

### ***History of the ASLA Historic Preservation Professional Interest Group***

Excerpted from the 1996 ASLA Annual Meeting Proceedings article by Patricia M. O'Donnell.

The Historic Preservation Professional Interest Group was created in the mid 1970s. At the time few landscape architects were aware of historic values and issues in their projects. Formal schooling required only a whirlwind overview of the global history of landscape architecture, covering great designed landscapes and notable landscape architects. Very little was known about regionally or locally important landscapes and their designers, much less was understood about the vernacular and associative cultural landscapes of an area. Many professional commissions proceeded to radically change landscapes that had historic values with little recognition of their historic importance while historic buildings were the subject of exacting restorations. Within this milieu a few landscape architects were aware. The late Thomas J. Kane, FASLA, chaired the early ASLA Historic Preservation Committee (HPC) through the 1970s and sought to increase awareness by designating ASLA chapter liaisons for historic preservation. Interest and expertise was increasing and in 1978, Kane and colleagues from the United States and Canada founded the Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation, and interdisciplinary group of professionals ([www.ahlp.org](http://www.ahlp.org)).

Although the ASLA HPC languished for a year or two at the end of the 1970s, by 1981 Richard Machias and Patricia M. O'Donnell had reestablished the HPC. The primary agenda during this renewal was continuing education within the profession, targeting landscape architects with the message of adding historic research and preservation to project considerations. Efforts were made to renew the chapter liaison network.

By 1983, the newly defined Historic Preservation Open Committee (HPOC) was reaching out to allied professions and organizations to build lines of communication. Initiatives included the gathering of examples and developing of a format for a national landscape survey; outreach by liaisons to state and local officials and private groups; the gathering of landscape preservation bibliography and the development of a historic plants source list. Also in 1983, the HPOC worked with other groups to support and lobby for the Olmsted Historic Landscapes Act, congressional legislation to inventory and preserve historic landscapes and honor F.L. Olmsted, Sr. and his colleagues. Although the bill did not pass, the effort did place the HPOC in the forefront as a proponent for landscape preservation.

By 1984 the HPOC announced the National Historic Landscapes Survey, a modification of the National Register nomination form, keyed to landscape topics and issues. Open lines of communication between the National Park Service (NPS) and landscape preservation advocates, led to a pivotal meeting that began the NPS Historic Landscape Preservation Initiative. At that meeting twelve tasks were outlined ranging from compilation of a bibliography, to developing model Historical Landscape Reports to holding workshops, developing model National Register and National Historic Landmark nominations, to developing a Historic American Landscapes Survey. Note that at this time there were no historical landscape architects on NPS staffs, no definition of such a title, no technical bulletins, no model National Register nominations, no endorsed inventory forms, no training initiative, etc. all resources we now take for granted. This meeting marked the beginning of the NPS Historic Landscapes Initiative. Through the development of the NPS work with historic landscapes, the HPOC played a critical review role for numerous NPS publications on historic landscape planning and treatment.

By 1986 the standard HPOC annual meeting sessions had gone beyond basics and a concentrated training session was proposed. In collaboration with NPS the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual HPOC Historic Landscape Preservation Symposium was presented at the 1987 ASLA annual meeting in Baltimore. Note that this symposium was held as a separate venue from the ASLA annual meeting, not until recently has historic landscape preservation been a concurrent track within the annual meetings. This first symposium made a substantial leap in continuing education efforts within and outside the profession offering a binder to participants containing a host of case studies and reference materials on archeology, pollen analysis, historic plants, etc. These annual symposium continued through 1996, then were incorporated into mobile workshop tours as a part of the ASLA Annual meeting.

The topics and vocabulary have evolved as the state-of-the-art has been redefined. Character-defining features, landscape units, landscape characteristics, integrity analysis are all common terminology today.

Interestingly, there has been a shift from “historic” to “cultural” landscape which has accompanied an enlarged vision of landscape resources and outdate the “designed” and “vernacular” terms of previous use.

A global framework for landscape preservation has come to the forefront, in part through the efforts of HP-PI Group members. In 1992 the World Heritage Guidelines were amended to address cultural landscapes as designed, evolved, and associative resources worthy of designation at the global level.

The variety of achievements of the HPOC/HP-PI Group forms a basis to further advance cultural landscape preservation:

- Providing continuing education for inter-professional advancement
- Lobbying for theme study and other appropriation or legislative issues
- Building interdisciplinary alliances
- Providing technical assistance nationally through charrettes or study
- Reporting on projects and new initiatives
- Communicating on upcoming opportunities through the newsletter
- Advocating landscape preservation when important landscapes are at risk
- Continuing efforts to enlarge public awareness of cultural landscapes.

The HP-PI Group must strive to remain at the forefront of landscape preservation issues. The most fundamental aspect of this group is to provide a forum for meaningful dialogue. Over 20 years of symposia and dialogue has seen a small circle of colleagues grow to over 250 members and a network of allied organizations. The HP-PI Group is a vehicle for sharing a passion for valued cultural landscapes. Much remains to be done in the field of landscape preservation, yet the chronicle of the next twenty-five years grows from the foundation of this past twenty-five years.