IF WALLS COULD TALK

Telling the Story of a Historic Building to Create a Market Edge

National Trust for Historic Preservation

Acknowledgments

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The National Trust for Historic Preservation is the only national, private, nonprofit organization chartered by Congress with the responsibility for encouraging public participation in the preservation of sites, buildings and objects significant in American history and culture. Support for the National Trust is provided by membership dues, endowment funds, contributions and matching grants from federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, under provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Interior Department or the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Townscape Institute of Cambridge, Massachusetts, is a nonprofit, public interest organization concerned with increasing the livability of cities, towns and neighborhoods through conservation and visual enhancement. Townscape consults widely on issues of urban design, public art planning, cultural interpretation and historic preservation. Townscape publications include *Place Makers: Creating Public Art That Tells You Where You Are, New Providence: A Changing Cityscape, Facade Stories: Changing Faces of Main Street Storefronts and How to Care for Them* and *On Common Ground: Caring for Shared Land From Town Common to Urban Park.*

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COVER: The Dell DeHay Law Library, Tarrant County Courthouse, Fort Worth, Texas. Completed in 1893, this landmark structure was rehabilitated in the early 1980s. A partnership of area business leaders, who formed the Committee for a Greater Tarrant County, voters and government agencies restored this symbol of justice to its original design and ideal—a house of courts. Photographs with brass plates that interpret the rehabilitation are located throughout the building. (Photo: Bob Guarnieri)

Design by Stephen Kraft

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Photo: Chas A. Miller III

Message from the President

In the decade since Congress established federal tax incentives for rehabilitating historic buildings, a renaissance of rehabilitation activity occurred in villages, towns and cities across the nation.

Thousands of previously underused or derelict historic buildings have been returned to a viable economic role in communities large and small. We all have witnessed these remarkable changes. But how many of us stop to think about what makes the work possible? At the National Trust, we believe that if more people were aware of how the tax incentives benefit historic buildings and districts, they would sharply increase the already strong support enjoyed by this critical federal tax policy.

This book tells the stories about these rehabilitation projects, now more than 20,000 in number, and about the partnerships between federal, state and local governments and private developers and owners that made them happen. It was supported by a generous matching grant from the Design Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts.

With any rehabilitation project, a private owner is creating, in a sense, a "product" to be sold or rented. Through marketing of the project, the owner presents the availability and distinct advantages of a newly rehabilitated historic building to prospective customers. By expanding the marketing message to include information about the history of the building and the process by which it was rehabilitated, the building's owner engages in what is called *interpretation* of the rehabilitation project. At the National Trust, we believe better designed and promoted interpretation programs may gain real estate and business marketing advantages for the building owner—a *marketing edge.* That edge may mean quicker rental and even higher rents for a rehabilitation project.

This publication is an "idea book" to stimulate creative thinking about rehabilitation. It shows by examples what private owners and developers are doing today to interpret their rehabilitated historic buildings, and how they are making money in the process.

As we undertook this project, we created a network of national nonprofit organizations, government agencies and preservation professionals to monitor our work. We are very grateful for the interest and excitement expressed by network members and for the valuable ad-

vice and direction they offered. We are also grateful to network members, who include representatives from the National Park Service, the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, the Building Owners and Managers Association International, the American Planning Association, the American Association for State and Local History, and Preservation Action, to mention a few, for help in distributing this informative new publication.

J. Jackson Walter
October, 1989

Wherever men have lived there is a story to be told . . . .

HENRY DAVID THOREAU
Journal, March 18, 1860

Telling the Story

Over the past two decades, historic buildings of all kinds have been rehabilitated for continued use in American cities, towns and rural areas. The passage of the 1976 Tax Reform Act and subsequent legislation encouraged this trend by providing incentives for the rehabilitation and use of depreciable properties eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. With this legislation, Congress recognized the need to put historic buildings on an equal playing field with new construction, which has long benefited from tax incentives. However, the story of these buildings, called "interpretation," remains for the most part still to be told.

Congress created a public/private partnership between the private owner and the state and federal agencies who ensure the Standards for Rehabilitation; guidelines defined by the Secretary of the Interior. Although this partnership story is not well known, since passage of the 1976 Tax Reform Act over 20,000 completed building projects are preserving an important part of our nation's heritage, revitalizing commercial and residential districts, creating new jobs, as well as increasing local and state revenues.

The Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for Rehabilitation:* Ten rules for rehabilitating historic buildings in a sensitive manner to maintain their historic integrity and character. Contact your State Historic Preservation Office for a copy.

The task remains to *interpret* historic buildings and thus reveal the historic connections and cohesion they give our culture. To interpret a historic building is to tell its story in a way that will increase the public's understanding and appreciation of the significance of the

building's role in community or even national development. Is the building an acclaimed example of a particular architectural style, or does it express an innovation in building technology? How do the building's architecture and function relate to neighboring structures? What was the drama of those personalities who lived within its walls? In many cases the building's function has changed. Who are the players in the public/private partnership that helped give it new life? By telling these stories, building owners offer the public a tangible link to the past, one that may both increase their appreciation of the building's history . . . and of the storyteller, as well as help them understand the importance of government policy that protects the past for the future.

To create an effective interpretation program, developers can, of course, look to the techniques employed by museums; they can also look to what their colleagues in the private sector are already doing. What follows is an exploration of why owners of Certified Rehabilitations, projects that meet the Standards for Rehabilitation, interpret their historic buildings . . . and how they do it.

Goals of Interpretation

1. To help the public understand the connections between as many aspects of what is being observed as possible.

2. To tell the story in a way that will encourage people to discover for themselves.

3. To encourage the preservation of significant historic properties by creating an understanding and consequent appreciation of them.

4. To show the relationship of what is being observed (experienced) to the lives of the observers.

General Do's and Don'ts of Interpretation

Do	*Don't*
Appeal to all five senses	Exaggerate for effect
Place structure within the broader historical context	Focus solely on the building
Be brief and concise	Use jargon or overly technical terms
Involve the visitor	Overwhelm with information

Meyer May House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. This Certified Rehabilitation of a Frank Lloyd Wright masterpiece is one of the first places Steelcase, Inc., takes its clients when they arrive in town.

Why Tell the Story?

