

2008 Top Ten Best

Historic Preservation Opportunities

in the Pittsburgh Area



Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh



Maximize the Intergenerational Effect



Dan Holland

Pittsburgh has seen a lot of history in the last 250 years—from George Washington's first exploration of this area, to the rise of glassmaking, iron making, and steelmaking to the making of pickles, the Polio vaccine, beer, whisky, and robots.

Pittsburgh is also well known for preserving its history. Examples include the Armstrong Cork Factory, Heinz Plant, and the former Union Baptist Church, now Union Project. The Main Street program has proved to be a consistent generator of jobs, tax revenue, and local pride in places like Blairsville, #1 on this year's Top Ten List.

And just recently, Pittsburgh was named a Preserve America community, a designation bestowed upon the city by the National Park Service.

I am encouraged by the hopes and dreams and aspirations of the next generation, which is making history, as much as they are preserving it. There are a number of young leaders in the Pittsburgh area who are shaping a better future for this region.

But there is a whole other generation that we are at risk of losing. In our low-income and African American communities, large inventories of vacant buildings sit idle. Unfortunately, the leading solution throughout the region has been demolition.



McKeesport has moved aggressively to demolish vacant properties before they have a chance for revitalization. There are more than 1,600 vacant buildings across Pittsburgh, and if they get demolished, it would be a loss of more structures than urban renewal of the 1960s.

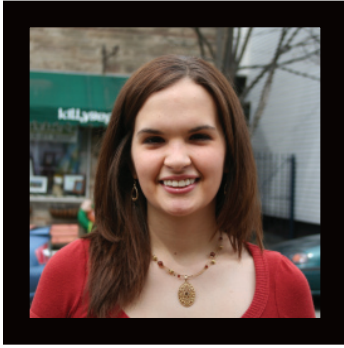
With this mass demolition scheme, not only are we losing hundreds of historic properties that could be converted into homes for working people, but we're losing a whole generation. What kind of message does this send to our young people?

Meanwhile, other cities across the country are saving their vacant buildings. Baltimore, for instance, has pioneered the SCOPE program (Selling City-Owned Properties Efficiently), a public-private partnership to create a simplified and cost-effective process for putting vacant, city-owned properties to use. Baltimore is just one of many cities across the United States which is taking advantage of the back-to-the-cities movement being led by young people.

We cannot afford to lose the next generation. This is why YPA emphasizes intergenerational learning—so that established leaders can mentor the emerging ones, and young people can honor the legacy of those who came before us and worked hard to make Pittsburgh a better place.

It is important for us to acknowledge that there is a new generation of preservationists coming of age, such as this year's 2008 Promise Award winner, Tansy Michaud of Irwin, who filmed a video documentary that conveys a unique message of hope for improving historic Main Street Irwin. A senior in high school, Ms. Michaud will enter Florida State University next fall. Many of the recommendations she and her classmates developed in their video are being implemented in downtown Irwin.

Tansy was the inspiration for YPA's successful Youth Main Street Advisors Project, which involved 33 students from four Pittsburgh-area high schools who produced videos on how they would revitalize their communities.



Tansy Michaud

YPA cultivates and supports emerging leaders like Tansy, who will become the next investors, homeowners, business owners, and decision makers for our communities.

But we also must be mindful of the older generations who have fought hard to maintain our heritage—people such as Barbara Edwards Lee, who was the Executive Secretary for the National Negro Opera Company, the nation's first black opera company that started right here in Pittsburgh. Young people need to hear her story, and preserve the legacy that she and many others worked hard to create.

YPA was established to be an organization with an open door for all ages, races, and backgrounds. YPA has become known for our quality events, our innovative programs, and our diversity. This year, we are pleased to partner with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and Northside Leadership Conference to present this Preservation Month Celebration.

Consider this event and this organization to be an invitation not only to Pittsburgh's young people, but also to new migrants to the city, foreign-born immigrants, and those who might consider themselves "old" to join our growing movement.

It is contingent upon all of us, old and young, to work together to give life to history.

