

Chapter 6

# Public Education

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## Chapter 6

# Public Education

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### INTRODUCTION

Public education is an extremely important component of the preservation process because most funding for historic preservation projects derives from the public, either through taxes, or through entrance fees at sites and museums. Public education and preservation research seek to answer the question: what can we learn from our material past? Information conveyed to the public is directly tied to what we learn from the study of archaeological sites and historic structures and landscapes. Preservation professionals have a responsibility to report their research findings to the public as well as to colleagues at professional meetings and in published articles.

Public education is most effective when, in addition to reporting research results clearly, it also helps the public understand the broad meaning of prehistoric and historic sites, structures, and landscapes. Fully realized public education explores the prehistoric and historic context for experience, actions, and events. It evokes an understanding of our relationship to those who preceded us as revealed in their cultural material.

Accessible, clearly presented information enables the public to understand, for example, that historic structures or designed landscapes are more than reflections of famous people or personal esthetic values, but are the products of a multitude of complex cultural forces that include economic, political, and social values as well. For example, information concerning prehistoric sites can assist in understanding the cultural and scientific achievements of Native American s.<sup>1</sup>

Among Federal agencies, the National Park Service (NPS) has a long history of educating the public about cultural resources, which grew out

of its interest in interpreting natural settings and values to its park visitors.<sup>2</sup> NPS sees cultural resource management and interpretation as complementary. "Interpretation communicates the significance and value of the resource to . . . 'the public.'<sup>3</sup> Interpretation also assists in "developing support for preserving" the parks' resources, including cultural resources.<sup>4</sup> As the director of NPS recently observed, "the preservation of the tangible evidence of this [our] past insures the preservation of the knowledge base. [It is] a base that can help us understand the fundamental relationships of men to each other and of men living in communities to their environment as a whole."<sup>5</sup> Research results are an important part of the significance and value of cultural resources, and often form a part of NPS interpretative presentations.

Hundreds of private, nonprofit organizations contribute greatly to the public's understanding and appreciation of preservation goals. Many of these organizations promote community and individual involvement in research or restoration. For example, the Crow Canyon Center for Southwestern Archeology in Cortez, Colorado, provides the opportunity for individuals, from elementary school age children to senior citizens, to spend time participating in an archaeological dig, experiencing the varieties of tasks and tech-

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<sup>1</sup>Barry Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service: A Historical Perspective* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1986); see also Heather Huyck and Dwight T. Pitcaithley, "National Park Service: Historians in Interpretation, Management, and Cultural Resources Management," in *Public History: An Introduction*, Barbara J. Howe and Emery Kemp (eds.) (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co., 1986), pp. 371-387.

<sup>2</sup>*Cultural Resources Management* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, NPS-28), ch. 3, p. 34. See also *Interpretation and Visitor Services Guideline* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, NPS-6).

<sup>3</sup>"The Role and Responsibility of Interpretation in the National Park Service," position paper attached to a Memorandum from William Penn Mott, Jr., NPS Director, to NPS Regional Directors regarding Interpretation, Feb. 10, 1986.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*, p. 8.

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas J. Schlereth, "Material Culture Research and Historic Explanation," *The Public Historian* 7, 1985, pp. 21-36. See also, Ray A. Williamson, *Living the Sky: The Cosmos of the American Indian* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), for an extensive discussion of prehistoric structures that display evidence of Native American interest in the motions of the celestial sphere.

niques of archaeology.<sup>6</sup> Other institutions, such as the White Mesa Institute, College of Eastern Utah in Blanding, Utah, may combine the experience of research with a regional educational tour.<sup>7</sup> The Alexandria Urban Archeology Program of the City of Alexandria, Virginia, has developed a highly structured program for involving the citizens of Alexandria in their city's past. The hours spent by the volunteers count toward fundraising by helping to secure matching research grants, and "the volunteer program also provides a vehicle for participants to conduct their own

<sup>6</sup>See Ricky Lightfoot, "The Duckfoot Site," *Archaeology*, March/April 1986, pp. 68-69 for a description of Crow Canyon's goals and some recent research results.