"It's in our best interest. . ." "It wouldn't have worked any other way. . ." "If we spent a million dollars, we wouldn't have received this much publicity. . . ." In other words, Certified Rehabilitation owners interpret their projects *because it's good business!* This is what the project managers, executives and building owners said in a recent survey of interpretation programs in Certified Rehabilitations across the country, from Baltimore to Honolulu.

The impetus to establish an interpretation program varies widely, depending on the use of the building. Steelcase, Inc., an office furniture corporation based in Grand Rapids, Michigan, restored the Meyer May House, one of Frank Lloyd Wright's masterpieces of design. Steelcase opened it to the public three days a week not only as a goodwill gesture to their hometown, but also to bolster their corporate image among colleagues in the design community.

"Interpretation is part of the program, and I sell that as well as space."

HARRIS MULLEN, *owner*
Ybor Square in Tampa, Florida

At the other end of the country, Harris Mullen, owner of Ybor Square in Tampa, Florida, (formerly a cigar factory, now a retail mall) interpreted his project because it helped him create a total image for the new development.

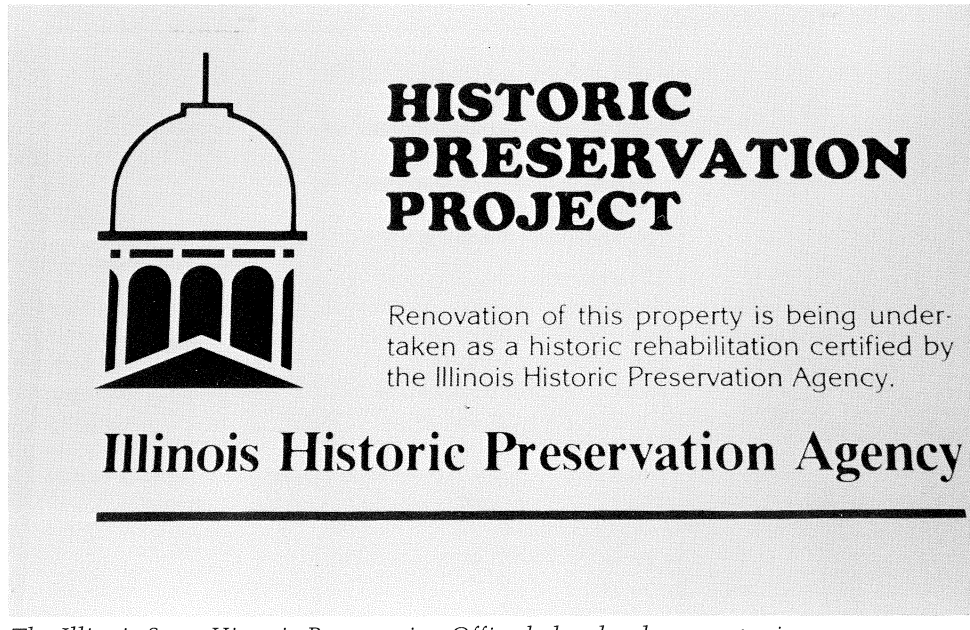
At St. Louis Union Station, the country's largest rehabilitation project, the developers asked the public to write about their memories of meeting the train. The Memories Program, which mounts these letters in flip racks, helps retain the aura of the old train depot—now a festival market and shopping mall—reassuring residents that this landmark is still a part of the public domain. And besides, says Molly Walsh, Memories Program coordinator, "it brings people back!"

Ways to Tell the Story

Most Certified Rehabilitation projects competing in the commercial market need to have a marketing and public relations strategy, just as they need an interior design scheme. The most successful interpretation programs approach these tasks and expenditures with imagination and an eye to key historical events. Integrating an interpretation program should not be a separate process considered only at the tail end of project development. Thinking through the interpretation of a Certified Rehabilitation can influence the entire marketing and promotion of the project. Some of the expenses involved with interpretation may be included in the investment credit base; check the list of qualified expenditures in the tax code to ensure the fullest advantage.

Interpretive techniques are varied and range from providing brochures on a counter to giving organized tours. The following discussion of three promotional strategies shows how these techniques can help create a market identity for a Certified Rehabilitation.

Marketing. Each project, whether a festival marketplace or an office building, needs to set itself apart from the crowd. The approaches



The Illinois State Historic Preservation Office helps developers get a jump-start on interpreting their projects by providing signs for Certified Rehabilitation projects.

to this task can also serve as interpretive strategies. There is an opportunity to set a Certified Rehabilitation apart from other competitive projects with the use of construction signs right from the start. These signs can advertise the historic significance of the project and highlight the public/private partnership that assists in its rehabilitation. In other forms of marketing literature (i.e., brochures, advertisements, menus, letterhead) the story of the building can be communicated. In Albany, New York, Norstar Bancorp has produced an appealing visitors' guide to Norstar Plaza (formerly Union Station), their newly rehabilitated executive office building. The guide tells the story of Union Station through the words of the contemporary Albany chronicler, William Kennedy. In telling the story of Union Station, Norstar Bancorp also anchors itself in the community.

Interpretive Tools

Literature/publications
Public media/presentations
Tours (guided and self-guided)
Artifacts
Photographs
Audiovisuals
Exhibits/displays
Artwork/craft
Structural interpretation

Use the story of the building, whatever its particular flavor, to give the product—office space, apartments, condominiums, retail shops, restaurants, and hotel rooms—a special marketing edge. It is a successful strategy because it roots the building in the most evocative context—the drama of history.

Publications/Literature

Advantages	*Limitations*
Portability	Lengthy text discourages use
Relatively inexpensive	Can be a source of litter
High souvenir value	Poor design reduces interest
Wide variety of illustrative techniques can be used	Require storage, handling and accountability
Suited for presenting sequential material	Ease of production encourages use in place of more appropriate media
Can be read at visitor's pace	
Easy to revise	
Can be produced at various levels of detail	

Public Relations. While closely connected to marketing, a public relations campaign often encompasses a more active foray into the community or a more direct involvement with visitors at the building site. Walking groups through a restoration project, whether they are VIP's, a bus load of senior citizens, or a classroom of school children, will net more visibility and good will than a listing in the yellow pages. Guided tours, given before, during and after rehabilitation work, allow visitors the flexibility of asking a myriad of questions about the building's history and the restoration process. Self-guided tours offer people the freedom to discover on their own.

