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# History of Historic Preservation

— Katie Leeper, CLG Coordinator —

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# What is Historic Preservation?

“Historic preservation seeks to protect the uniqueness, and therefore the identity, of places. With place preserved, we can recognize where we belong and understand more fully who we are.”

-Jay Vogt and Stephen Rogers in  
*Picturing the Past*



Source: NPS, Preservation Briefs

# Where Did Preservation Start?

- In the 1850s George Washington's home was beginning to deteriorate. In response (and in one of the first organized historic preservation efforts in the United States), prominent women in the surrounding area formed the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association in order to restore and administer the site
- Galvanized by this first effort, similar organizations began to form, mostly focused on the protecting the properties of prominent American persons



Source:  
[mountvernon.org](http://mountvernon.org)

# National Monuments

- In 1872, Yellowstone National Park was created by an Act of Congress, making it the first federally protected national park and the first federal attempt at conservation. Congress was inspired by California's 'Yosemite Act' of 1864 (Yosemite was the first state park).
- In 1892, Casa Grande, Arizona was established as the first prehistoric and cultural reserve in the United States in an effort to repair and protect the ruins from the increasing vandalism and souvenir hunting from tourists



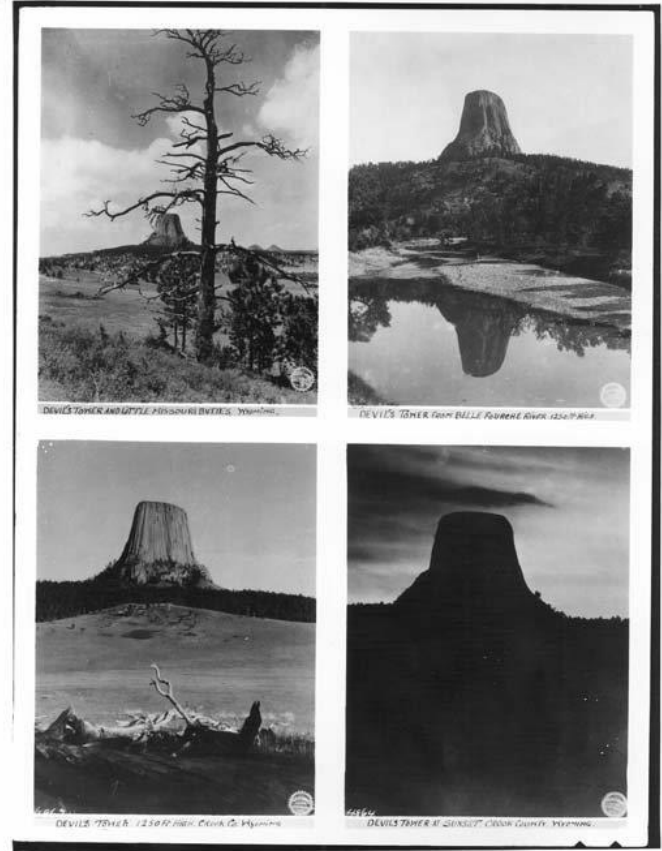
Source: NPS, Casa Grande



Source: NPS, Thomas  
Moran

# The Antiquities Act

- With the rise of industrialization in the United States, and the ongoing looting of archaeological sites, Americans started to grow worried about the preservation of the landscapes and history of the United States
- In 1906, Congress passed the Antiquities Act to protect nationally significant sites and allow the President to designate National Monuments. President Theodore Roosevelt declared Devils Tower as the first national monument.