<sup>7</sup>Ray A. Williamson and Fred Blackburn, "The Living Earth and the Outdoor Museum," paper presented at the conference, *Is the Earth a Living Organism?* Amherst, MA, August 1985.

learning in a preferred area of education and work."<sup>8</sup>

Not only should public education focus on the results and interpretation of research, it should also include discussion of research techniques. Often the public is unaware of the part new technologies play in the analysis of prehistoric and historic sites, structures, and landscapes. Yet, many of the techniques are of interest in themselves. Demonstrating the analytical process could contribute to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the complexities of research. However, as is true of the research process, lack of availability of information has impeded adequate public understanding of this important facet of preservation.

<sup>8</sup>Steven J. Shepard and John F. Stephens, "The Volunteer Program: Developing a Symbiotic Relationship Between the Profession and the Public," *Approaches To Preserving a City's Past* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service Preservation Planning Series, April 1983), pp. 61-68.

## THE TECHNOLOGIES

In addition to the traditional means of conveying information about prehistoric and historic preservation, including brochures, displays, museum exhibits, photographic slide presentations,<sup>9</sup> films and other media, techniques for interpreting research on cultural resources now include video, holographic images, and optical disks. Public television programs based on video footage taken during an excavation or renovation can be particularly effective in conveying a sense of the excitement of research. In addition, allowing the public access to components of a collection is useful for conveying the shape, size, and manufacturing details of the artifactual material.

### Interpretive Labels, Signs, and Other Written and Graphic Information

These take a variety of forms, including brochures, maps and diagrams with points of interest highlighted, signs, or labels. These kinds of

<sup>9</sup>Nancy E. Malan, "Producing Professional Quality Slide Shows," *Technical Report 2*, American Association for State and Local History, 1985.

interpretative material are essential for curious visitors to derive the maximum benefit from visiting a historic site. Without such aids, visitors may be able to experience the ambience of the site, but remain uninformed about what they are seeing. Such information can be provided on two or three levels of complexity, depending on visitor interest and involvement.

One way to increase public awareness of significant landscapes is to provide interpretive signs along the highways, such as are used for historic routes, buildings, and monuments. The presence of a sign may entice a few to stop and invest the time to learn about the property. France, for example, has an effective program to call travelers' attention to historic sites, including landscapes, using explanatory signs along the side of the road. At some locations it is even possible to obtain information pamphlets.

### Interpreters

Trained individuals who can explain the history and significance of a site, structure, or landscape are most effective at sites. Such interpret-

ers can react immediately to visitors' questions. As noted above, NPS provides education to the public concerning cultural resources. NPS interpretative personnel provide tours, give slide shows, and a variety of informative talks concerning Park cultural and other resources. Effective use of technologies, such as tape recordings, movies, and slide shows, can enhance the ability of such interpretive staff to convey meaningful information to the public.

### Taped Walking or Driving Tours

Many museums, and some historic sites, offer taped tours of exhibits so that visitors may experience them at their own pace. Such equipment could be easily used for a variety of prehistoric and historic sites, structures, and landscapes. Some could be provided by the private sector. For example, a private nonprofit group allied with Fredericksburg-Spotsylvania National Battlefield Park provides tape cassettes on a rental basis for battlefield driving tours.

### Electronic Media

Most sites contain far more information than can be conveyed to the public using traditional signs and written materials. Video tape, optical disks, and computers not only deliver information in new formats, they make it possible to treat a wide variety of information. Such devices can be used not only to impart information on the site, structure, or landscape at which they are located, they store and share a wide variety of contextual or comparative information.

For example, the staff of the Frederick Law Olmsted Historic Site in Brookline, Massachusetts, are developing a computer database that will soon be able to generate a list of properties designed by the Olmsted firm within or near a given area code. Visitors will be able to learn whether Olmsted properties are located near their homes. Eventually, the interpretive staff at the site hopes to be able to call up and display images of such properties on a video monitor. For comparative purposes, such an arrangement could display site plans, historic photographs, and modern views of the site. Clearly, this technology could also serve as an effective research tool.

Electronic media make possible greater public involvement with the educational materials because they allow direct interaction. Optical disks, especially, allow viewers to select different paths of information and to individualize their educational experience. For example, the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress has developed a documentary optical disk describing life on a cattle ranch in Paradise Valley, Nevada.<sup>10</sup> On one disk, the producers have included full motion video with sound, a large, still picture archive (with captions) and oral histories in the form of filmed interviews that users can examine quickly and easily.

