

# Evolution of Historic Structure Reports at the U.S. National Park Service: An Update

RANDALL J. BIALLAS

**Originators of the historic structure report in the U.S., the National Park Service is engaged in an ongoing refinement of its concept and application.**

In a 1982 issue of the *APT Bulletin*, I wrote a brief history of the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) historic structure reports.[1] This article updates that history.[2]

In January 1990 a task force was established to revisit the approach, content, and application of an HSR for historic and prehistoric structures within the U.S. National Park System.[3] Such review has occurred fairly consistently on a ten- to fifteen-year cycle over the last forty years.[4] This task force was established for two reasons: the very high cost of a comprehensive HSR needed to be controlled, and although the NPS was preparing an HSR for most development projects, it was not conducting adequate research to support small projects, such as preservation maintenance. This resulted in incremental adverse effects.

ICAP Version 2.0 Kingsley Main House Page 19
SOUTHEAST AREA ATLANTIC COAST
TIMUCUAN ECOLOGICAL & HISTORIC PRESERVE 12/17/96 09:04 am
Park General WORK RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT TIMU-5308-K001 -BU

4221 FEATURE: Int Ceiling Structure MATL/TYPE: Unspecified FEA LOC: ASSET GENERAL
UNIT: 0001 DEF QTY: 327.000 UM: SF $ 800
CMP/TYPE: Feature General COND: N/A HIST RATE: T 0
MOD: SOURCE: means/other 100
PRIORITY: Critical $ 900

INSPECTED BY: Ali A. Miri CODE VIOLATIONS: INSP DATE: 06/16/1993

DEFICIENCY: Damaged plaster in the storageareas on the 1st.& 2nd flr.,& south wall of the west room onthe second floor and the base-ment walls.

RECOMMENDATION: 1-Repair all of the cracks by creating a groove in the crack;filling the groove & sanding smooth. 2-Remove all damaged plaster in the basement & sto-rage areas,apply new coat.

4231 FEATURE: Int Floor Structure MATL/TYPE: Unspecified FEA LOC: ASSET GENERAL
UNIT: 0001 DEF QTY: 30.000 UM: SF $ 200
CMP/TYPE: Feature General COND: N/A HIST RATE: H 0
MOD: SOURCE: others 20
PRIORITY: Critical $ 220

INSPECTED BY: Ali A. Miri CODE VIOLATIONS: INSP DATE: 06/16/1993

DEFICIENCY: Northeast corner of the music room close to the door is not too stable

RECOMMENDATION: Reinforce the joists in the northeast part of the music room.

Fig. 1. Part of a sample page from the historic structure assessment report for Kingsley Main House, Timucuan Ecological and Historic Reserve, Florida.

The task force members asked basic questions, such as: when is an HSR needed and what information is essential. These were their recommendations:

- HSRs are reference documents that should be prepared to minimize loss of significant fabric or material and character when management's or the owner's objectives will affect a historic or prehistoric structure. Management objectives involve not only restoring a structure to a period of time but also re-roofing or providing accessibility for the disabled.
- HSRs should be defined to include any of the following information: physical history and condition, alternative ways to meet management objectives, and specifics of actual treatment.
- HSRs should be restricted to information bearing directly on historic material and character. In particular, historical research should be focused on the development and use of the structure.
- An HSR should not unnecessarily republish information available from other convenient sources.
- An HSR should be required whenever existing information about the physical history and condition does not provide an adequate basis upon which to address anticipated management or owner issues and when impending development could have a significant adverse effect.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

i. Cover Page

ii. Table of Contents

iii. Executive Summary. This introductory text provides a concise account of (a) research done to produce the HSR, (b) major research findings, (c) major issues identified in the task directive, and (d) recommendations for treatment or use. Deviations from general planning documents should be identified here and discussed more fully in the body of the report.

iv. Administrative Data. This section contains (a) names, numbers, and locational data used to refer to the historic structure, (b) the proposed treatment of the structure including the source document, (c) related studies, (d) cultural resource data including date listed in the National Register, period of significance, and context of significance, and (e) recommendations for documentation, cataloging, and storage of materials generated by the HSR.