Source: WY State Archives



# The National Park Service

- In 1916 the National Park Service (NPS) was formed within the Department of the Interior and tasked with protecting and managing the 35 existing national parks and monuments
- At present the NPS manages 431 individual 'units' including 63 National Historic Parks (such as Fort Laramie National Historic Site), 85 National Monuments (such as Fossil Butte National Monument), and 63 National Parks (such as Grand Teton National Park)



Source: WY SHPO Photo Collection

# First Historic District

In 1931, citizens of Charleston, SC formed the first historic district in the United States

- The goal of this district was to protect their historic resources from the encroachment of the automobile, the popularization of which was literally reshaping the U.S.
- The historic district was strengthened by a zoning ordinance to prevent the construction of automobile related businesses in the city center
- An architectural review board was also established to review exterior alterations to buildings and provide a 'certificate of appropriateness' if the change was deemed acceptable.
- The Charleston historic district became a blueprint which formed the basis for many historic districts in the U.S.





Source: NPS, Historic Depot From Mount Rose Trail

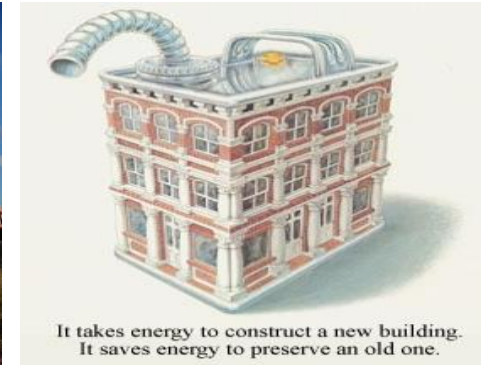
# Historic Sites Act

- Out of the New Deal, which sought to employ the millions of Americans impacted by the Great Depression, the Civil Works Administration passed the [Historic Sites, Buildings and Antiquities Act](#) in 1935 which authorized the NPS to:
  - Carry out programs to survey, research, and acquire historic and archeological sites of national significance.
  - Collect documents, photographs, and objects associated with sites.
  - Cooperate with states, organizations, and individuals to preserve or operate sites.
  - Restore sites and maintain museums.
  - Erect commemorative tablets.
  - Operate and manage sites acquired under the Act.
  - Develop a public education program.
- As part of the act, the American Institute of Architects also employed 1000 out-of-work architects in the documentation of historic buildings



# National Trust for Historic Preservation

- In 1949 The National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) was formed out of the need to create a national organization to support local preservation efforts
- Initially, the focus of the NTHP was on the acquisition and administration of historic sites
  - The first historic place acquired (in 1951) was Woodlawn Plantation in Virginia
- Today the focus of the NTHP is on; saving America's historic sites, telling the American story, building communities and investing in the future of preservation
- Many programs were founded by the NTHP, such as: National Main Street, America's 11 Most Endangered Places, and This Place Matters



It takes energy to construct a new building.  
It saves energy to preserve an old one.