I conclude with a quote from Vanessa M. Rendine, a student at Trinity High School in Washington, Pa., who was part of YPA's Youth Main Street Advisors Project in 2007:

"One of the most important things I learned about my Main Street was how important it is to the stability of the community. I then learned that in order to truly preserve the honor of Main Street for decades to come, my generation and generations below mine need to instill a sense of pride in their heritage. Without pride, people become careless and they ultimately damage or destroy the most historical part of their town."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dan Holland'.

Dan Holland
Holland6@aol.com

Executive Summary

YPA's 2008 Top Ten List is a diverse array of historic sites that emphasizes the Pittsburgh area's strengths. We have what no other region has: our history. Therefore, preservation of the region's heritage becomes a competitive advantage for attracting and retaining talent. We should do more of it.

These ten sites are representative of the opportunities that are before us as a region. Four of the Top Ten sites are in Allegheny County, two are in Fayette and Westmoreland counties, and one each in Indiana and Somerset counties. YPA has yet to receive a nomination from Armstrong County.



Downtown Blairsville

Six of the Top Ten sites are linked to the nationally successful Main Street program. In many cases, the rehabilitation of an anchor building in a community's Main Street district will foster additional revitalization.

But there are also unique individual examples, such as the Meason House, Overholt Distillery, Garden Theater, and the Dormont Pool that are too critical to lose. Without them, our region would be a much bleaker place.

For some low- and moderate-income communities, such as Wilkesburg, it is a struggle to attract positive media publicity. But historic preservation is a great way to emphasize all the good things happening in the community.



Homestead: an emerging preservation success story

Blairsville stands out as this year's shining star. Begun as a stagecoach route in 1818, the town's economy has ebbed and flowed with the different transportation methods—canal, rail, and road. Economic vitality is rebounding due to the success of the Blairsville Downtown Main Street Organization. However, the restoration of the Blairsville Armory, built in 1909 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is still a critical need.

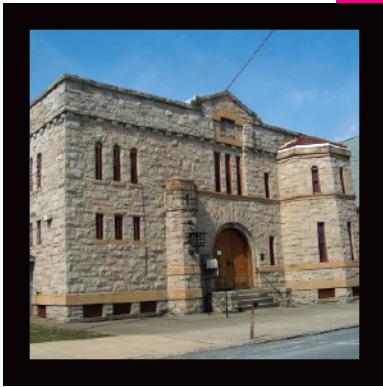
YPA's Top Ten List is a way to confirm the hard work that goes into preservation. For years, these communities have worked tirelessly to gain recognition and appeal to a broader regional audience. It is through YPA's Top Ten List that we give witness to our slogan: give life to history.

Historic Preservation Opportunities

in the Pittsburgh Area

1 Blairsville Main Street/ Elm Street District

1818



Municipality: Blairsville
County: Indiana County
Theme: Main Streets

Experience Blairsville's unique character—the visible impact of distinct transportation eras and the dance between preservation and what different generations have perceived as modernization.

Founded in 1818, Blairsville sits on the Conemaugh River at the boundary between Indiana and Westmoreland County. Much of the town's physical development can be understood in terms of transportation systems: originating as a stagecoach stop, surviving as an important link in the Underground Railroad, flourishing during the canal and railroad eras, initially rising with the automobile age and the William Penn Highway, then foundering when Route 22 was relocated in the 1950s.

Transportation is becoming an opportunity for Blairsville again, with Rt. 22 improvements, the Hoodlebug and Ghost Town Trails to the east and West Penn Trail to the west, two canoe/kayak launches and Blairsville's position as a "hub" community in the Pittsburgh-to-Harrisburg Main Line Canal Greenway™ and as a gateway to the Indiana County and to the Laurel Highlands.

Blairsville Borough, several state agencies and partners, Indiana County and a cadre of community volunteers associated with the Blairsville Downtown Main Street Program are actively pursuing a number of interpretive, restoration and revitalization efforts to capitalize on Blairsville's many heritage and natural resources.

