

Saving Outdoor Sculpture

A Nationwide Survey is Underway

Susan Nichols

The statue of Patrick Henry, 9' tall and carved mostly from a single white-painted log, once graced the courthouse cupola in Morgantown, WV, and now resides in the courthouse tower. In Augusta, ME, the youthfulness of Samantha Smith, the teenager who wrote to Yuri Andropov with her concerns about nuclear war, is fixed in bronze; depicted in blue jeans, she cradles a dove. In 1981, Boston's black and white communities teamed up to raise funds for the restoration and establishment of a maintenance endowment for the Robert Gould Shaw Memorial which honors the black 54th Regiment of Massachusetts which fell during an assault on Fort Wagner, SC, July 18, 1863. One-time printer for the U.S. House of Representatives, distinguished military leader and presidential confidante, Major General James Blair Steadman died as Toledo's chief of police and is memorialized in bronze, which is now the focus of efforts to provide proper care and maintenance.

These few represent our diverse national collection of outdoor sculpture that give identity to our public spaces. That collection is threatened by vandalism, neglect and pollution. Because of a current project called Save Outdoor Sculpture!, alias SOS!, these and other works are gaining greater recognition from local and national audiences. Throughout the country, the concept of a national collection of outdoor sculpture reflecting our history and art is beginning to emerge.

Approximately five years ago, concern for outdoor sculpture intersected with the interests of two organiza-

tions—the National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property (NIC) and the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (NMAA). At the museum, the Inventory of American Sculpture, comprised of indoor and outdoor works, was envisioned as a companion computerized database to the Inventory of American Painting, which opened in 1976. NIC is concerned with increasing public awareness about the need



Tennessee volunteers surveying *Pioneer Family*. Puryear Mims.

for proper care of cultural property, and outdoor sculpture is among the nation's most imperiled cultural property. To meet the ambitious and comprehensive goals of both organizations, NIC and NMAA formed the private/public partnership of Save Outdoor Sculpture! which has two goals, both first steps toward other goals.

SOS! has an interesting statistical profile. The project is underway in 43 states plus the District of Columbia and involves 122 organizations. Of the primary or lead organizations, 35 have a history or preservation interest, including state historic preservation offices; 31 are arts-oriented; 10 are universities, museums or civic groups. SOS! projects have been completed in North Dakota, West Virginia, Tennessee and Illinois.

The project's first goal is to locate and make an initial report about all publicly accessible outdoor sculpture in the United States. Although some (perhaps most) are owned by community governments, the scope of our work is not limited to **publicly owned** works. Pieces owned by corporations, non-governmental agencies and individuals, if they are **publicly accessible**, are included.

SOS! surveys will lay important groundwork in many communities. They help public and private owners prepare for in-depth condition surveys conducted by conser-



Robert Gould Shaw Memorial, Boston, MA. Augustus Saint-Gaudens. Photo by Jeffrey Nintzel, courtesy Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site.

vators and encourage the establishment of long-range maintenance programs with the guidance of conservators.

The national SOS! survey model is tailored by each SOS! coordinating organization to suit its own mission and resources, survey area, geography and estimated number of sculptures. Adults age 18 years and older are recruited to be volunteers by the local SOS! coordinating organizations to conduct on-site surveys and background searches of the works they locate. In addition to museums, historical societies, libraries, retiree organizations and similar traditional sources for volunteers, art and photography students of the Upward Bound summer program were tapped to help in Vermont. In California, Urban Corps members will team with community volunteers. Employees of British Petroleum in Cleveland attended training during their lunch time and are survey-



Mitochondria, Bellevue Medical Center, New York, NY. John W. Rhoden. Photo by John C. Scott, New York Conservation Center, Inc.

ing works in the downtown. In Philadelphia, students at Temple University are responsible for inventorying works on their campus. To survey its 82 counties, Mississippi SOS! has recruited college students, officers of Women's Clubs, a city employee who enforces a local preservation ordinance, a semi-retired engineering consultant and a rural real estate agent.

As conservators conduct assessments or provide treatment or as programs of annual maintenance are established, as locales commission new works or as additional historical information is discovered, those updates about

Contact SOS! with the names of colleagues and organizations in these 26 unfunded areas: Alaska; California, including Fresno, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, San Jose, Santa Ana; Colorado; Delaware; Idaho; Louisiana; Missouri; New Jersey, including Newark; North Carolina, including Charlotte; Oklahoma, including Oklahoma City and Tulsa; Pennsylvania, including Pittsburgh; Virginia, including Virginia Beach; Washington.

outdoor sculptures will be forwarded to the Inventory of American Sculpture.

