

American culture. "Nature Transformed" provides resources to help educators convey how Americans have thought about their physical surroundings and changed themselves or their environment to address their developing needs. Each guide is maintained by National Humanities Center staff and a panel of advisors from secondary and post-secondary educational institutions.

The instructional guides offer essays written by leading scholars that provide an overview of the topic, bibliographies, and links to outside websites for further research. The essays range from discussions of the biological and ecological exchange (called the "Columbian Exchange") that followed Christopher Columbus's "discovery" of the New World in 1492, to the efforts of early conservationists such as John Muir, a founding member and former president of the Sierra Club, and Wilderness Society founders Aldo Leopold and Robert Marshall.

After leading the reader through an overview of the topic, the authors suggest ways of incorporating the topic into classroom discussions with students and relating it to the issues of today. The site also offers question and answer forums where readers can communicate directly with the writers of the guides. This format dovetails nicely with the National Humanities Center's larger goal of linking the advancement of scholarship with the improvement of teaching in the humanities by providing a way for interpreters of history to interact with those teaching history in the classroom.

In an age of 24-hour news networks, students seldom have to struggle to visualize current events, a fact of contemporary life that makes it hard for teachers to create a compelling image of the past through words alone. To compensate, teachers often draw upon the work of historic preservationists and cultural resource managers to fill in the blanks. *TeacherServe*[®] provides a valuable service by including pictures, diagrams, and charts that teachers can pass on to their students for visual ref-

erence. These images are often drawn from the work of national and international historic preservation organizations and include links to websites for further research. Not only does this help teachers find the visuals they need to reinforce the concepts they are teaching, but it also promotes the work of organizations such as the Plymouth Colony Archive Project and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and brings them to the attention of future preservationists and scholars.

The nonprofit National Humanities Center depends on donor contributions for its livelihood and programming, so it is unclear how many guides will be produced. With only two instructional guides in place, the site cannot be described as comprehensive, but it offers an excellent model for bringing the work of historic preservationists and cultural resource managers to the attention of teachers.

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National Trust for Historic Preservation
<http://www.nationaltrust.org>

Maintained by the National Trust for Historic Preservation; accessed September 6-9, 2005

Established in 1949 by congressional legislation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation (the Trust) is the premier nonprofit preservation organization in the United States. The success of the Trust's mission—to provide leadership, education, advocacy, and resources to save America's diverse historic places and revitalize its communities—depends on its effectiveness in communicating its message to the public. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Trust has developed an in-depth website to serve as its primary communication tool.

Over the past decade, the website has grown as an online resource for both the general public and preservation professionals. The website now offers a wealth of information on the programs offered by the Trust to assist homeowners, local preservation organizations, and cultural resource specialists. Redesigned in 2003, the improved navigation delineates the major sections of the website at the top of every page, with subsections accessible from additional navigation on the left. "Why Preserve?" is targeted at those new to the world of preservation and answers questions raised in subsections "What is Historic," "Who Benefits—and How," and "How Can I Help?" The "Historic Travel" section is aimed at the heritage traveler, with information on the Trust's Distinctive Destinations program, historic study tours, and a reservation system for its Historic Hotels program.

Several sections of the website are useful for both seasoned professionals and the casual visitor. One can join the Trust or renew a membership at "Get Involved," find local and state preservation groups, or get advice on planning an event for Preservation Month, an annual commemoration established by the Trust more than 30 years ago to encourage and spotlight grassroots preservation efforts. Preservation challenges faced by communities across the country are identified in "Issues and Initiatives." Guidance and resources are provided to help address each issue (such as chain drugstores, historic schools, housing, smart growth, and transportation).

"Get Involved" also includes an advocacy section with guidance for local preservation nonprofits on the legislative process, lobbying techniques and restrictions, and preservation policy developments. The Legislative Access Center (CapWiz) is an extremely useful online database of current preservation-related legislation, providing background information, action needed, and talking points for each piece of legislation. The database allows you to identify and email all of your federal, state, and

local officials, local media, and to see how your federal representatives have voted on specific bills.

