an average 19<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse).
2. Estate records and wills may include very specific room by room descriptions of the structure.
3. Insurance records may include floor plans and dates of construction.
4. Maps may show footprints of buildings and could help date the structure and additions, or more likely, may just include the name of the property owner.
5. Tax records may include descriptions of structures and additions, and can be found at the city or county clerk's office, but may only go back a few decades.

One way to identify the construction timeframe is by having a professional, who is knowledgeable about historic buildings examine the architectural style and building materials. By consulting surveys at SHPO and local historical organizations, you may find that this has already been done and an approximate date has been established.



*Who to Contact for More  
Historic Preservation  
Information*

**Nationally**

**The National Register of Historic Places:** Within the National Park Service, this office provides valuable information, including the National Register Bulletins are available online or mail. (202) 354-2213, [www.cr.nps.gov](http://www.cr.nps.gov)

**The National Trust for Historic Preservation:** A non-profit organization that provides education and advocacy. (202) 588-6000, [www.nationaltrust.org](http://www.nationaltrust.org)

**In New Jersey**

**NJ Historic Preservation Office:** Within the Dept. of Environmental Protection, this office is invaluable for research and throughout the application process. (609) 292-2023, [www.state.nj.us/dep/hpo/](http://www.state.nj.us/dep/hpo/)

**NJ Historic Trust:** A non-profit organization that is administered by the State, it provides grants and loans. (609) 984-0473, [www.njht.org](http://www.njht.org)

**NJ Historic Commission**  
Provides links to, historical societies, museums, and communities. [www.state.nj.us/state/history/](http://www.state.nj.us/state/history/)

**Preservation New Jersey:**  
Promotes historic preservation, and their Preservation Tool Kit is available online or mail. (609) 392-6409 [www.preservationnj.org](http://www.preservationnj.org)

**NJ State Archives:** A repository for public documents and genealogical resources. (609) 292-6260 [www.state.nj.us/state/darm/links/rchives.html](http://www.state.nj.us/state/darm/links/rchives.html)

**NJ State Museum:** Contact the Bureau of Archaeology and Ethnology for more information about archaeological sites in the state. (609) 292-8594 [www.state.nj.us/state/museum](http://www.state.nj.us/state/museum)

**Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association:**  
Education and information on watersheds and land use [www.thewatershed.org](http://www.thewatershed.org)



## National Register Checklist

The National Register Bulletin #16A: *How to Complete the National Register Registration Form* provides the following instructions, "applicants are ready to complete the registration form when they can complete the following questions."  
(This form is available online or by mail, see contact information for National Register of Historic Places).

1. What was the property called at the time it was associated with the important events or persons, or took on the important physical character that gave it importance?
2. How many buildings, structures, and other resources make up the property?
3. Does the property contain any archaeological remains? To what period, events, and activities do they relate? To what extent has their significance been evaluated?
4. When was the property constructed and when did it attain its current form?
5. What are the property's historic characteristics?
6. What were the historical influences (such as design, materials, style, or function) on the property's appearance?
7. What changes have been made over time and when? How have these affected its historic integrity?
8. What is the current condition of the property, including the exterior, interior, grounds, and setting?
9. How have archaeological sites, if any, been identified (e.g. through intensive survey)? To what extent and by what methods have subsurface deposits been located?
10. How was the property used historically and how is it used today?
11. Who occupied or used the property historically? Did they individually, or as a group, make any important contributions to history? Who is the current owner?
12. During what period of prehistory or history was the property associated with important events, activities, or persons?
13. Which of the National Register criteria apply to the property? In what areas of prehistory or history is the property significant?
14. How does the property relate to the history of the community where it is located?
15. How does the property illustrate any themes or trends important to the history of its community, State, or the nation?
16. How large is the property, where is it located, and what are its boundaries?