In underwater archaeology, as in other preservation areas, demonstrating the analytical process could greatly contribute to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the complexities and importance of underwater archaeology and maritime preservation. However, research results have not always been available in a timely manner, or in a form appropriate to public consumption.

<sup>10</sup>*The Ninety-Six: A Cattle Ranch in Northern Nevada*, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, 1985. See "Videodisc: The Ninety-Six Ranch," *Folklife Center News* 9, 1986, pp. 8-11.



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Color video has become a very versatile tool in both high and low visibility underwater environments. It is relatively inexpensive and easy to use and capable of high resolution images. In addition, powerful new lighting systems can overcome the limitations on color balance and differentiation that occur 20 meters below the water's surface when ambient light is reduced. These techniques are among those which have been applied in the project to record and stabilize the *Monitor*.

The imaginative use of the various photo-imaging systems, such as stereo photography and video, can convey the essence of the underwater experience to those who do not possess the capabilities to dive themselves. The elderly and handicapped, for example, should be able to share some aspects of the underwater experience. In some cases it may be possible to view historic shipwrecks through submerged glass-lined compartments set into specially built tourist vessels.

Video cameras are particularly effective interpretive devices because they are relatively inexpensive and require only moderate training for acceptable results.<sup>11</sup> Interpretive staffs can use them to tailor presentations to meet specific local needs, and to document the park's holdings. They are also able to exhibit information about sites, structures, and landscapes that may be closed to visitors because they are too fragile or too difficult for the average visitor to reach.

Audiovisual techniques can enhance visitors' experiences enormously, but it should be noted that they must be planned for and tested carefully. At Kings Mountain National Military Park, South Carolina, a creative audiovisual approach misfired. Kings Mountain commemorates a battle between American loyalists and revolutionaries during the Revolutionary War. NPS featured this civil conflict by playing recorded arguments

<sup>11</sup>Staff members of the NPS Submerged Underwater Cultural Resources Unit have made effective use of video cameras to document underwater resources in the National parks for management and protection. Park managers have also found that the footage so acquired can be used to display and interpret the resources to park visitors.

over speakers placed at either end of the main exhibit area of the visitors center.

Unfortunately, visitors entering the building too frequently found themselves under verbal fire: "... the exhibit did not work . . . The shouting match between the Loyalists and the Patriots confused visitors. . . ." Although the recordings began as the visitors entered the building, the accompanying visual exhibit was not necessarily synchronized with the sound. Insufficient testing clearly left the public with a far too real perception of Revolutionary confusion and strife.<sup>12</sup>

### Interpretive Structures/Visitor's Centers

One of the most effective interpretive devices is a separate structure or pavilion that allows for the use of a variety of media—written, graphic, and video display. However, such structures may intrude on a historic site or landscape, so great care must be exercised in placing them to avoid visual conflicts and to ensure that their design is compatible with the setting. Existing structures can often be adapted to serve interpretive purposes.