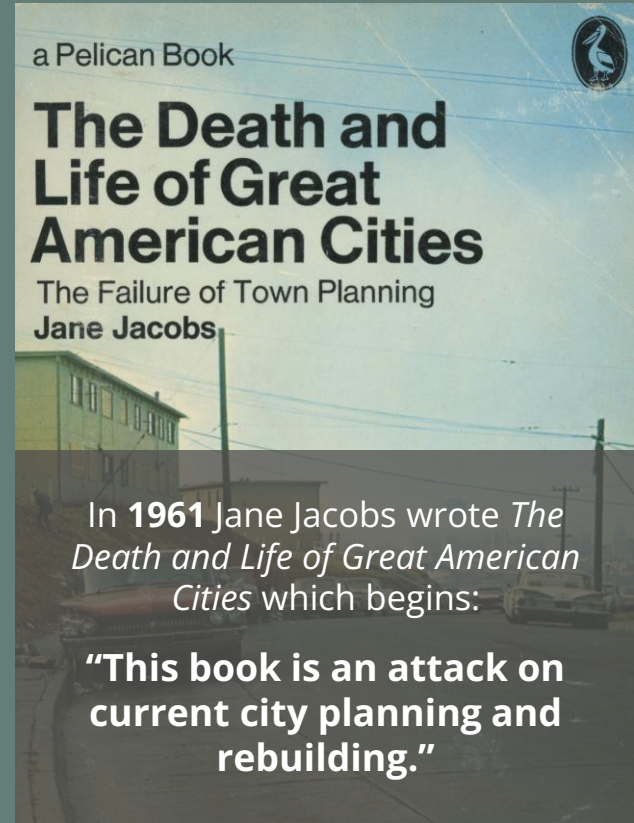


National Trust *for*  
Historic Preservation®

Source: National Trust for Historic  
Preservation

- Post-WWII America saw an explosion of growth that was further spurred on by the Housing Act of 1949 and the Urban Renewal Act of 1954
  - These acts sought to provide stimulus for the purchase and clearing of 'deteriorated' or 'blighted' urban neighborhoods
- Many of these cleared areas never received investors which left them vacant and unused
- Additionally the construction of the interstate highway system resulted in the demolition of many existing (often low-income) neighborhoods
- In response to the constant destruction of buildings, Jane Jacobs wrote *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in 1961
  - She argued that older buildings helped shape the sense of community in a neighborhood and that preservation should be more important than constant new developments.
- Her book struck a chord with Americans, convincing them that preservation was about far more than just landmarks

# Urban Renewal

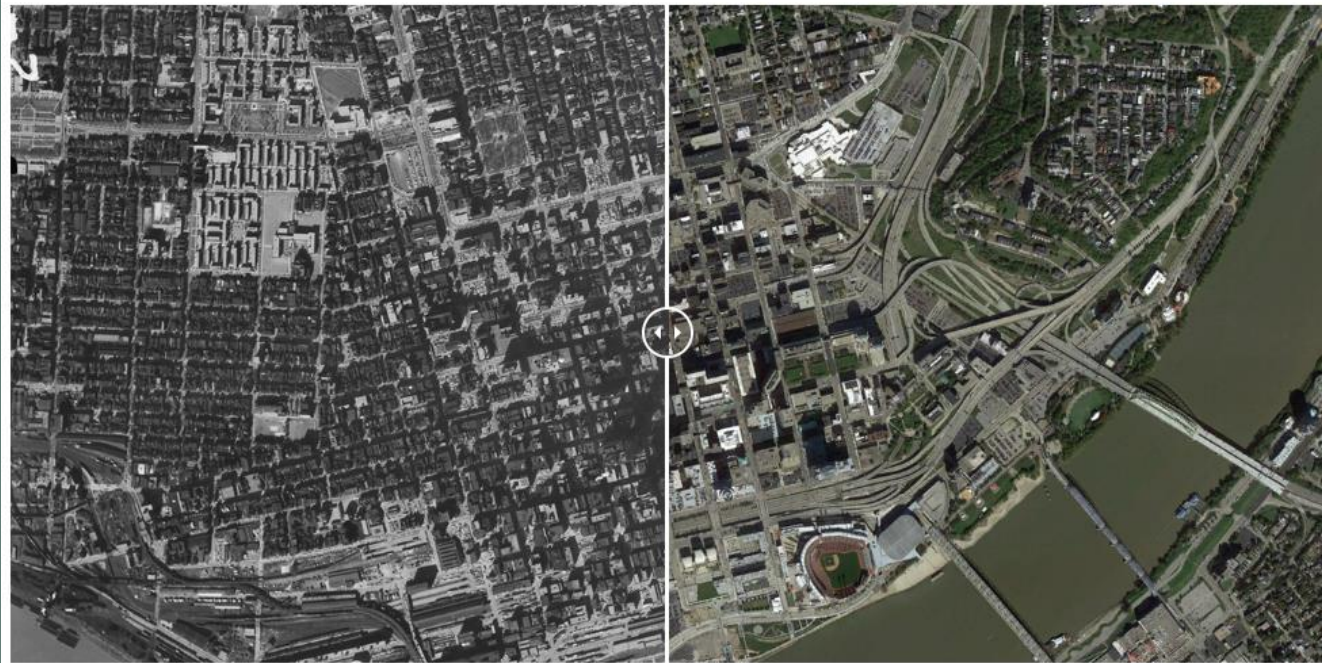


In **1961** Jane Jacobs wrote *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* which begins:

**"This book is an attack on current city planning and rebuilding."**

### Cincinnati, 1955 to 2013

The images of Cincinnati show incredible destruction of dense urban neighborhoods to the west and south of downtown caused by the construction of interstate highways. One of the worst impacted areas is the West End or "Kenyon-Barr," which was a mostly Black neighborhood of 25,000 people in the 1950s and is not populated today. The riverfront area was cut off from the downtown by a section of I-71 known as Fort Washington Way, but redevelopment has followed successful planning efforts there. In the future, the freeway could be capped to provide better connections to downtown.



# Urban Renewal

The Institute for Quality Communities has some very interesting visuals that help show the often drastic change of cities over time, starting in the 1950s. Click the link or the image to be taken to their website:

<https://iqc.ou.edu/2014/12/12/60yrsmidwest/>



# NY Penn Station Demolition

- A significant demolition that spurred on preservation efforts was that of the beaux-arts style Pennsylvania Station, built in New York in 1910
- With the advent of the car and air travel, the Pennsylvania Railroad ridership began to decline
  - Less ridership meant less money for upkeep and fewer customers for vendors which caused the station to begin to deteriorate
  - Railroad executives made a deal with New York City to sell the station and use its footprint to create new, more profitable buildings
  - Read this [NY Times article](#) for some more detail on the story and some fantastic photos from the time
- In 1961 the demolition of the station was announced and in the following years the Action Group for Better Architecture publicly protested and voiced their dissent at City Planning Commission meetings, but only a few hundred New Yorkers ever joined in the protests
- Despite the protests, the demolition of the station began in 1963 to make way for the construction of Madison Square Garden
- In 1965 the New York Landmarks Law was passed, in part, as a response to the demolition of Penn Station