2 Murphy Building

1915



Municipality: West Newton
County: Westmoreland County
Theme: Main Streets

Downtown West Newton, Inc., has been directing the reinvestment of West Newton, a small town tucked into the Youghiogheny River Valley, along part of the Great Allegheny Passage rail-trail system. Key to Downtown West Newton's plan is restoring important anchor buildings, such as the 1907 G.C. Murphy Building (three facades joined together). Many of these classic storefronts are disappearing from the American landscape every year. Downtown West Newton intends to restore the neglected Murphy Building into a retail space, consistent with West Newton's successful Main Street program, providing a unique experience that young people desire.

3

Wilkinsburg Main Street

1890s-1940s



Municipality: Wilkinsburg
County: Allegheny County
Theme: Main Streets

Wilkinsburg’s commercial core is an outstanding example of the classic Western Pennsylvania small-town main street. It’s vernacular commercial fabric is largely intact as a district. Wilkinsburg was a key stop along both the William Penn Highway (Penn Avenue) and the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad, as well as its location as an attractive streetcar suburb. Wilkinsburg has applied to the state to become a Main Street Community, and has the support and involvement of many in the community. The Main Street designation would enable the borough to apply for facade restoration and other programming that will draw market interest back to the core.

4

Meason House

1802



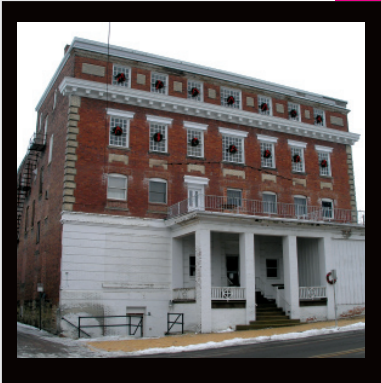
Municipality: Lemont Furnace
County: Fayette County
Theme: Landmark Houses

Built in 1802, the Meason House is nearly as old as Pittsburgh. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Meason House is a National Historic Landmark. It is a unique expression of the English Palladian villa in America, built by Isaac Meason, a pioneer in the region’s iron industry. The house is threatened with encroaching development and potential sale of the house that would require its dismantling and removal from the site. There has been substantial attention focused on the preservation of this house from many aspects of the community. A long-term solution could include the house’s fair market sale to a preservation-friendly buyer.

5

Colonial Hotel

1904



Municipality: Meyersdale
County: Somerset County
Theme: Historic Hotels

Opened in 1904 as an elegant, European-plan hotel in the heart of Meyersdale, Somerset County, the Colonial Hotel is poised for redevelopment. The rehabilitation of this particular building is crucial to propelling and sustaining a renaissance in downtown Meyersdale. The historic Colonial Hotel is one of the most important architectural, historical, and cultural assets in the Borough of Meyersdale and south-central Pennsylvania. The current owners of the property are committed to the appropriate rehabilitation of this National Register of Historic Places property, which will cost about \$4.1 million. Substantial private funding has been committed, but more is needed.

6

Zillmer Building

1890s



Municipality: Arnold
County: Allegheny
Theme: Educational History

The Zillmer Building was built in the 1890s, when the City of Arnold had just incorporated as a borough. It is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and is the most architecturally distinctive building in the commercial district. The Mayor of Arnold, John Campbell is trying to remove the building from the city's demolition list. Short-term funding is needed to stabilize the building while a longer-term plan is developed. This plan includes transformation of the building into commercial and residential space, as well as a museum to jazz great, and Arnold native, Johnny Costa, who was the music director for Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood.

7

McKees Rocks Main Street

1890s -1930s



Municipality: McKees Rocks
County: Allegheny
Theme: Main Streets

The McKees Rocks Community Development Corporation is driving change in McKees Rocks, which includes transforming the economy, design, and function of lower Chartiers Avenue. With the opening of Hollywood Music and a new Cultural Arts Center, more projects are in the works. This includes the restoration of the Roxian Theater into a mid-sized performance space, 597 and 602 Chartiers Ave., and the Shoppes at Chartiers Crossing. Listing the Main Street development on YPA's Top Ten List would provide a much-needed boost to fundraising and financing efforts and help legitimize the years of work that McKees Rocks has put in to bring their proud town back to life.