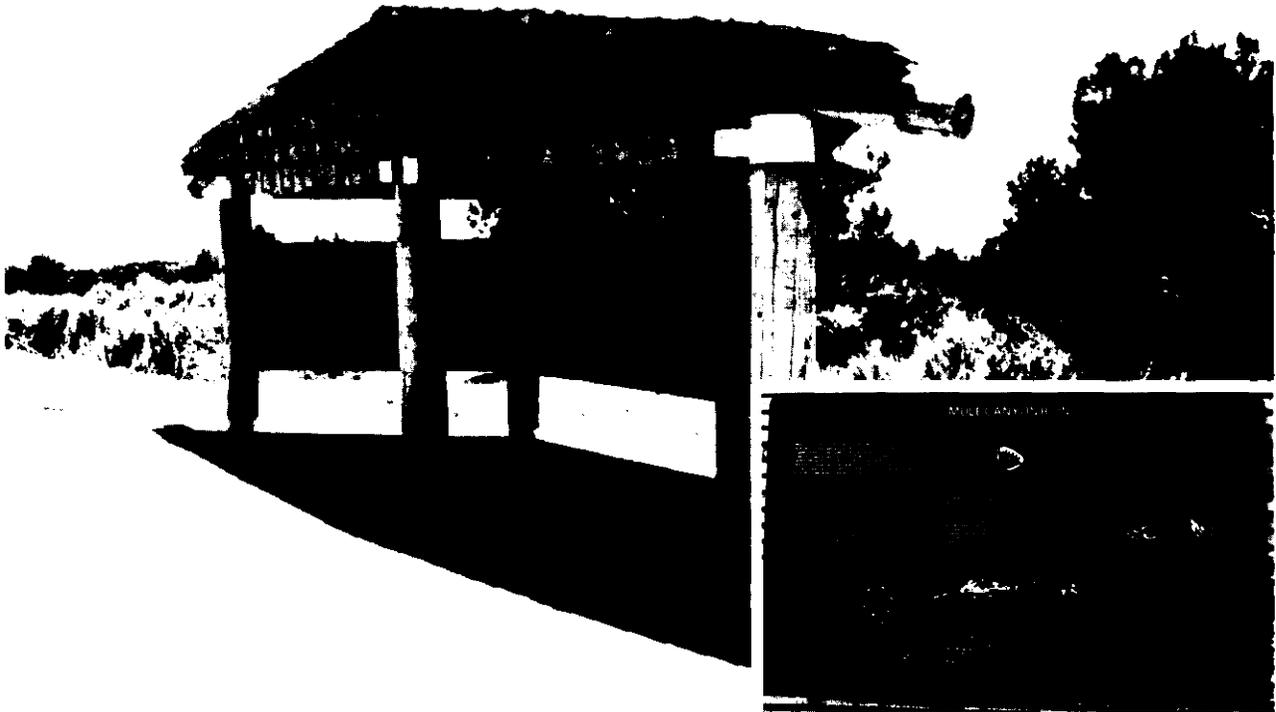
### Accessible Interpretation

Consideration of provisions for handicapped access to designed landscapes and structures is important for public education. However, for some historic public properties it may be difficult to provide access without impairing the historic integrity of the building or designed landscape.<sup>13</sup> A designed landscape whose only access is a long flight of steps, or a historic structure with extremely narrow staircases are possible examples. The Eugene O'Neill house in California has a brick sidewalk far too narrow for wheelchairs or walkers that is part of the house entrance vista.

In many cases, it may be possible to make part of the property accessible. In these cases, appro-

<sup>12</sup>Mackintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>13</sup>Charles Patton, *Access to Historic Buildings for the Disabled: Suggestions for Planning and Implementation* (Washington, DC: Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service Technical Preservation Services Division, 1980).



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Interpretive structure and sign, Mule Canyon Ruin, southeast Utah. This structure is located to the side of the path leading to the stabilized and protected ruins of an ancient Pueblo Indian dwelling and sacred kiva.

priate educational tools and structures are especially important and should be designed and provided as an integral part of the site design or visitation process.

Video technology can be especially useful in assisting the handicapped to view a landscape or see the interior of a distant room because it is possible to set up video cameras in such a way that the handicapped can scan them from one or more fixed locations. In any case, all interpretive signs and labels should also be written in Braille. Recorded tours can be keyed to activate at points of interest and describe what can be experienced there.

### Designing Access to Sites

For landscapes, one of the most important amenities the landscape architect can provide is a system of pathways and viewpoints to maximize

the visitors' experience of important landscape features. Some zoo designers have been particularly effective in creating settings that channel visitor traffic and screen certain critical areas.

### Community and Public Education and Awareness

Creating awareness of the value of historic properties within local communities is an important part of public education and preservation. In addition to providing information to the news media, managers of historic properties may find it beneficial to provide public lectures and other events for the local population either at the historic site or in the community .14

<sup>14</sup>For example, S<sub>ony</sub> side, in New York State, sends its interpretive staff into the local community to make citizens aware of their local history.

Obtaining the involvement and support of the local community, with participation in setting project goals, is one of the most important aspects of public education. Involving the local community gives its citizens a sense of contributing to the aims of the prehistoric or historic place, and imparts in them an interest in preserving the resource because they have contributed to it.

For example, the park staff at Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site in Illinois depends on close involvement of individuals from the nearby communities to assist in educating park visitors. Volunteers suggest projects that would make the park experience more enjoyable and participate with park rangers and interpretative personnel in carrying out these programs. They assist in archaeological excavations, the development of interpretive displays, and even publish a Park newsletter, *The Cahokian*.