Go out and talk to people about the project! In both large and small communities, residents *and journalists* are interested in the impact a rehabilitation has had on a neighborhood. Do not ignore the power of the press and its ability to provide positive publicity.

Co-owner, Kathryn Slick, tells a group of visitors how the restoration of the Plaza Hotel spurred other Certified Rehabilitations in Las Vegas, New Mexico.

"There is no better place for us to be than downtown in our hometown, in the grand building bequeathed to Albany by another hometowner, from another age." *(From Norstar Bancorp's "A Visitor's Guide")*

The Pennsylvanian leasing desk exhibit. Historic Landmarks for Living uses the history of this Pittsburgh railroad station to market their luxury apartments. The Pennsylvanian is a Certified Rehabilitation completed in 1988.

Trained volunteers lead tours four times daily at St. Louis Union Station. They also offer a self-guided walking tour.

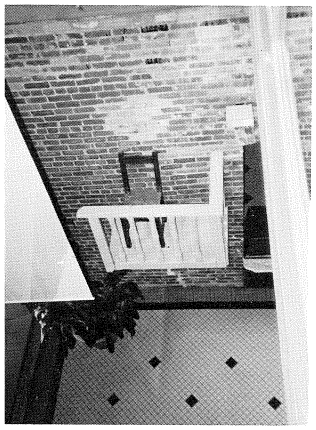
Guided Tours

Advantages	*Limitations*
Provide opportunity for dialogue	Restricted to scheduled times
Require no structural changes	Accommodate a limited number of people
Adapt easily to specific audiences	Present liability issues
Provide personal touch	Require training and monitoring of tour guide
Encourage community participation	

Audiovisuals

Advantages	*Limitations*
Capture realism and provide emotional impact	Best when used under controlled situations
Good for introductory programs	Require backup equipment, regular maintenance and monitoring
Good for sequential stories	Can be perceived as sterile or impersonal
Opportunity for dramatization	Can be a visual or auditory intrusion
Reach many visitors at one time	Poor when used for detailed orientation (how to get there, etc.)
Can illustrate before and after effects	

Interior Design. Refurbishing one's building can provide the greatest opportunity for creative interpretation. As the interior design or motif is developed, the story of a Certified Rehabilitation can be evoked through highlighting structural elements, through artwork and craft, and through exhibits integrating artifacts and photography. Care should be taken, however, in designing and placing interpretive elements and motifs so as not to obscure or overwhelm historic features or spaces.



At Ybor Square, Tampa, Florida, El Lector's chair recalls the tradition of reading to the immigrant cigar makers. (Photo: Harris Mullen)

Ybor Square in Tampa, Florida, has mounted on a characteristic platform an original "Lector's Chair" to help tell the story of the cigar industry. An accompanying plaque explains how "El Lector," sitting on his elevated perch, read in Spanish to immigrant workers the news and literature of the day. This tradition helped keep the workers' minds off the oppressive heat and monotonous tasks.

Because such works of art and craftsmanship are often simply glanced at in passing, the public can miss their narrative potential. It is important, therefore, to draw attention to the artifact with a tour program, brochure, or plaque. If this is accomplished, a developer may find that an element of artistic interpretation becomes one of the most memorable impressions made on the visiting public.

Structural interpretation focuses on either the process or the techniques of construction or rehabilitation, or on a particular material or technology employed in a building project. While this tool is infrequently used in the private sector, it can be invoked as simply as choosing the right paint color. This was the case at Festival Market

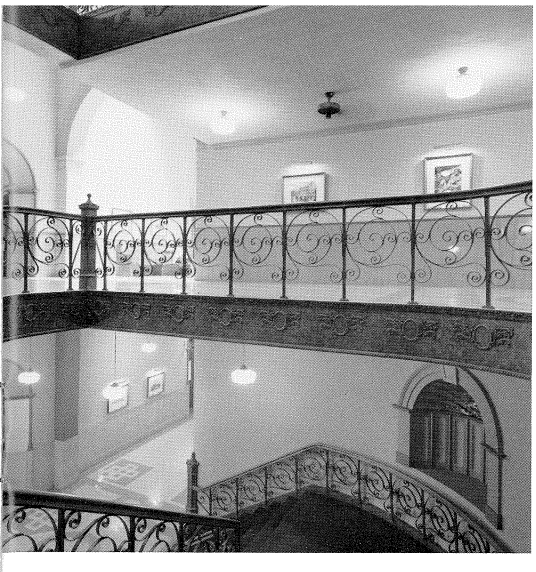
Local and national newspapers may not be intrigued by a new downtown mall, but they can be interested in the journalistic hook of historic rehabilitation and its relationship to the tourism industry, or how an adaptive use gave renewed life to a threatened community treasure.

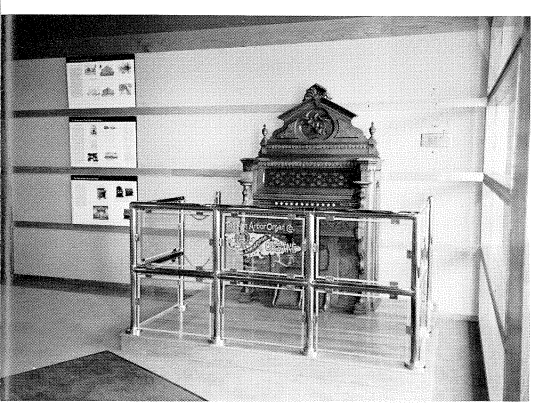
Place at Union Station in Indianapolis. In discussions with visitors, building managers discovered that the structural daring of the building's wide spans was a major draw for visitors. Consequently, in their current "theme enhancement" program, they are highlighting important engineering elements through bright colors and focused lighting.

Other Certified Rehabilitation projects use photographs, artifacts and exhibits to interpret their building. As with other interpretive tools, historic photographs and artifacts are simply a creative way to complete a necessary task. Walls, hallways and lobbies may benefit from some enhancement; why not highlight what makes the building special? When photographs are used, it is important either to have captions under each picture or to provide a narrative, grouping photographs together. Without explanation, the pictures become decoration only and much of their interpretive value is lost. The Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, a Certified Rehabilitation, has arranged a photograph and memorabilia exhibit along a timeline that interprets the evolution of Hollywood and the entertainment industry so important to the Hotel.