Source: Upper - KChistory.org Lower- NPS

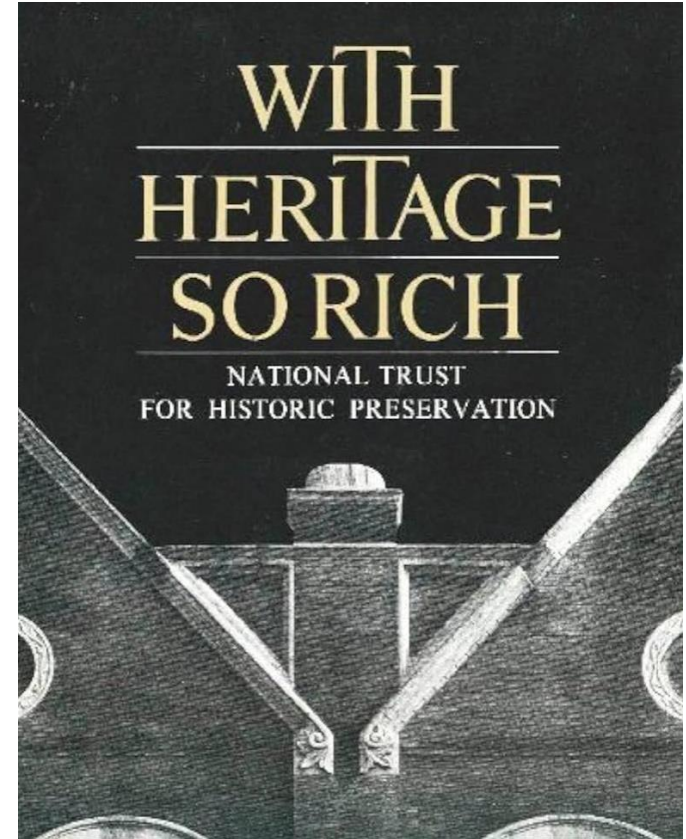


# *With Heritage So Rich* and the National Historic Preservation Act

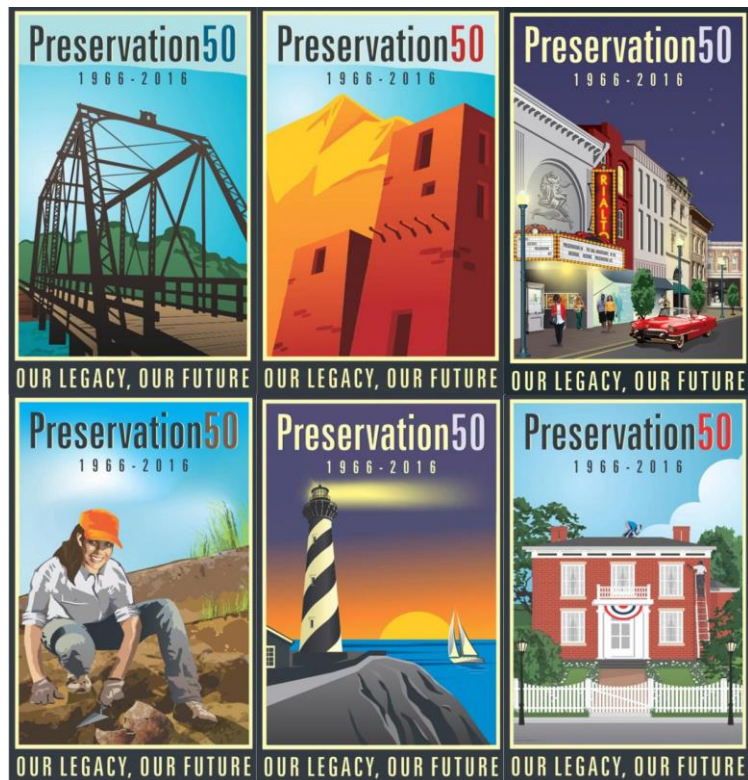
Following after Jane Jacobs' book, *With Heritage So Rich* truly galvanized historic preservation in the United States

*With Heritage So Rich* was a collaboration between the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National Trust for Historic Preservation

- The book used poignant photography to show the buildings already lost and urged for more action to be taken to preserve historic sites before it was too late
- It outlined four main initiatives:
  1. The creation of a national level historic preservation program
  2. A national survey of significant historic properties
  3. A list or register of significant historic properties
  4. Partnerships between all levels of government on historic preservation



# National Historic Preservation Act of 1966



Source: NPS Posters celebration the 50th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act

*With Heritage So Rich* inspired the creation of legislation based on its recommendations in 1966.

The National Historic Preservation Act is the backbone of preservation in the United States and it created/established:

- The National Register of Historic Places
- National Historic Landmarks Program
- Authorized funds for historic preservation activities
- State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices
- Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
- Enshrined the protection of historic property owners so the federal government could not interfere with their private property rights
- The Section 106 process, which evaluates the impact of projects using federal funding or by federal agencies on historic sites