Some historic sites involve the community by providing opportunities for local residents to participate in historic festivals,<sup>15</sup> or to volunteer as

<sup>15</sup>English Heritage (The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England) has made particularly effective use of local

tour guides dressed in period costumes.<sup>16</sup> The issue of costuming interpreters, however, like that of presenting demonstrations or "living history" at cultural sites, is controversial within the profession. Such activities can, perhaps inadvertently, misrepresent the past by substituting charm, cleanliness, or nostalgia for historical reality.

General support can also be gained by forming "Friends of . . ." groups whose members can assist with maintenance, fund raising for special projects, and staffing sales and information desks, as well as serving as trained docents.

residents in historic festivals centered around historic landscapes, buildings, and monuments. See Malcolm G. Wood, "The Marketing and Interpretation of England's Heritage," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, New Orleans, Apr. 23-27, 1986.

<sup>16</sup>Such volunteers work out best for the organization when they receive appropriate onsite training. The volunteers, in turn, gain the opportunity to learn more about the historic property and its historic relationship to the local community.

## ISSUES

### ISSUE 1:

#### **Education is an effective means of increasing protection of cultural resources.**

The excavation and collection of historic and prehistoric artifacts from both public and private land is a serious problem for cultural resource specialists. Fascinated by artifacts of earlier eras and other cultures, amateur collectors have made artifact collecting part of their recreational activity. Often, they are unaware of the damage their collecting inflicts on the available resource. Educational programs that describe the preservation research process and convey an understanding of the significance of prehistoric and historic cultural resources to the public could play an important part in reducing damage from such activities. Educational programs that actively involve the public and draw public input are likely to be most effective.

In addition to affecting public attitudes toward cultural resources on public lands, such programs may also educate private landowners to protect rather than dig up cultural resources on their own land. Prehistoric or historic cultural resources on private land are unprotected under current Federal preservation law. Such programs would also reduce the ease with which professional "pot-hunters" loot sites and could enable easier convictions under the Archeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA). Public outrage at the losses sustained by such activities is likely to increase if the public were more aware of the economic losses that can be incurred with looting and vandalism.

A variety of technologies exist for education, but they need to be used more effectively in order to affect significantly the retention of prehistoric and historic resources. Most interpretive

displays or other educational materials lack information concerning the protection of sites and what the loss of those sites means in human or cultural terms. The Louisiana program, designed and executed by the Louisiana Division of Archaeology, serves as one important example of what can be done, at relatively little cost, to educate the public about protection issues (box C).

#### ISSUE 2:

Museums have an important role in contributing to the public's understanding of **preservation goals**.

Museums play a unique role in public education because they rely largely on the use of original natural objects or artifacts. They also employ photographs, drawings, or video for interpretation. Although museums have re-created whole historic rooms, or even dwellings inside their walls, in most cases it is impossible to recreate a rock art site or a landscape in a museum set-

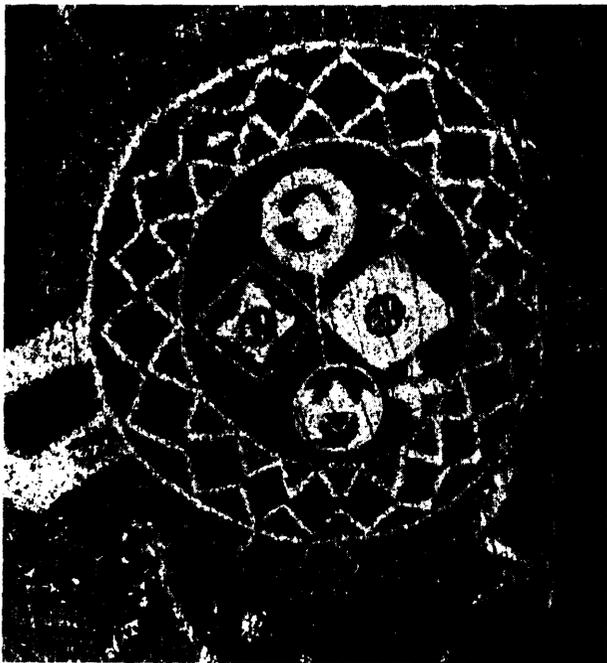


Photo credit: Ray A. Williamson

**Ancient Pueblo Indian petroglyph of shield and warrior (on basalt) south of Santa Fe, NM. Native Americans pecked, carved, or painted many thousands of images on stone outcroppings throughout North America. Long known and admired for their beauty, they have only recently been studied and interpreted.**