8

Overholt Distillery

1853-1899



Municipality: Broad Ford
County: Fayette County
Theme: Industrial History

The Overholt Distillery, located on the bank of the Youghiogheny at Broad Ford, Fayette County, became a popular whiskey in the 1850s (Jim Beam still makes *Old Overholt Straight Rye*), when the first building was erected. Additional structures were built between 1853 and 1899. The distillery was one of the few to operate during Prohibition, distilling spirits for "medicinal purposes." It remained in operation through the mid-20th century, but has since been abandoned and sits, deteriorated and vandalized. Karen Rose Overholt Critchfield (great, great, great granddaughter of distiller Abraham Overholt) envisions the site as a museum to American whiskey making and a destination for the newly established American Whiskey Trail.

9

Dormont Pool

1929



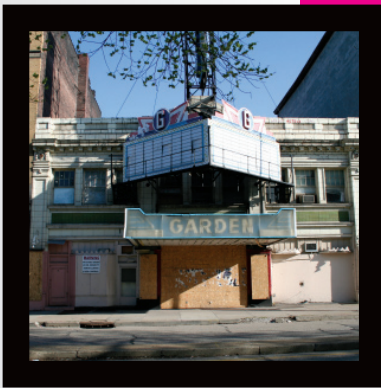
Municipality: Dormont
County: Allegheny County
Theme: Recreation Sites

The Dormont Pool is a symbol of American leisure and recreation, a retreat from the hectic pace of urban life. Built in 1929 to accommodate Pittsburgh's growing middle class, the pool quickly became a popular summertime destination. With 1.5 million gallons, it is the largest outdoor pool in Pennsylvania. The Dormont Pool has maintained its original look for nearly 90 years. However, extensive repairs are needed to keep the pool in good working order. Friends of Dormont Pool formed to raise the \$1.2 million needed for renovations. They are halfway there. We hope that the pool's listing on YPA's Top Ten List will help the Friends close the funding gap.

10

Garden Theater

1915



Municipality: Pittsburgh
County: Allegheny County
Theme: Historic American Theaters

This Nickelodeon-style theater was built in 1915 by David Park, Vice President of the Peoples National Bank, and is believed to be the oldest theater in Pittsburgh. It became the "New Garden Theater" in 1973 and began showing adult films. Owned by the city's Urban Redevelopment Authority since 2007, the URA is developing feasibility plans for the theater, in cooperation with the neighborhood. After its nomination by the Mexican War Streets Society in 2007, the theater obtained City Historic Structure Designation, which protects the theater from demolition. Much community input is needed to determine the appropriate market to ensure its future viability.

Past Pittsburgh Area Preservation Opportunities

The 2007 Top Ten List

1. **Coyle Theater** 1927-1928
Charleroi, Washington County
- 2/3. **Blairsville Second Baptist Church** 1918
Blairsville, Indiana County
- 2/3. **Waynesburg & Washington Railroad** 1910
Washington, Washington County
4. **R. W. McIlwain Store & Warehouse** 1850
Saltsburg, Indiana County
5. **Glenshaw Glass Company** 1900
Glenshaw, Allegheny County
6. **Morningside School** 1897
Pittsburgh (Morningside), Allegheny County
- 7/8. **Crawford Grill** 1917
Pittsburgh (The Hill District), Allegheny County
- 7/8. **West Overton Museums** 1826-1859
Scottdale, Westmoreland County
9. **Blairsville High School** 1930
Pittsburgh (Morningside), Allegheny County
10. **Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Beaver Passenger Station** 1850-1906
Beaver, Beaver County

The 2006 Top Ten List

1. **Vandergrift Historic District** 1890s
Borough of Vandergrift, Westmoreland County
2. **Eagles Club** 1910
City of McKeesport, Allegheny County
3. **St. Cloud Hotel** 1852
Borough of Homewood, Beaver County
4. **East Liberty Town Square**
Pittsburgh, East Liberty
5. **Denton Powell Farm** 1871
Butler County
6. **First Presbyterian Church** 1887
Borough of Braddock, Allegheny County
7. **Mooncrest** 1943
Moon Township, Allegheny County
8. **Graceton Coke Ovens** 1886
Indiana County
9. **Lemington Center** c.1890
Pittsburgh, Lincoln-Lemington
10. **McCook Mansion** 1906
Pittsburgh, Shadyside

