

Measured Practice: Drawing a Barometer of Preservation through the Historic American Buildings Survey

SURVEY

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Author: Virginia Price

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Main content

Abstract :

Established in 1933, the Historic American Buildings Survey is the nation's oldest federal preservation program. The collection of measured drawings, large-format (film) photographs, and historical reports created by HABS and maintained at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, has become one of the largest architectural archives in the world. Drawing for the record was one strategy for preserving valued pieces of the past and facilitating their reconstruction. The HABS collection as an object of study, therefore, can tell us about the history of preservation and the architectural practice it generated by the technologies it recorded, as well as through the places selected for documentation. This paper looks at the different approaches to HABS documentation and shows how the evolution in what was drawn, and the changes in the presentation of those structures graphically, responded to contemporary preservation demands.

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Historic buildings were traditionally designed with many sustainable features that responded to climate and site. When effectively restored and reused, these features can bring about substantial energy savings. Taking into account historic buildings' original climatic adaptations, today's sustainable technology can supplement inherent sustainable features without compromising unique historic character. Preservation keeps our nation's history and culture alive and we learn much from the methods and practices of those who came before us. With our threatened environment, it is imperative that historic preservation (US), heritage preservation or heritage conservation (UK), is an endeavor that seeks to preserve, conserve and protect buildings, objects, landscapes or other artifacts of historical significance. It is a philosophical concept that became popular in the twentieth century, which maintains that cities as products of centuries' development should be obligated to protect their patrimonial legacy. The term refers specifically to the preservation of the built

environment, and not to Measured drawings, photographs, and written historical and architectural information for structures and sites dating from the 17th-20th centuries in the U.S. and its territories. Documentation for more than 43,000 sites and structures; records being added. The Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) collections are among the largest and most heavily used in the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress. Since 2000, documentation from the Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS) has been added to the holdings. Administered since 1933 through cooperative agreements with the National Park Service, the Library