### PART 1. DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY

A. Historical Background and Context. This section briefly describes the people and events associated with the structure. The section should establish a recommended period or periods of significance if this has not been done in the National Register nomination or historic resource study (HRS).

B. Chronology of Development and Use. Physical construction, modification, and use of the structure is summarized in this section. The text should be based on historical documentation with corroboration from first-hand observation and materials analysis.

C. Physical Description. This section contains a systematic accounting of all features, materials, and spaces according to age, significance, and condition. Copies of computer-generated inspection reports should be included in the appendix but summarized in the body of the chapter. The text should also discuss causes of deterioration and structural adequacy.

### PART 2. TREATMENT AND USE

A. Ultimate Treatment and Use. This narrative discusses and analyzes the ultimate treatment and use of the structure as defined in park planning documents. If they have not been defined, this section may recommend an ultimate treatment and use. If analysis of the structure suggests that a planned treatment or use would adversely affect it, the text may present an alternative approach.

B. Requirements for Treatment. In concise terms, this text outlines applicable laws, regulations, and functional requirements. Specific attention should be given to issues of human safety, fire protection, energy conservation, abatement of hazardous materials, and handicapped accessibility.

C. Alternatives for Treatment. This section presents and evaluates alternative approaches to realization of the ultimate treatment. Alternatives are presented in both text and graphic form. Analysis addresses the adequacy of each solution in terms of impact on historic materials, effect on historic character, compliance with NPS policy, and other management objectives. The section concludes with elaboration on the recommended course of action and specific recommendations for preservation treatments.

### PART 3. RECORD OF TREATMENT

A. Completion Report. This section summarizes (a) the intent of the work, (b) the way in which the work was approached and accomplished, (c) the time required to do the work, and (d) the cost of the work. It also describes any information about the history of the structure based on physical evidence discovered during construction.

B. Technical Data. This portion of the report contains copies of field reports, material data sheets, field notes, correspondence, accounting spread sheets, and contract summaries.

### APPENDIX

Bibliography
Drawings
Photographs
Materials Analysis

Fig. 2. Model HSR table of contents.

- An HSR should be prepared for the entire structure, as well as for features and all levels of treatment.
- An HSR should be prepared at a level appropriate to the NPS planning process, since only an HSR contains the information about physical integrity and condition that might limit development or use.
- An HSR should record work actually done.
- An HSR should take design alternatives no further than detailed schematics; preliminary drawings should not be included; the proposed use may change and make these designs obsolete.
- Time and money spent on an HSR should be limited to management or owner objectives and the structure's significance. The level of effort should be determined by professionals, with management or owner approval.
- An HSR should be an integrated product prepared by a team representing only critical disciplines.
- An HSR should be written for primary audiences, maximize the use of existing reliable information, and minimize its reformatting.
- An HSR should be divided into three basic sections: a management summary of findings, recommendations, and accomplishments; physical history and condition, alternative ways of meeting management objectives, and specifics of treatment; and an appendix of technical data and research notes.
- An HSR's primary emphasis should be reflected in its subtitle.
- Limited copies of an HSR should be printed, but the information contained in it should distributed broadly using non-publishing means such as compact disks.
- Flexibility in formatting an HSR is important to maximize communication between the professionals