The Trust is not only an advocacy organization but also steward of 25 historic properties, including Montpelier (home of James Madison) and Woodlawn (designed by William Thornton). The "Historic Places" section highlights these properties and the building-specific programs offered by the Trust. This section is also home to the Trust's widely recognized "11 Most Endangered Historic Places" list and its Restore America campaign, and it includes information on the services offered by the Trust's Law Department—from in-house legal advice to conservation easements, with a convenient glossary of legal terminology.

The "Community Building" section covers the range of financial support, technical assistance, and strategic advocacy offered by the Trust to improve declining historic residential, commercial, and rural areas. The "Community Revitalization" department provides not just advice, but funding for local organizations to encourage preservation as an economic development tool. More than 20 case studies illustrate successful uses of the Trust's loan and equity financing programs. There is also information on the National Main Street Center approach to the revitalization of commercial districts, successfully adopted by more than 1,600 communities nationwide. The Center for Preservation Leadership offers resources for preservation professionals, including training and grants.

Unfortunately, some valuable sections of the website are not indexed under the major sections of the site and are accessible only from the homepage. One of those sections is the online version of the bi-monthly *Preservation* magazine. Also, daily and weekly preservation press events, posted online as a complement to the magazine since 2001 (an archive contains all past stories), are only accessible through the homepage.

Whereas most of the website is available to Trust members and the general public, National Trust Forum members can access a password-protected area that contains resources specifically tailored to preservation professionals. Forum membership offers additional publications beyond those included in the standard membership, along with discounts on conference registration and preservation books. Case studies and publications are searchable, as are all messages (1998 to present) posted on Forum-L, a listserv for discussing preservation issues and exchanging ideas and information.

Following the current trend in website design, the Trust's homepage includes a feature, usually on the most newsworthy campaign or timely issue. On the days this reviewer accessed the site, there was information on a new Hurricane Relief Fund to "support assessment teams, assist small businesses through our National Main Street Center and disperse critical grant monies to organizations on the ground in affected communities" in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Whether searching for historic travel destinations, information on an upcoming preservation conference, a preservation publication, or information on starting an easement program in your community, it is likely that the Trust's website will supply the tools needed to reach one's preservation goals.

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Vernacular Architecture Forum

<http://www.vernaculararchitectureforum.org>

Accessed September 10, 2005; October 9, 2005

Architectural history has traditionally connected itself with the art history world, focusing on notable commissions and famous architects. Until

recent decades, vernacular architecture was forgotten at best or, at worst, maligned as unworthy of study. In 1980, vernacular architecture started to receive the formal recognition it deserved with the establishment of the Vernacular Architecture Forum (VAF).

From the outset, VAF embraced an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on perspectives from history, art, historic preservation, and folklore studies. It also adopted a continental focus with an eye to including Canada, Mexico, and even the West Indies in its area of study. Its topics are just as broad, ranging from antebellum slave quarters to contemporary roadside architecture.

VAF's main vehicles for encouraging research and scholarship are its annual meeting, its quarterly newsletter, *Vernacular Architecture News*, and its peer-reviewed journal, *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*. It has also taken an active role in publishing books and technical literature like Thomas Carter and Elizabeth Cromley's *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture* to help raise public awareness of the subject.¹

The VAF website serves as an introduction to the organization, with information on its governing board, publications, special programs, annual meeting, awards, and how to join. It also offers a bibliography of vernacular architecture, a link to a vernacular architecture email list, and a syllabus exchange. The "News and Updates" page consists primarily of announcements of related professional conferences and deadlines for award nominations.

Whereas the website helps connect people to VAF, it fails to connect people to vernacular architecture. Other than offering electronic copies of the last three issues of *Vernacular Architecture News*, the site provides little in the way of information on vernacular architecture itself. The site has only a handful of photographs or illustrations, and they are largely decorative. It says little about the

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