The survey questionnaire and the volunteers' training are designed to help assure uniform data collection, accurate surveying and creation of a credible database. For instance, in the portion of the survey questionnaire



All Wars Memorial to Colored Soldiers and Sailors, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, PA. J. Otto Schweizer. Photo by Franko Khoury for Save Outdoor Sculpture!

devoted to reporting on the condition of a work, a yes-no check list format is used. Are there any cracks, splits, breaks or holes? Is there evidence of bird guano, black or white crusts, metallic staining, spalling, graffiti or spray paint? Does water collect in recessed areas? Training includes a lecture and walking tour by a conservator whose area of expertise is outdoor sculpture to point out examples of the deterioration referred to in the questionnaire. To reinforce the tour or for use in regions without access to a conservator, a video is provided as part of the SOS! training. It features volunteers surveying sculptures with Henry Lie of the Center for Conservation and Technical Studies at Harvard University. To date, with 1,400 survey questionnaires received from Arkansas to Vermont, based on surface, observable clues, volunteers report that 49% of sculptures surveyed are well-maintained, 32% could benefit from treatment, 11% require immediate review by a professional, and a judgment was not made for 8% of the surveyed works.

The National Park Service is the largest, single "owner" of outdoor sculpture in America. NPS has surveyed its works as part of the List of Classified Structures and estimates that 2,500 items on the list meet SOS! criteria. (See box for SOS! survey guidelines for reporting works.) When National Park Service properties are part of a survey area, the SOS! project coordinator contacts the NPS site staff regarding existing documentation and the site is surveyed by SOS! volunteers. Marian Barksdale,

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coordinator for Mississippi SOS!, allows that “one of our biggest challenges was how to tackle the Vicksburg National Military Park, home to more than 200 monuments. Much to our delight, Nancy Bell, executive director of the Vicksburg Foundation for Historic Preservation, stepped in with enthusiasm and willing volunteers. The National Park Service has provided substantial support—plus access to their files.”

In Tennessee, Henry and Sophie Trent have surveyed 10 counties for the project. “The highlight of our summer trips was the survey of the Civil War sculptures in the Chattanooga area. In conjunction with this visit, we drove to the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park. The park staff was very helpful. We found extensive material concerning each sculpture. Some of the early photographs were wonderful!”

SOS! Coordinating Organizations were selected through a competitive proposal process. Modest awards to help defray the costs to implement this survey and public awareness project are made to nonprofit organizations and government agencies.

Our second goal is to raise public awareness. Here again SOS! offers an important first step in the long-range task of raising an owner’s consciousness about the intrinsic value of outdoor sculpture and the need for responsible ongoing care. Philosophically, involvement of community residents as surveyors helps to develop or reinforce a coterie of supporters who can be tapped after the survey portion is completed to assist with efforts to provide care for their works, including fundraising to cover assessment and treatment by professional conservators, the establishment of maintenance endowments and of adopt-a-sculpture programs. With three-quarters of all SOS! sites funded, this second goal becomes the project’s top priority.



SOS! training in Pompano Beach, FL. Photo by Christoph Gerozissis.

In 1993, a series of articles will be published directed at people who have responsibility for seeing that outdoor sculpture is cared for—legislators, business people, commissioning agencies, philanthropists, community leaders, conservators and artists, for example. A companion 30-minute video, available in spring 1993, will feature how groups in Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Seattle, and Upland,

Guidelines for On-Site Reporting Works of Outdoor Sculpture

For the purpose of SOS!, outdoor sculpture is defined as follows:

A three-dimensional artwork that is cast, carved, modeled, fabricated, fired or assembled in materials such as stone, wood, metal, ceramic or plastic, located in an outdoor setting, and is accessible to the public.

Tastes change over time. No sculpture should be omitted because of incomplete information or because it is thought to be unimportant or unworthy of consideration. Some types of outdoor sculpture will be omitted from the survey:

- grave markers/headstones
carved headstones, sculptural markers, memorial tombs, urns
- commemorative works
Plaques, historical markers or tablets
- architectural structures
structures such as the Gateway Arch in St. Louis
- architectural ornamentation
minor decorative embellishments, such as rosettes, keystones, garlands, wreaths
- mass-produced items
commercial products, garden ornaments, weather vanes, whirligigs, show signs, figure-heads and circus and carousel carvings
- museum collections
sculpture gardens owned or administered by museums

CA, raised their funds and will spark ideas for similar efforts in other communities.

In Mississippi, Marian Barksdale sums up for many involved with SOS! nationally: “Unfortunately, Mississippi cannot boast of great sculptural wealth, but SOS! is already helping us appreciate the sculptural expressions and traditions that are uniquely ours.”

Susan Nichols is SOS! program director for the National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property. For additional information, to receive a copy of *SOS! Update* and the orientation or training videos, or to suggest contacts in unfunded areas, call the SOS! staff at 800-422-4612.