Artifacts also have more meaning to the public when they are interpreted. The Allmendinger Building in Ann Arbor, Michigan, (formerly an organ factory, now an office building) employs a number of interpretive tools that explain the 1880s organ they placed in their front lobby. This exhibit includes text and photographic panels about the building site, the company, and its product, as well as a representation of the original company business card etched in glass.

Richmond's Jefferson Sheraton Hotel, a Certified Rehabilitation, replaced the live alligators that guarded the statue of Thomas Jefferson in the past with several sculpted reptiles created by Paul Jeffries, thus interpreting an intriguing chapter in hotel history to the delight of contemporary guests. (Photo: Andrea Black Jeffries)





Above left: The Tarrant County Courthouse in Fort Worth, Texas, displays photographs throughout the building with each floor focusing on a different topic. This interpretation covers the building's rehabilitation, Tarrant County communities, and past county officials. Small brass plates identify and date each photograph. (Photo: Byrd Williams, IV)

Above: Lining the walls of the mezzanine level at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, this entertainment industry exhibit provides a vivid and informative backdrop for parties and receptions. (Photo: Ted Kitos)

Left: This organ exhibit at the Allmendinger Building, a former piano and organ factory in Ann Arbor, Michigan, effectively integrates a variety of interpretive tools. (Photo: Roberts Gates)

Exhibits/Displays

Advantages
Viewed at visitors' own pace
Can display artifacts associated with the site or the story
Promote visitor participation
Can be complemented with other media
Can be designed for indoor or outdoor use

Limitations
Sensitive to deterioration
Require security and maintenance

St. Louis Union Station.

All of these interpretive tools serve functions that contribute to the economic success of the historic rehabilitation. While this may be good news for the developer, to the general public and building user, a successful interpretation program need only enhance their experience and understanding of the building—and bring them back!

Taking a Closer Look

But what does it cost? Who is involved? Here is a closer look at five Certified Rehabilitations and their interpretation programs.

• St. Louis Union Station, St. Louis, Missouri

In 1980 when Oppenheimer Properties of New York assembled their development team, The Rouse Company of Missouri and Hellmuth, Obata, Kassabaum, a major architectural firm in St. Louis, their task was to turn Union Station, a city landmark, into a shopping mall/hotel complex. The development team recognized that to succeed, the project would require strong community support. To garner this support, they envisioned a project that reinforced the symbolic meaning of the building yet gave it new life. To achieve this, they worked with their public partners, the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office and the regional office of the National Park Service, to ensure a sensitive rehabilitation of the building itself, and they told (and continue to tell) the story of Union Station through videos, tours, exhibits, and the written memories of St. Louis citizens.

Consequently, the country's largest rehabilitation project is also the most extensively interpreted. The Rouse Company of Missouri, now property managers, employ a full-time Memories Program Coordinator; this department has an annual budget of $63,000 that also covers the staffing of the information booth.

Visitor reads reminiscences of "meeting the train" in St. Louis Union Station. (Photo: Molly Walsh)

Does the company think it is worth the effort? Molly Walsh, Program Coordinator, admits that this is hard to measure. But she is quick to add, ". . .the building is very much loved by the St. Louis community and while our rehabilitation has retained the integrity of the structure, it is our interpretation program that has helped retain the emotional attachment of the community."

Team

Property owner
Hotel owner
Property manager
Museum curator
Exhibit designer
Public relations staff
Memories coordinator

"See the Station by Rail" is a self-guided walking tour that tells the story of the architecture, the trains, and the people who made St. Louis Union Station a city treasure. (Photo: Molly Walsh)

Cost

Exhibit fabrication	$185,000
Video production (three videos)	$14,670
Annual operation cost	$63,000

The Whipple House, Cheyenne, Wyoming. (Photo: Richard Collier)

• Whipple House, Cheyenne, Wyoming

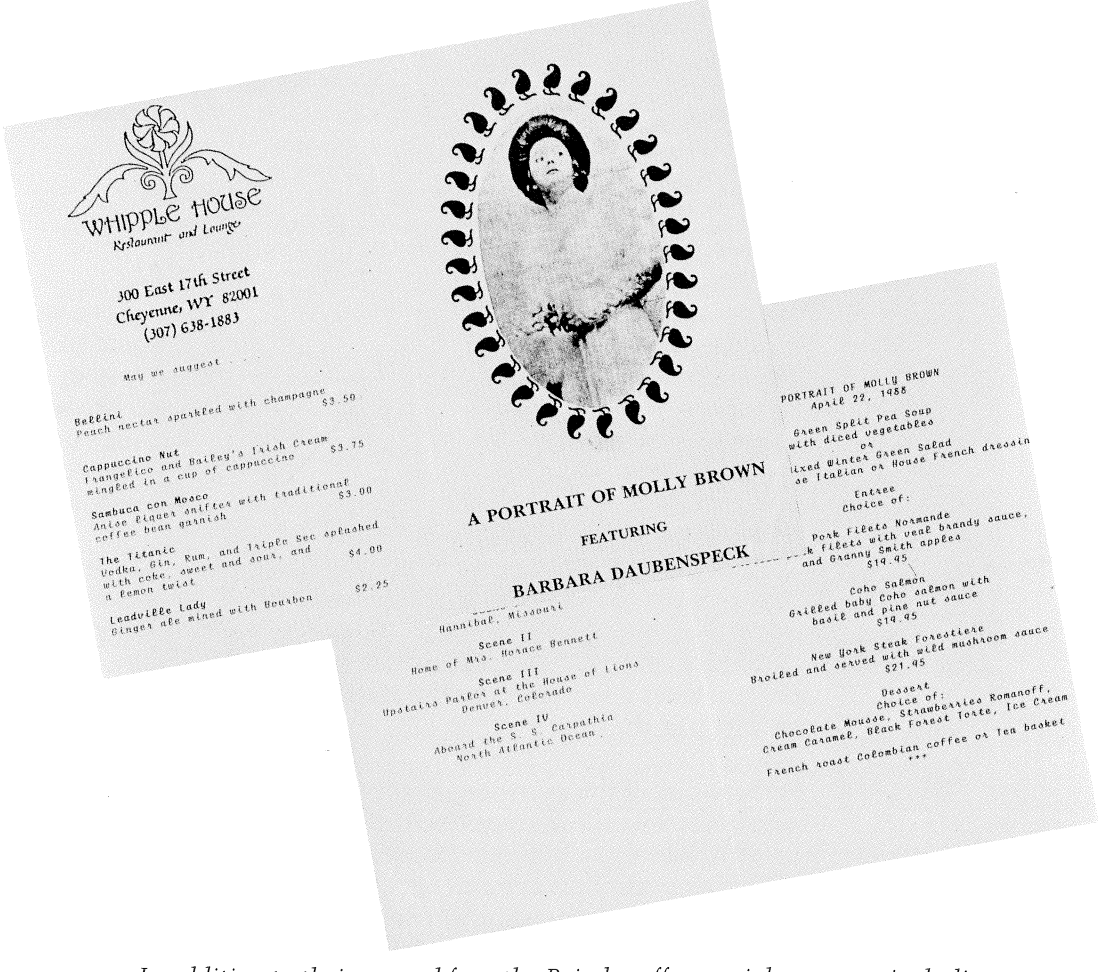
Unlike the St. Louis Union Station, the Whipple House is a small-scale Certified Rehabilitation. However, like the St. Louis Union Station, it packs a big message. In 1982, Leonard and Betty Ann Beierle saved this handsome Victorian from demolition and have since transformed it into a restaurant. Although there are no exhibits on the walls or videos in the foyer, this project is steeped in a very personal interpretation program which, for a reasonable cost, effectively reaches the Cheyenne community and beyond.