ting. Yet interpretation, both for research purposes and for public education, requires detailed knowledge of the local environmental context in which rock art and historic landscapes occur. Museum displays, however, tend to tell one story, instead of providing the multidimensional, multivalent explanation that designed and cultural landscapes call for. The appropriate use of optical disks or video might make possible a more dynamic, contextual approach that would include opportunities for the visitor to see a landscape or historic structure from different angles and at different seasons.

Museum curators tend to regard the museum as a facility for conserving prehistoric and historic artifacts and educating the public concerning their function and meaning. Most curators have not taken an active role in educating the public about the need to preserve cultural materials not in museums.<sup>17</sup> However, most of the same technologies that are used for interpreting museum collections to the public could be employed to alert it to the problems of protecting and preserving resources not yet in museums. Protection issues need to be included in interpretational B

#### ISSUE 3:

**Restoration and conservation techniques should be included in public education plans.**

Although certain conflicts and uncertainties over the interpretation of prehistoric sites will continue, interpretive schemes would better serve the public if they explicitly incorporated information on the process of preserving sites. At York Minster<sup>19</sup> in England, preservationists planned to close the structure to carry out massive multi-year restoration, but were ultimately convinced to

<sup>17</sup>Curators of materials from a marine environment are familiar with the need to educate the public about protection issues because their artifacts are so fragile.

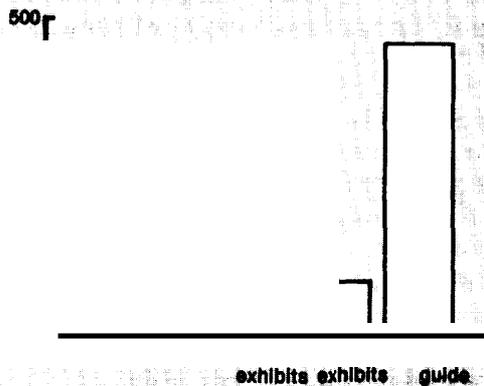
<sup>18</sup>For example, in 1984 the Denver Museum of Natural History mounted a small exhibit about Colorado Archaeology. A pamphlet distributed as part of the exhibit not only listed the major public archaeological sites in the State, but also included a warning about plundering archaeological sites and cited the State and Federal laws against collecting artifact on public lands. See "Colorado Archaeology: Riddles and Resources," Denver Museum of Natural History, 1984.

<sup>19</sup>See Bernard M. Feilden, *Conservation of Historic Buildings* (London: Butterworth Scientific, 1982), for more information on the restoration of York Minster.

**Box C.—Louisiana's Public Education Strategies for Archaeology**

About 85 percent of Louisiana's land is privately owned. Archaeological sites on private land have no formal protection under Louisiana law. Thus, in order to increase site protection in the State, the State's Division of Archaeology has embarked on a formal program to increase public understanding and awareness of archaeology. Louisiana's efforts demonstrate that not only can such a program reach a wide audience, it has a direct positive effect on the preservation of archaeological sites on private land.<sup>1</sup>

**Time Required To Develop Various Projects**



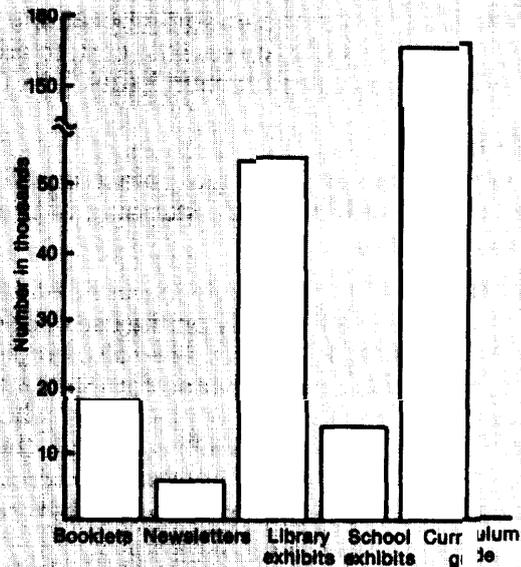
SOURCE: Louisiana Division of Archaeology.

