

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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*National Conference of State Historic
Preservation Officers*

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

importance of studying and preserving vernacular architecture.

Given the increased importance of the Web and the challenges of maintaining professional organizations, VAF's website may one day shift from being a passive overview of the organization to an active communications tool. Architecture naturally lends itself to visual forms of communication, so more drawings and photographs would greatly enhance the site. Furthermore, while awards for preservation and scholarship should certainly be encouraged, devoting so much space to the organization's awards program suggests that the "award winning" topics are all that matter.

The VAF is a great organization, and the website is a good beginning. It will be interesting to see how it is developed in the future.

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1. Thomas Carter and Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture: A Guide to the Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005).

The National Archives and Records Administration
<http://www.archives.gov/>

United States National Archives and Records Administration; accessed September 2, 2005

As archivists continue to embrace the digital revolution by employing electronic methods of document preservation, organization, and presentation, researchers proficient in traditional cataloging methods must master new technologies in order to access the past. The United States National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) website offers historians, archeologists, and others interested in heritage and heritage

stewardship a starting point in understanding the advantages—and limitations—of Internet research.

First launched in 1996 and redesigned in 2005, the NARA website is federally funded and produced by the staff of the National Archives Policy and Communications Division. Charged with advancing the mission of the National Archives, the website serves the broad interests of an increasingly Internet-literate public, from genealogists and veterans to records managers and cultural resource professionals.

The NARA website includes resources relating to the nation's administrative, legislative, and cultural history, as well as more than 30 online exhibits that chart significant events and themes in U.S. history through documents, images, and photographs. It also features a series of lesson plans, "Teaching with Documents," demonstrating how primary sources might be used creatively in the classroom.

While the purpose of the NARA website is to offer tools and guides to help researchers at all levels locate documents in the archives, most professionals will find that searching, locating, and viewing digitized NARA records is no substitute for visiting one of NARA's regional branches or its two main depositories in Washington, DC, and College Park, Maryland.

Those unfamiliar with the National Archives and its collections, however, will find the NARA website especially helpful. Besides explaining the mission of the National Archives as the official depository for federal records, the website presents hundreds of online texts and finding aids describing the various types of government documents and their purposes and functions.

The NARA website also allows visitors to navigate through millions of records without first having to master the complicated system of how these records are arranged. In effect, two processes

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