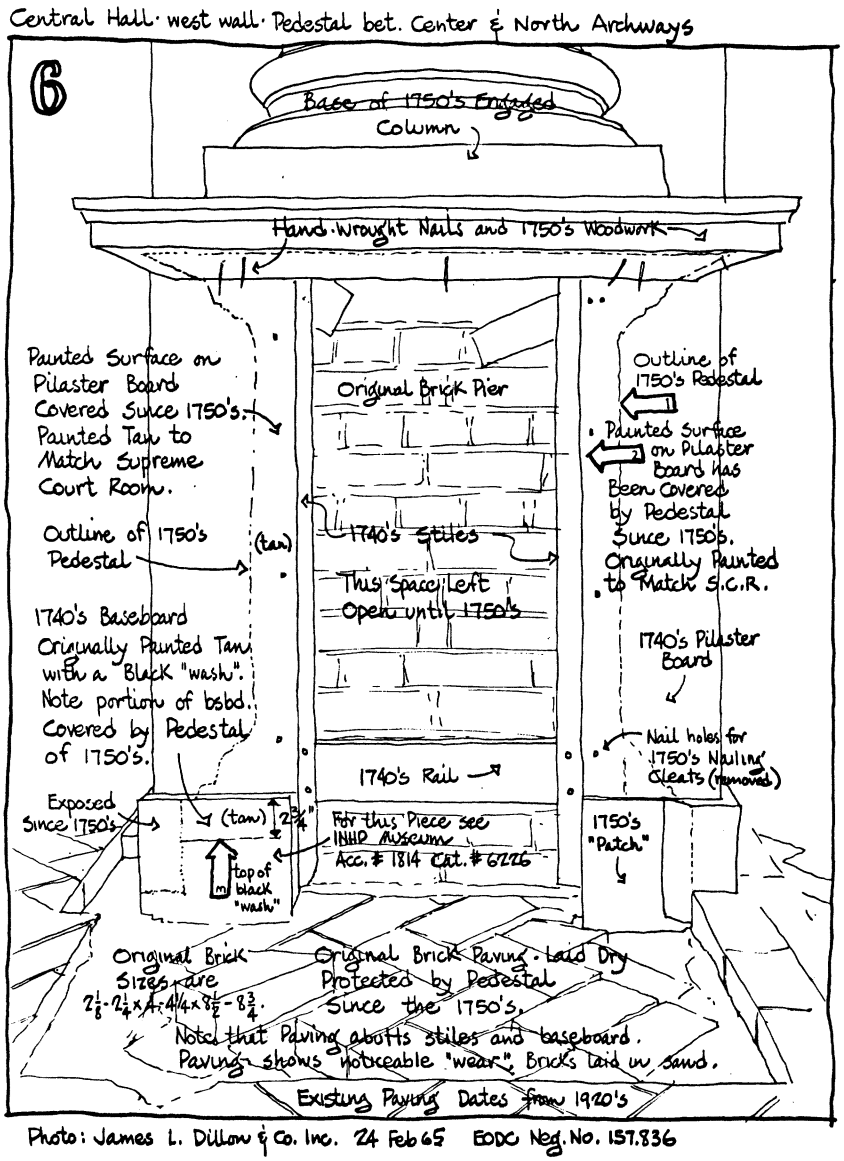


Fig. 3. Annotated sketch by Lee H. Nelson of central hall column pedestal, Independence Hall, Independence National Historical Park, Pennsylvania.

preparing the report and the management or the owner, to allow the reuse of existing information, and to use new information for other purposes. Computers are useful. Through the reuse of feature inventory and condition assessment data from the NPS Inventory and Condition Assessment Program (ICAP), a computer-generated historic structure assessment report (HSAR) (Fig. 1), which documents the structure condition, can be produced. ICAP is a series of procedures, nomenclature standards, and a supporting computer program. It can record park asset and feature inventories and their physical condition and identify specific preservation maintenance and development tasks and procedures.

Based on these recommendations, the NPS revised its outline of a comprehensive HSR (Fig. 2) and its definition of an HSR in 1994.[5] The HSR was defined as

the primary guide to treatment and use of a historic structure and may also be used in managing a prehistoric structure. A separate HSR should be prepared for every major structure managed as a cultural resource. Groups of similar structures or ensembles of small, simple structures may be addressed in a single report. In no case should restoration, reconstruction, or extensive rehabilitation of any structure be undertaken without an approved HSR, Parts 1 and 2.