Knowing that most of her clientele come for an experience of history, Ms. Beierle is always ready to answer questions that the printed building history may not cover. Twice a year, she offers a formal tour that includes a sample from the restaurant kitchen; informal tours are given at the drop of a hat.

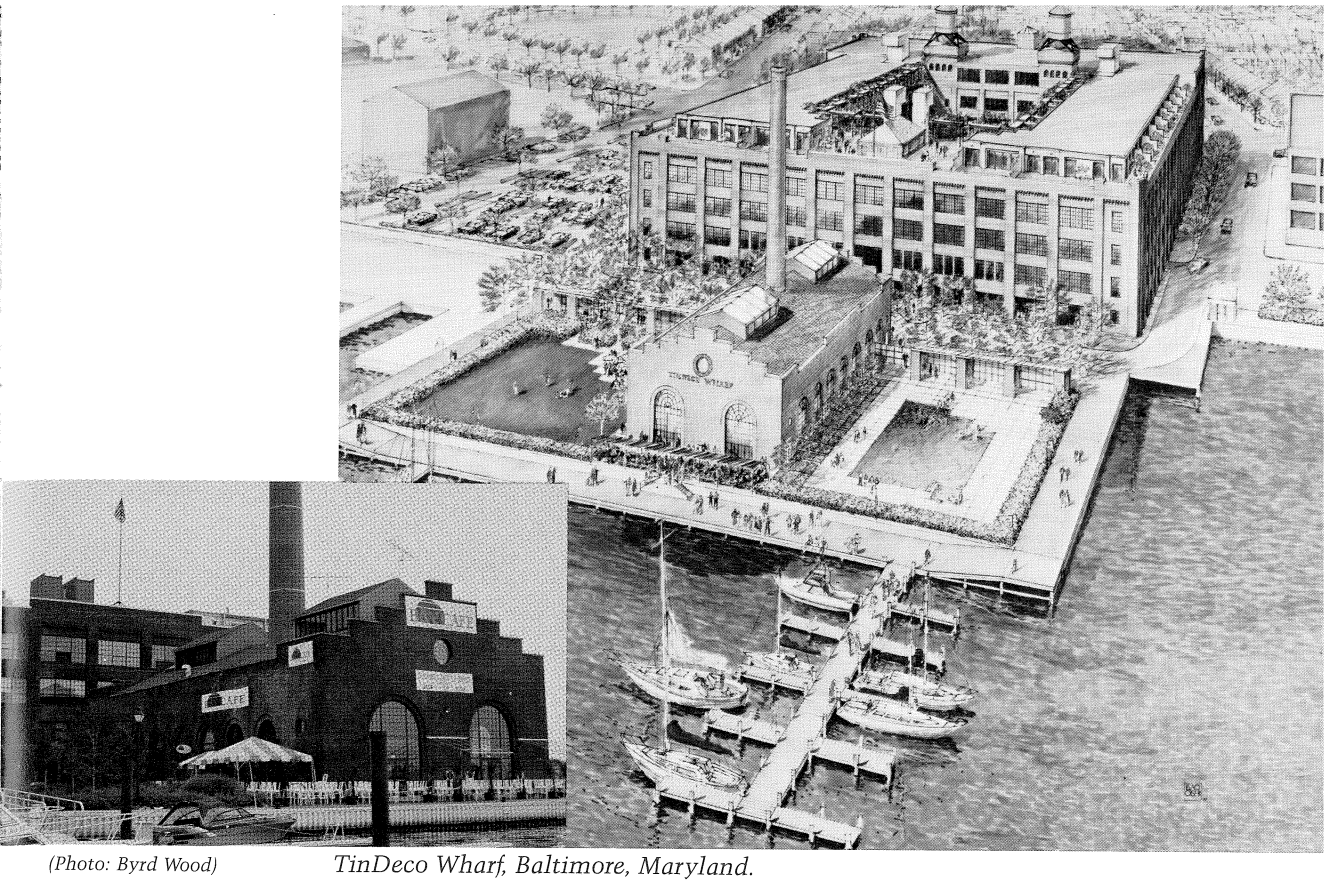
Perhaps one of the most important messages the Beierles communicate is the role the Investment Tax Credit played in the $750,000 rehabilitation of the Whipple House. Throughout the year, Ms. Beierle speaks to community groups about the rehabilitation process and the public/private partnership which made it possible. The Beierles are now considered community resources for the continuing preservation work in Cheyenne, work largely spurred by the Whipple House project.

Using a Victorian motif infused with Western flair, the Beierles have created an aura of an earlier time. This enticing environment has not gone unnoticed, and the Whipple House has been featured in several national magazines as well as in the local press. A fact which, Ms. Beierle notes, "has been great for business!"

Team	**Cost**	
Developer	Renovation	$750,000
Architect	Annual interpretation	$3,000
Contractor		



In addition to their normal fare, the Beierles offer special programs including historical dramas in their Heritage Dinner Theatre at the Whipple House.



(Photo: Byrd Wood)

TinDeco Wharf, Baltimore, Maryland.