# National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)

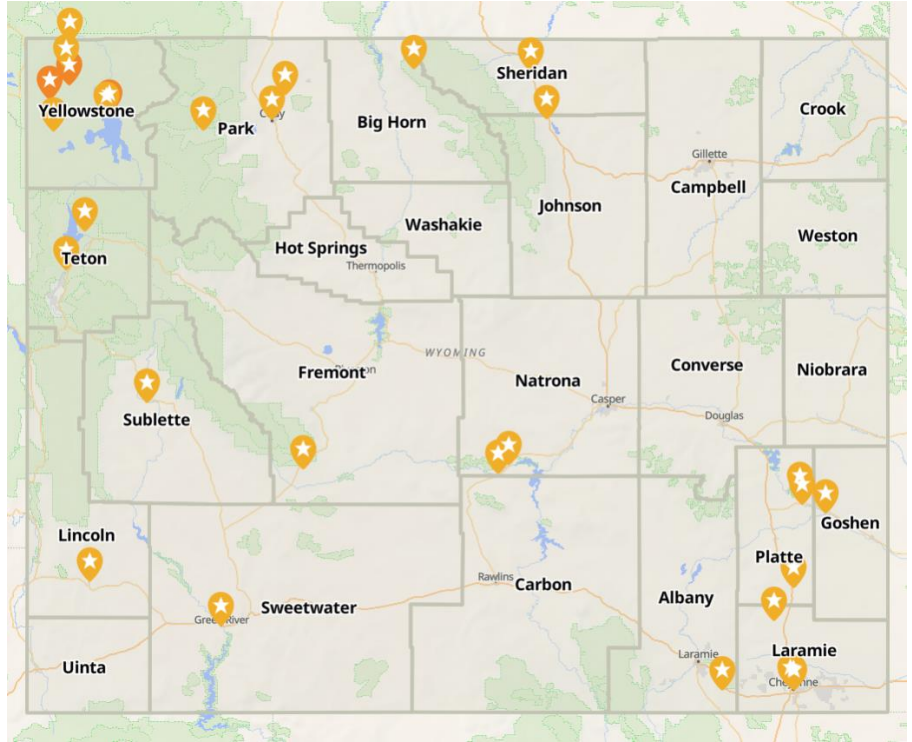


- Founded as a result of the National Historic Preservation Act, the NRHP is the federally recognized list of the United States' significant historic places and is administered by the National Park Service (NPS)
- Listing a property in the National Register is a form of acknowledgement and prestige which places no restraints on the property. It does not restrict the rights of private property owners to use, develop, or sell the property.
- As of 2023 there are more than 98,000 properties listed on the NRHP
- Currently Wyoming has 571 NRHP listings and every county has at least 5 sites listed

# National Historic Landmarks (NHLs)

- National Historic Landmarks were also established as part of the National Historic Preservation Act and hold even more rigorous designation criteria than NRHPs
  - NHLs must have national, or even international, levels of significance
- There are 28 NHLs in Wyoming, including the State Capitol, Independence Rock and the Old Faithful Inn
- The National Park Service defines NHLs as:

“Historic properties that illustrate the heritage of the United States. The over 2,600 NHLs found in the U.S. today come in many forms: historic buildings, sites, structures, objects, and districts. Each NHL represents an outstanding aspect of American history and culture.”



Click [here](#) or on the map to be taken to an interactive map of the NHLs in Wyoming





Follow us on social media to learn  
something new every day in May about  
historic preservation!