The National Park Service includes the following in an HSR:

- Management Summary is a concise account of research done, major findings, major issues identified in the task directive, and recommendations for treatment and use. Administrative data and related studies are included.
- Part 1, Developmental History, is a scholarly report based on documentary research and physical examination documenting the evolution of a historic structure, its current condition, and causes of its deterioration. Research may be expanded to clarify the significance of the resource or to refine contextual associations; however, major investigation of contextual themes or background information should be conducted as part of another type of report call a historic resource study, not an HSR. ICAP reports should be included in an appendix.
- Part 2, Treatment and Use, evaluates alternative uses and treatments and emphasizes preserving extant historic material and resolving conflicts that might result from a structure's "ultimate treatment." It concludes with a recommended treatment and use that responds to park management objectives. Design work is usually schematic.
- Part 3, Record of Treatment, documents actual treatment, including accounting data, photographs, sketches, and narratives outlining the course of work, conditions encountered, and materials used.

All aspects of a structure and its immediate grounds should be addressed in an HSR. Potential overlaps with other cultural-resource types and natural-resource issues should be identified, and applicable studies and reports should be called for or referenced. An HSR and analogous reports (e.g., a cultural landscape report) may be combined to address multiple resource types at a single property or area.

Parts 1 and 2 of an HSR should be prepared soon after acquisition of a structure or recognition of its status as a cultural resource. An HSR may be prepared incrementally when there are funding and time constraints or when a complete HSR does not exist, or an existing HSR does not adequately address a proposed treatment, such as replication of missing features, removal of significant features or large amounts of historic material, or introduction of new systems or exterior additions. In no case should a Part 2 be prepared without a Part 1.

The scope, level of investigation, and extent of schematic development are outlined in a task directive based on the recommendations of a historical architect in consultation with other cultural-resource specialists and the park manager. Major factors in the task directive include the structure's significance, condition, and intended use. The task directive should also address participation of other cultural-resource specialists and publication of the document.

Two ideas are important. First, the purpose of an HSR is to record documentary, graphic, and physical information about the history and condition of a structure; to address management or owner objectives; and to record physical work. Secondly, the use of a standardized method or format for an HSR inhibits communication and increases costs. An HSR can have a primarily narrative format following an outline (Fig. 2), can be primarily graphic (Fig. 3), or can be computer generated (Fig. 1).[6] These formats can also be combined.

RANDALL J. BIALLAS is Chief Historical Architect of the U.S. National Park Service. He has been a member of APT since 1969 and has attended 18 annual conferences.

## Notes

1. See Randall J. Biallas, "Evolution of Historic Structure Reports and Historic Structure Preservation Guides of the U.S. National Park Service," *APT Bulletin,* 14 (1982): 7-17.

2. This article is based in part on a paper delivered at an American Architectural Foundation symposium in Washington, D.C., in 1991. See Randall J. Biallas, "The National Park Service's Approach to HSRs," in *A Historic Structure Report Symposium, February 25-26, 1991, Washington, D.C.,* Lonnie J. Hovey, comp. (Washington, D.C.: The American Architectural Foundation, 1992), 11-17.

3. Special thanks to Billy G. Garrett, who chaired the task force and was responsible for the majority of the review and revision to the definition of an HSR.

4. See the *CRM Bulletin* 13 (1990) for a series of articles on HSRs. Also see Billy G. Garrett, "Revision of the National Park Service Guideline for Historic Structure Reports," in *Standards for Preservation and Rehabilitation, STP 1258,* Stephen J. Kelley, ed. (West Conshohocken, Pa.: ASTM, 1996), 109-18.

5. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Cultural Resource Management Guideline, Release No. 5* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1997), 116-119.

6. Lee H. Nelson, "Historic Structure Report, Part II: Architectural Data Section on Independence Hall, 'Paving' in the Central Hall and Tower Stairhall and Related Exterior Doorways, Sill, Steps and Pavements, Independence National Historical Park" (Philadelphia, Pa.: National Park Service, Eastern Office, Design and Construction, Div. of Architecture, Feb. 1966), 220.