• TinDeco Wharf, Baltimore, Maryland

In its heyday, the Tin Decorating Company of Baltimore manufactured four million tin cans a day. Not your average tin cans, these were collectibles yesterday as well as today. Now a residential and commercial Certified Rehabilitation with 328,000 leasable square feet, TinDeco Wharf caters to professional couples and empty nesters, a market drawn to unique and interesting environments. The developer, Struever Bros. Eccles & Rouse, Inc., felt it was important to let this market know the history that made their project special. In the five-story atrium lobby and elsewhere there are vivid displays of the colorful products manufactured on site from 1914 to the 1960s. Accompanying these exhibits are panels narrating the history of the

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Team
Limited partnership
Developer
Architect
Historian

Cost
Interpretation—$65,000

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company and those who worked there. Standing 20 feet high with 60 panes, the original window sashes could not be reconditioned for exterior use. These sashes, however, have been salvaged for interior use and now frame interpretive panels and display cases.

John Laria, who worked for the developer, cites two motivations for their interpretation program: pride, and . . . equally important, marketability.

Many former employees of the Tin Decorating Company of Baltimore bring family and friends to see the new residential community and its celebration of their craft. *(Photo: Byrd Wood)*

"Increasingly, people are drawn to historic settings. Stressing the history associated with a project enhances its marketing advantage; interpretation is one vehicle to get this message across."

JOHN LARIA, *project manager, Struever Bros. Eccles, & Rouse*

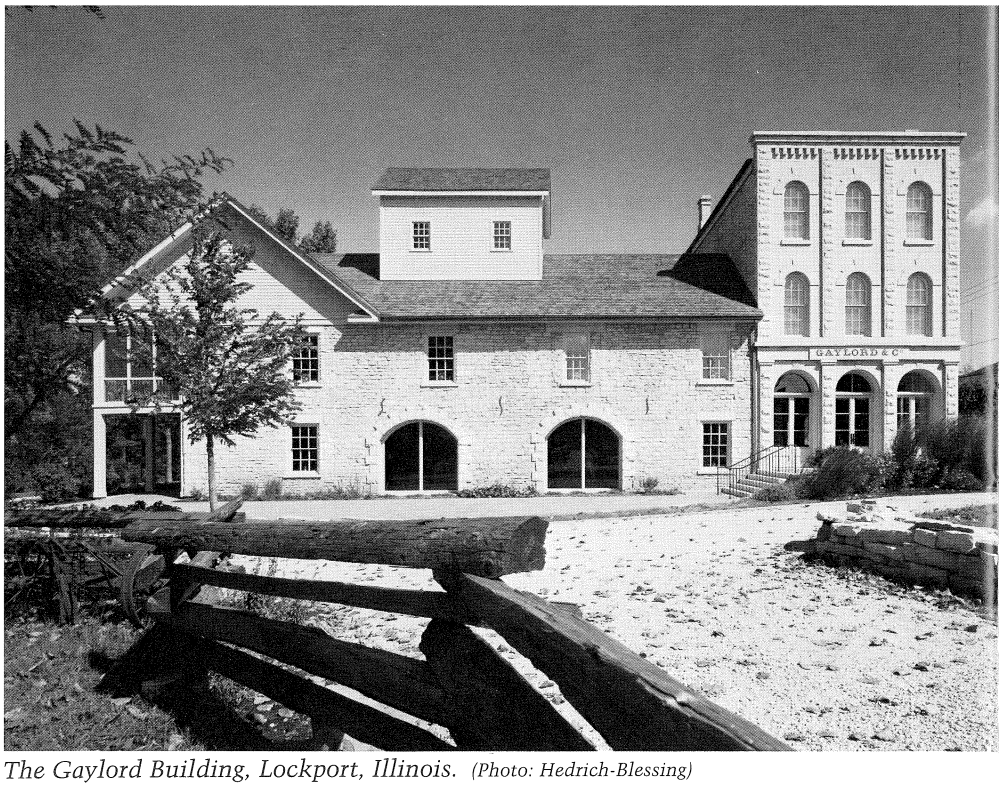
• Guthrie Commercial District, Guthrie, Oklahoma

Certified Rehabilitations often exist in the context of a historic district where the success of one project is closely tied to the success of the district as a whole. In these cases, the interpretation of individual projects helps to create a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts. Guthrie is a prime example of a place where marketing historic resources put a town back on the map. Today visitors experience both guided and self-guided tours of the historic district, as well as view individual plaques that tell the story of many downtown buildings.

Founded in 1890 as Oklahoma's territorial and later state capital, Guthrie developed with expectations of grandeur; 1,300 Victorian cottages had been constructed by the turn of the century along with a commercial core that together comprise one of the largest National Register Districts in the nation.

However, Guthrie lost the capital designation to Oklahoma City in 1910, and by the time Ralph McCalmont arrived in town in 1974, he found much of the commercial core covered with false facades and up for sale. As owner of a local bank, Mr. McCalmont was vitally interested in the town's prosperity. His first inclination was to pull buildings down, but he soon was confronted with the rich legacy of the past—the story each building told about the growth of Guthrie. Convinced that Guthrie would prosper best by marketing this history, Mr. McCalmont began to work with the preservation community to restore the town's earlier glory. Still in progress, over 10 million dollars of rehabilitation has already transformed the downtown core—all accomplished through the public/private partnership implicit in the Certified Rehabilitation process.

Intriguing stories can now be found on plaques such as this in front of more than two dozen commercial structures in Guthrie, Oklahoma. (Photo: Sally G. Oldham)



The Gaylord Building, Lockport, Illinois. (Photo: Hedrich-Blessing)

• Gaylord Building, Lockport, Illinois

The Gaylord Building, an 1838 warehouse and dry goods store along the old Illinois & Michigan Canal, serves as an anchor site in this nation's first National Heritage Corridor. The corridor came into being in 1984 when Congress enacted legislation recognizing the area's unique contributions to the nation's development. Administered by the Illinois Department of Conservation, this corridor runs along the canal connecting the Great Lakes to the Illinois River. The Corridor's interpretation program explains how transportation and trade transformed the region.

Rehabilitated through the efforts of The Gaylord Lockport Company, the Gaylord Building houses three tenants, the I&M Canal Visitor Center (operated by the Illinois Department of Conservation), the Illinois State Museum Lockport Gallery and the privately owned Public Landing restaurant. At each of these destinations, through a combina-

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"Historic buildings tell a story. When people restore an old building, they should be encouraged to share their knowledge and expertise. Interpretation is a means of sharing with others what you know."