The 2005 Top Ten List

1. **Main Street Braddock** 1875-1915
Borough of Braddock, Allegheny County
2. **John Woods House** 1792
Pittsburgh, Hazelwood
3. **Main Street Aliquippa** c. 1930 and 1939
Aliquippa, Beaver County
4. **Andy Warhol Residence** 1915
Pittsburgh, Oakland
5. **Bryce-Mesta Mansion** 1880
Borough of West Homestead, Allegheny County
6. **Murphy Building** 1903
Blairsville, Indiana County
7. **Strand Theater** 1914
Borough of Zelienople, Butler County
- Hollywood Theater** c. 1920s
Borough of Dormont, Allegheny County
- Granda Theater** 1928-1932
City of Beaver Falls, Beaver County
- Denis Theater** c. 1920s
Borough of Mt. Lebanon, Allegheny County
- Cinema 4 Theater** c. 1920s
Borough of Dormont, Allegheny County
8. **John Wesley AME Zion Church** (1894-95)
Pittsburgh, Hill District
9. **Hays Woods**
Pittsburgh, South Side / Hays
10. **Otto Milk Plant** 1865
Pittsburgh, Strip District

The 2004 Top Ten List

1. **Tally Hollow Farm** c.1850s
Greene County
2. **The Manchester Neighborhood Transformation Initiative** 1870s-1990s
Pittsburgh, Manchester
3. **Pullman Park and Butler's West End Neighborhood** 1934 & 1890s-1940s
City of Butler, Butler County
4. **Carnegie Library, Hazelwood Branch** 1900
Pittsburgh, Hazelwood
5. **Former South Hills High School** 1915, 1923
Pittsburgh, Mt. Washington
6. **The Union Project** 1903
Pittsburgh, Highland Park
7. **Watts Mill Bridge** 1878
Beaver County
8. **Seton Hill University Center for the Performing Arts / Greensburg Cultural District** To be constructed
City of Greensburg, Westmoreland County
9. **Pennsylvania Station** 1916
Borough of Wilkinsburg, Allegheny County
10. **Allegheny County Health Department** 1900
Pittsburgh, Lawrenceville

