Historical preservation is the stewardship of the important places from our past, including buildings, structures, sites, districts, and landscapes. These places comprise the cultural resources of Colorado.

Understanding the character of Colorado’s cultural resources is essential for their protection. This knowledge provides the basis for effective preservation planning, cultural resource management, and historical research. Information about the types of resources, their distribution and condition, and the forces threatening them enables sound decision making and provides the basis for appropriate actions to preserve Colorado’s rich cultural heritage.

An historical & architectural survey is the collection and analysis of information concerning the buildings and structures that represent our past. Surveys generate historical background information, architectural descriptions, and locational data that become the basis for evaluation, planning, and management.

By documenting domestic, commercial, industrial, agricultural, recreational, and spiritual areas we can better understand how people lived, worked, and played; how communities grew; and how our state has changed over time. In short, a survey documents the physical evidence of the past that expresses and contributes to the history and identity of a region.

The activity that is the subject of this material has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Historic Preservation Act, administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior and for History Colorado. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of the Interior or History Colorado, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute an endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior or History Colorado.

This program receives Federal funds from the National Park Service; Regulations of the U.S. Department of the Interior strictly prohibit unlawful discrimination in departmental Federally-assisted programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, or handicap. Any person who believes he or she has been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility operated by a recipient of Federal assistance should write to: Director, Equal Opportunity Program, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1849 C Street, Washington, D.C. 20240.

These activities are also partially funded by the State Historical Fund, a program of History Colorado.
Historical & architectural surveys may encompass a wide variety of resource types, including urban surveys...

rural surveys...

and surveys of special property types, like those related to heritage tourism.

surveys of modern architecture...

Survey projects may be funded by grants from the State Historical Fund and by the Certified Local Government program, for eligible communities.

WHY SHOULD WE CONDUCT AN HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY?

Historical & architectural surveys provide tangible and lasting evidence of who we are, how we got here, and how we have changed through time. Identification, designation, and protection of historic buildings and structures ensure that communities retain their special sense of time and place.

Completed inventories provide the foundation for informed resource management and planning decisions. By considering historic resources early in the planning stages, it is more likely they can be preserved for future generations. Preservation planning studies providing for the recognition and protection of cultural resources are usually based on the results of historical & architectural surveys.

Survey information is a valuable educational tool for local residents, business owners, and the general public who are interested in learning more about a region. Property owners often use the information to help in the appropriate restoration or rehabilitation of their houses and places of business.

Survey information can also be used to establish walking tours or in the general reconstruction of a community’s history. Information gathered during surveys often becomes the basis for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places, the State Register of Historic Properties, or as locally-designated landmarks.

Photos from the collection of History Colorado

What are the steps in conducting an historical & architectural survey?

There are several basic steps when conducting historical & architectural surveys. Although surveys vary depending on the purpose, location, intensity, and types of resources present, following these major steps will facilitate a successful project.

Step 1: Review the Colorado Cultural Resource Survey Manual
Step 2: Define the Purpose of the Survey
Step 3: Fund the Survey
Step 4: Select the Project Personnel
Step 5: Plan the Survey
Step 6: Inform and Involve the Public
Step 7: Conduct the Fieldwork
Step 8: Conduct the Office/Lab Work
Step 9: Evaluate the Resources
Step 10: Identify and Record Districts
Step 11: Prepare the Report
Step 12: Present the Findings
Step 13: Use the Findings

Although these steps represent a logical progression, there are occasions when conditions warrant some rearrangement of activities to achieve desired survey goals. The steps should be viewed as a general framework for conducting a cultural resource survey — not all steps pertain to all surveys and additional steps may be required in some cases.