BARBARA C. DONNELLEY, *president, Gaylord Lockport Company*

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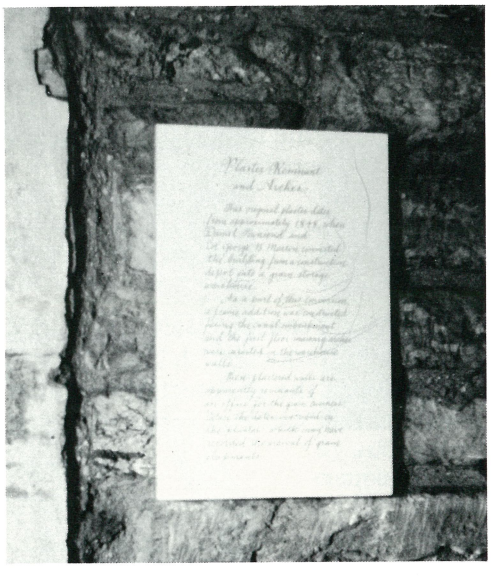
tion of exhibits and plaques, and with the assistance of Illinois Department of Conservation interpretation staff, the visitor learns about the building and its role in the community of Lockport and beyond. One of the more innovative interpretive techniques is found in the privately owned Public Landing Restaurant, which exposes a section of old horsehair plaster and describes it on a nearby plaque.

The Gaylord Building—a Certified Rehabilitation where public and private tenants together help tell the story of an entire region—represents a public/private partnership with a comprehensive vision.

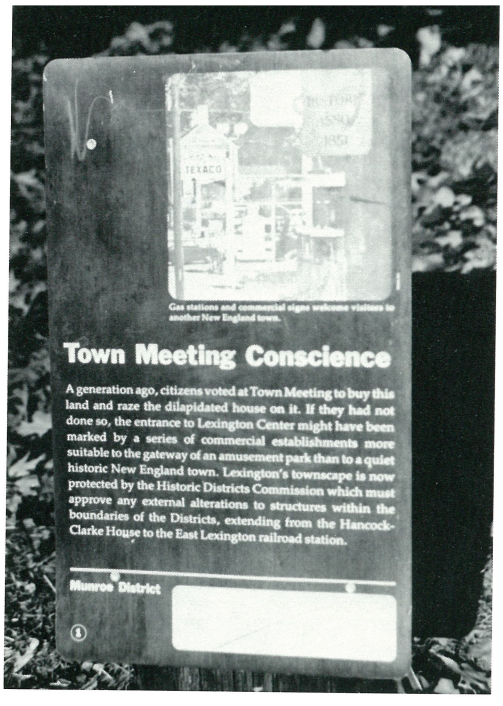
Team
Owner/developer
Architect
Historian
Graphic designer
Tenants

Cost
Total initial cost of interpretive displays in restaurant—$2,500

Along the Illinois & Michigan Canal, now a National Heritage Corridor, a series of interpretive markers provides information about nearby historic sites and their role in the history and development of the canal.



This plaque describing the plaster and stone work was carefully crafted to resemble the early records of the Gaylord Building and is written in faded blue ink to look like a journal page.
(Photos: Susan Jackson Keig)



By showing a planning disaster in another community, Lexington, Mass., showed citizens the sometimes vivid consequences of policy decisions. Anodized aluminum, accepting both text and line art, is an inexpensive but effective method of communicating both textural and pictorial information.

So What is the Process?

These and other projects demonstrate the range of opportunities for communicating a building's story and the public/private partnership assisting in its rebirth. Yet for every project that includes interpretation, many others remain silent.

The small residential project, for example, is the most often rehabilitated, but least often interpreted. How might the owners of a four-unit apartment building located in a historic district turn this "dumb building" into a "savvy structure" that tells its story to residents and the general public? How can the importance of the public/private partnership inherent in the certification process be communicated?

To address these issues, we recommend the following procedures:

1. Identify the site. Place a construction sign on site that lists the project as a historic rehabilitation and defines the public/private team —the owners, the developer, the architect, the local and state historic preservation offices, and the National Park Service.

2. Contact local and state preservation organizations. The owners should express their interest in interpreting the project to the local neighborhood association and to other preservation groups, as well as to the State Historic Preservation Office. Successful interpretations are often the result of collaborations where a local nonprofit group may research, assemble and maintain an exhibit on project property. This will lend credibility to the interpretation, strengthen content and reduce costs.

3. Take the story to the local media. A number of angles might pique interest depending on the locale. Is this the rehabilitation that will change the tenor of the neighborhood? Does this rehabilitation fit into a preservation trend in the area, or is it the outcome of a long uphill battle? Does the building have an illustrative past (did it house any famous, or infamous, citizens), or use a building technology or architectural style in a particular way? These are all valid stories, so prepare a press release and follow it up!

Preservationist and developer, Roger Webb, commissioned a new way of interpreting the site of Old City Hall in Boston, Mass. The resulting hopscotch, called City Carpet, animates the streetscape and connects with Boston's freedom trail. (Artist: Lili Anne Rosenberg; Planners: The Townscape Institute)

By asking the visitor questions, this computerized city guide developed by The Townscape Institute leads to a fuller discovery of place.

4. Use common spaces to tell the story. Will there be a lobby and common hallways? Let these areas tell residents and their visitors the history of the building. If the owners do not have photographs or other artifacts recording the building's history, they can often be found at the local library or historical archives. Again, the preservation groups and agencies are there to serve. Talk to people in the neighborhood. Do they have stories to relate about the building or previous occupants? History should give the developer a market edge; use it to its fullest potential.

5. Integration. Weave the building's history into the project's marketing program. Stationery, business cards, logos, brochures—all can communicate what is special about the project.

6. Know the neighborhood. Get involved in neighborhood activities. If the historic district organizes tours, sign your building up. Contribute to or begin a marker program that interprets individual buildings and homes, as well as their relationship to the surrounding neighborhood, and links them together in a walking tour.

Interpretive Methods

Historical Layers. Interpreting layers of time visible at the same moment allows the public to experience the complexity of history.

Time Lines. This technique can isolate the sequential change in the life of an individual or building and give focus to the process of change.