The 2003 Top Ten List

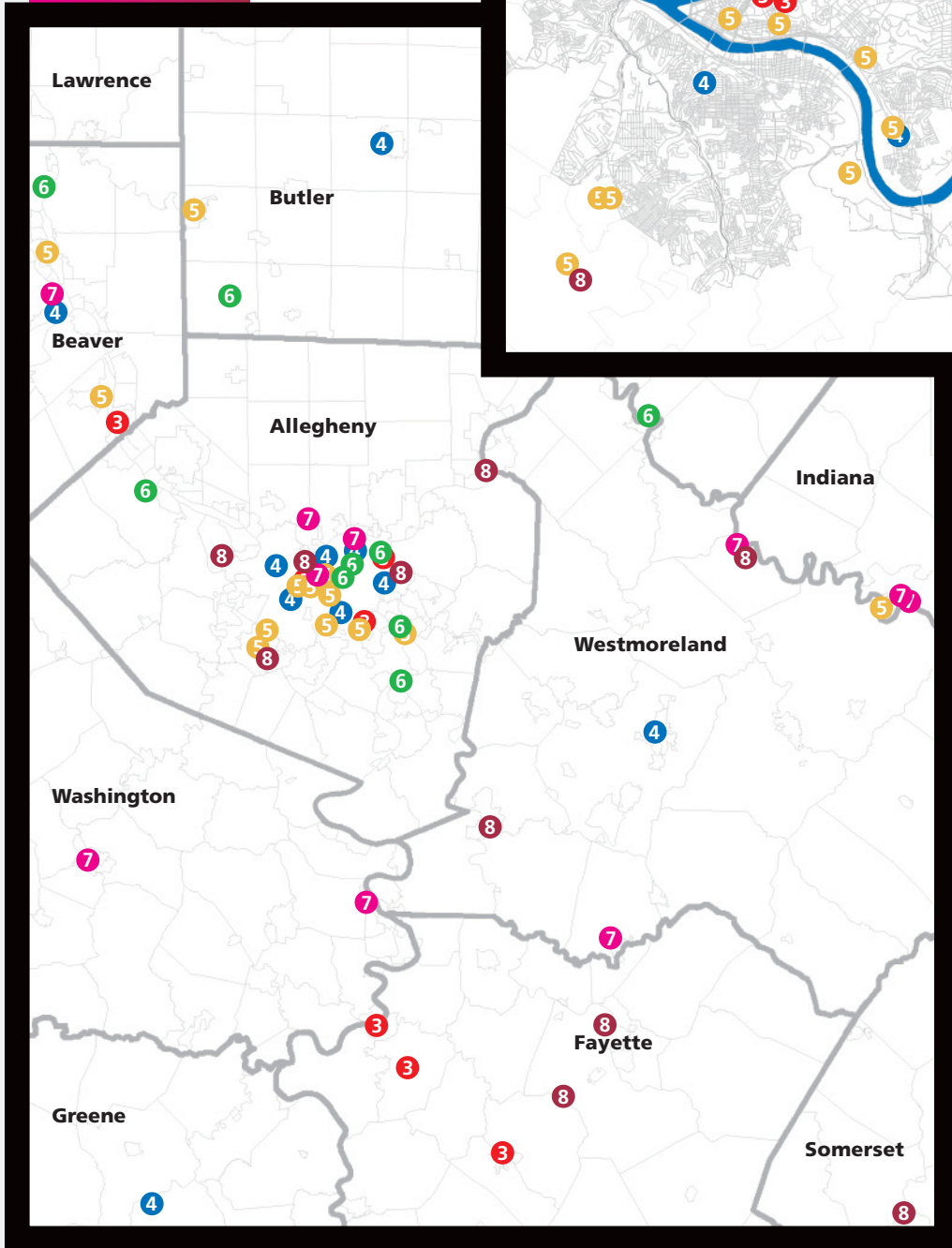
1. **Murphy Building, Downtown Uniontown** c. 1920s
City of Uniontown, Fayette County
2. **Brownsville's Downtown National Register Historic District** c. 1900 – 1930
Borough of Brownsville, Fayette County
3. **Homestead's Eighth Avenue National Register Historic District** 1890s-1940s
Borough of Homestead, Allegheny County
4. **National Negro Opera Company** c. 1894
Pittsburgh, Lincoln-Lemington
5. **New Granada Theater** 1927
Pittsburgh, Hill District
6. **Ambridge Historic District** 1825-1905
Borough of Ambridge, Beaver County
7. **Peter Colley Tavern** 1796
Fayette County
8. **August Wilson Home** c. 1895
Pittsburgh, Hill District
9. **B'Nai Israel Synagogue Sanctuary** 1923-24
Pittsburgh, Garfield
10. **Armstrong Cork Factory** 1901-1913
Pittsburgh, Strip District

60 Top 10 Sites

YPA's Sites by Year

- 3 2003
- 4 2004
- 5 2005
- 6 2006
- 7 2007
- 8 2008

Nine County Area



City of Pittsburgh



Acknowledgements

YPA is grateful for the following individuals for their assistance in making YPA a success.

Special Acknowledgements

YPA's logo was selected among six different designs developed by design students at La Roche College (in Pittsburgh's North Hills) during "Immersion Days" 2007, a design competition among six teams of design students. La Roche College has a partnership with the U.S. Small Business Administration, Pittsburgh District Office, which is represented on YPA's Advisory Committee. YPA was selected as the sole client for Immersion Days.

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YPA is grateful for the assistance provided by volunteer Bethany McLaughlin this spring.

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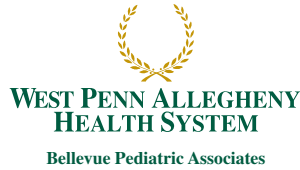
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YPA Mission

The participation of young people in the preservation of historic resources.

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