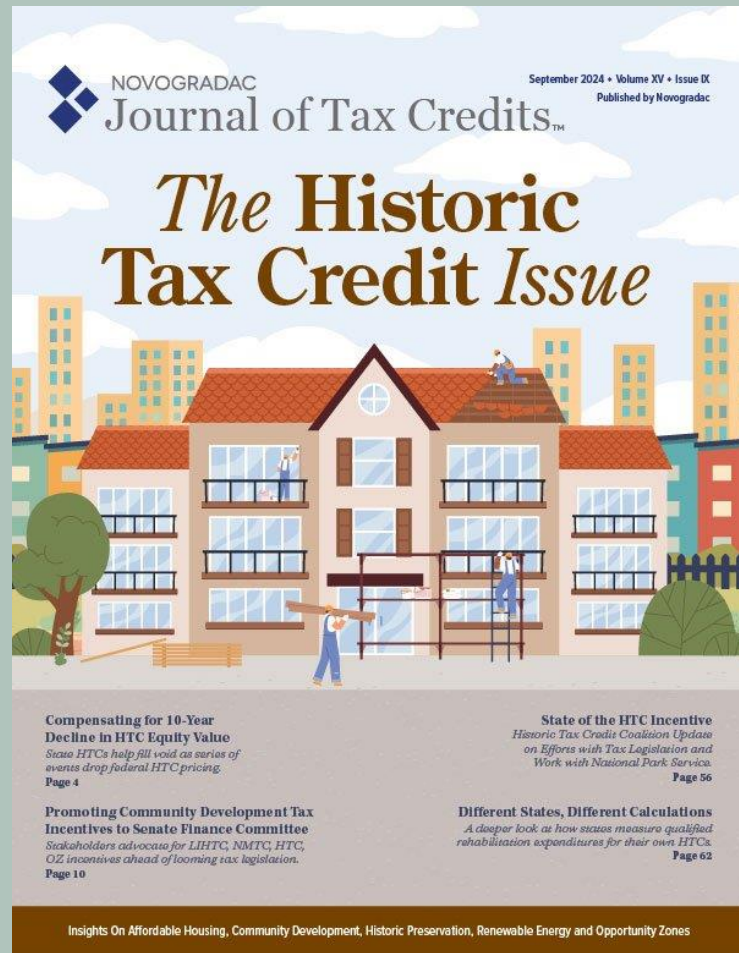
# 1973 - Historic Preservation Month

- The celebration started as National Preservation Week in May of 1973 out of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's desire to better communicate the successes and progress being made in historic preservation throughout the nation
- In 2005 Preservation Week was extended to Preservation Month and would take place throughout all of May
- Historic Preservation organizations all around the country now celebrate their successes, promote historic places, and encourage heritage tourism in their communities each May
- The Alliance for Historic Wyoming has been doing an amazing job fostering historic preservation in WY. You can find their calendar of Historic Preservation Events here: <https://historicwyoming.org/historicpreservationmonth2024/>

Source: The Alliance for Historic WY's [website](https://historicwyoming.org/)

# 1976/78 - The Tax Reform Act

- The Tax Reform Act of 1976 made it so that developers could no longer use the destruction of historic structures as a building expense, removing the ability to be reimbursed for the demolition.
- In 1978 the Tax Reform Act was amended to establish a tax credit for the rehabilitation of income generating historic buildings. Structures would have to be deemed as 'Certified Historic Structures' by the NPS to be eligible for the program.
- The program allows 20% of qualified expenses on a certified rehabilitation project to be claimed as a credit on Federal income taxes.
- The Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) serves as the liaison between the property owner and the NPS. The goal of this combined endeavor is to encourage preservation of community treasures and increase awareness of the benefits of rehabilitation efforts.
- Since 1976 there have been 43,000 Tax Credit projects nationally that have leveraged \$89.97 billion in private investment in the rehabilitation of historic properties



Source: [Novogradac Journal of Tax Credits: Volume 15, Issue 9](#)

# 1980 Amendments to the NHPA

- In 1976 the Historic Preservation Fund was authorized and it has remained the primary federal funding source for historic preservation
- In 1980 the National Historic Preservation Act was amended to include a provision for the creation of Certified Local Governments (CLGs) within each state
  - Funding for State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) through the Historic Preservation Fund was authorized
  - Once certified, CLGs would be eligible to apply for CLG grants through their SHPO, with each office required to give out 10% of their total federal funding in the form of these grants.
- 1980 also marked the inception of the Main Street Program by the National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Section 110 was also introduced by the amendments which required each Federal agency to establish a historic preservation program to identify and protect historic properties

# Sources and Further Reading

- “Beginnings of the Preservation Movement”, Wisconsin Historical Society,  
<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS105>
- *The National Historic Preservation Act and the National Park Service: A History* by Barry Mackintosh, NPS, 1986  
[https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online\\_books/mackintosh5/index.htm](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/mackintosh5/index.htm)
- *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice* by Norman Tyler, W.W. Norton and Co., 2009
- *With Heritage so Rich* (1999) PDF  
<https://www.slideshare.net/PreservationNation/with-heritage-so-rich-compressed>
- “Federal Historic Preservation Laws, Regulations, and Orders”  
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/historicpreservation/laws.htm>





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