Environmental Emersion. This notion surrounds observers with a total environment, causing them to step or peer into a different era, or to experience the sensation of another scale or viewpoint.

Leading Questions. An interpretation program can pose questions designed to lead the public along a pathway where many aspects of a site's significance may be discovered. For example, questions about architectural style can lead to an exploration of the social status of the original owners and their role in the community.

Place Making (Trails). Using the history of a site to challenge artists and craftspersons to create objects that call up selective associations about the site and its significance.

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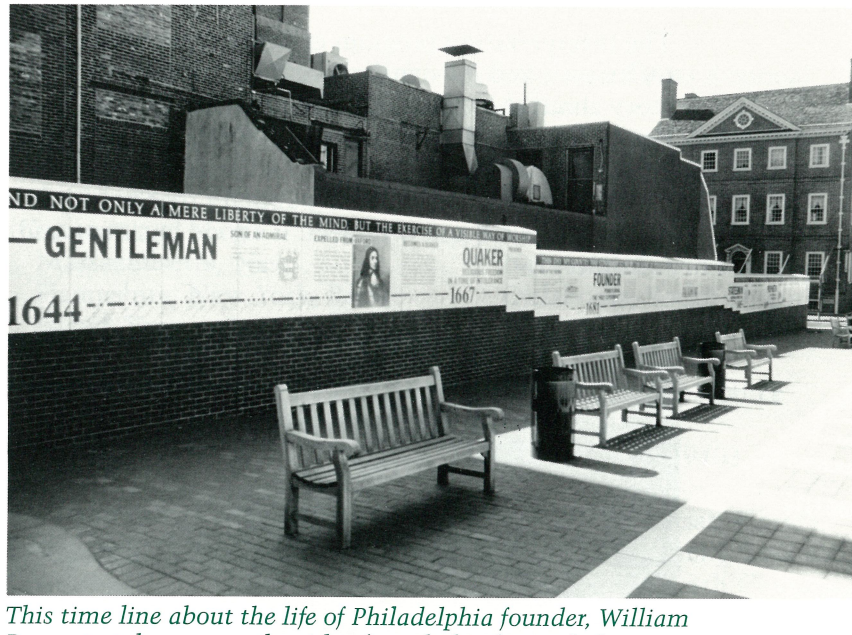
7. Communicate. Transmit the importance of the public/private partnership. Formally cite this partnership and its benefits on any marker or plaque that identifies the building. When asked about the rehabilitation process, explain who the players were and the role of the State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service. If the Investment Tax Credit attracted investors and has spurred revitalization in adjacent areas, let people know.

Put It On A Plaque!

"This Certified Rehabilitation, reviewed by (insert appropriate SHPO name here), has been found by the National Park Service to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and has earned federal income tax credits for this project."



This time line about the life of Philadelphia founder, William Penn, stretches across the side of newly landscaped plaza, Welcome Park. (Designer: Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown)

The Stockholm Museum allows the visitor to walk across a map of the archipelago of islands that form this city. This type of engagement can enchant and delight, but is too often not a part of interpretive displays. (Photo: Ronald Lee Fleming)

Bottomline

Despite the radiance of newly rehabilitated structures, *buildings do not speak for themselves.* It is up to the owner to relate the historical drama and the governmental policy which gave the building new life. "Certified Rehabilitation" is the mark of quality; communicate what it means with pride.

The interpretation program enlightens the viewer about the building, its history, and its significance in the community today. In telling the story about the Certified Rehabilitation and the public-private partnership involved, the story-teller, the building owner, also benefits. The public awareness and good will created by the interpretation program translate into valuable publicity that helps create the special market edge for a new project. It's good business, and that's the bottomline.

The complexity of interpretation is shown by these fragments of sculpture on Campidoglio Hill that reveal the many layers of Rome. *(Photo: Ronald Lee Fleming)*

Resources

Organizations

The National Trust For Historic Preservation
1785 Massachusetts Ave. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
202/673-4000

Northeast Regional Office
Old City Hall
45 School St., 4th floor
Boston, MA 02108
617-523-0885
(Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont)

Mid-Atlantic Regional Office
Cliveden, 6401 Germantown Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19144
215-438-2886
(Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Virginia, West Virginia)

Midwest Regional Office
53 West Jackson Boulevard
Suite 1135
Chicago, IL 60604
312-939-5547
(Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin)

Mountains/Plains Regional Office
511–16th Street, Suite 700
Denver, CO 80202
303-623-1504
(Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Wyoming)

Southern Regional Office
456 King Street
Charleston, SC 29403
803-722-8552
(Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee)

Texas/New Mexico Field Office
500 Main Street, Suite 606
Ft. Worth, TX 76102
817-332-4398
(Texas, New Mexico)

Western Regional Office
One Sutter Street, Suite 707
San Francisco, CA 94104
415-956-0610
(Alaska, Arizona, California, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Micronesia, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington)

National Park Service
Chief of Interpretation
Michael Watson
P.O. Box 37137
Washington, D.C. 20013
202-523-5270

Offers training courses on all aspects of interpretation, as well as speakers, publications and expert individual advice.

National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers
Suite 332, Hall of the States
444 North Capitol Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001
202-624-5465

Provides contacts in each State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The SHPO will be most familiar with the historic significance of a building and the resources of its surrounding area. Representatives of this office will be helpful in developing the content of an interpretation program.

American Association for State and Local History, Suite 102
172 Second Avenue North
Nashville, TN 37201
615-255-2971

Serves individuals working in state and local history agencies. Can provide literature on interpretation as well as a list of useful contacts at local museums and historical societies.

The National Association for Interpretation
Judy Giles, Executive Director
P.O. Box 1892
Fort Collins, CO 80525
303-491-6434

Membership includes firms that specialize in developing interpretation programs for clients.

Exhibit Designers and Producers Association
Donald L. McNeil
611 East Wells St.
Milwaukee, WI 53202
414-276-3372

Can assist in finding contractors who will fabricate and install exhibits.

Selected Bibliography

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Wittenborg, Lothar P. *Good Show! A Practical Guide for Temporary Exhibitions.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1981.

Technical Leaflets available from the American Association of State and Local History:

Historical Markers: Planning Local Programs (#104) Establishing a Plaque Program: Bringing Local History to the Community (#168)

National Trust for Historic Preservation
1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036