The Louisiana program has attempted to communicate the following information inexpensively and in a manner that would not threaten landowners who may own significant archaeological sites:

- private landowners may have significant archaeological sites on their property,
- archaeological resources provide important and interesting information about past inhabitants,
- scientific archaeological techniques provide the means to obtain the best information about archaeological sites, and
- not preserving resources results in the permanent loss of information.

<sup>1</sup>The information in this box was derived from Nancy W. Hensley, "Louisiana's Public Preservation Strategies," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, New Orleans, LA, Apr. 25, 1986.

**Number of People Affected by Various Projects**



SOURCE: Louisiana Division of Archaeology.

With only one person to coordinate and oversee activities, the Division of Archaeology has developed the following set of educational materials:

- An illustrated booklet series—about 30 pages long, each booklet is written by an archaeologist who is an expert on the topic. Booklets are advertised in newspapers and archaeological newsletters and distributed free to anyone requesting them (average cost per copy, \$1.50).
- Newsletters—these are 4 pages long and are distributed free to about 2,000 individuals, public libraries, and schools (average cost per copy, \$0.00).
- Exhibits—for libraries and small museums. They include artifacts, display captions, maps, photographs, and original illustrations. They are designed to be borrowed in an aluminum suit-hibit, (average cost of materials per exhibit, \$0.00).

For classroom use, the Division prepares smaller exhibits with artifacts that students can handle, maps, illustrations, and suggestions for classroom activities (average cost of materials per exhibit, \$180).

**Cost of Time and Materials of Various Projects  
Divided by the Number of People Affected**



SOURCE: Louisiana Division of Archaeology.

\* Curriculum materials-169-page curriculum guide designed for use in junior high school classes (average cost per \$0.90), \$0.90.

- Workshops-the Division offers workshops for teachers around the State to introduce teachers to the materials and techniques they can use to teach about archaeology and site preservation.
- Slide shows-for the workshops and in conjunction with exhibits.

Finally, the division has “encouraged archaeologists receiving federal grant funds to include public participation in their projects.”



Photo credit: Courtesy Dayton Museum of Natural History

A reconstructed prehistoric Indian house at the Incinerator Site in Dayton, Ohio. This thatched-roof dwelling represents archaeologists' interpretation of the original house forms at this location. It was built primarily with volunteer help from local citizens.

leave it open to the public who were able to view the **work's progress** in safety. The restoration generated a great deal of visitor interest and financial support, and provided a unique educational experience.

Likewise, in the United States, **NPS has** kept some historic buildings, among them the Clara Barton **House in** Glen Echo, Maryland, open for visitors during restoration and rehabilitation. Site managers can increase the public's concern over the continued "health" of historic structures by illuminating the process that preserves them.

Reconstructions of prehistoric or historic structures in a manner that preserves as much of the original methods as possible can be a source of particular enjoyment and instruction to site visitors. In one recent example, in which the **reconstruction of a Paleoindian house in Virginia was** carried out with volunteers using replicas of prehistoric tools, the house and the construction tools are now available for visitor inspection.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup>The **Thunderbird** Museum and Archaeological Park in Front Royal, VA. See "Indian Dwelling Rebuilt," *Archaeology* 39, 1986, p. 78.

A building, group of buildings, or a landscape can be historically significant **for one or several reasons**<sup>21</sup>—for a single event, day, or person, for outstanding design, craftsmanship, or artistic value, for representing a particular type, period, or method of construction, etc. Changes in use and occupancy may have wrought alterations that have assumed significance in their own right.

Buildings, for example, can demonstrate technological change over time, the history of building technology itself. It is often important for the history of changes in the use and function of historic structures to be incorporated into interpretive presentations. For example, the interpretation of a structure such as the Old Post Office in Washington, DC, owned by the General Services Administration, and recently rehabilitated to combined public and private office and commercial use, could include more information about its past function.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup>See *How To Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, DC.

<sup>22</sup>Page P. Miller, Nation Coordinating Committee for the promotion of History, personal communication, 1986.