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Interdisciplinary Service to the Community

The Texas A&M Experience

The Union Trading Company in Fort Davis, Texas is a part of the frontier heritage. Students battle the 100 degree summer heat to record adobe walls. Photo by the author.

Working with community members and a faculty director, the group identifies historic resources in Giddings, Texas. Photo by David Pugh.

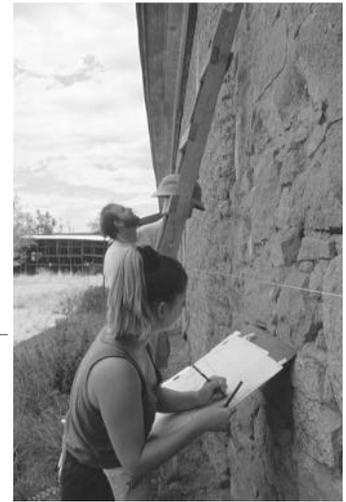
The importance of historic resources has long been a focus in the College of Architecture at Texas A&M University. Documentation to Historic American Buildings Survey standards was introduced as a graduate elective in 1977, and teams have recorded subjects ranging from log structures from 19th-century Texas to the remains of Anasazi pueblitos in the Four Corners region of the Southwest. The students have been recognized in the Charles E. Peterson Prize competition, including three first place awards. As part of a land grant institution, teaching, research, and service are explicit in the mission of the college's historic preservation programs. The academic component of the teaching mission is rooted in the concept that historic preservation is an interdisciplinary field, whose practitioners need to have their own focused expertise, while respecting and understanding the special skills and knowledge brought by other members of the team.

The Certificate in Historic Preservation is based on course work and field experiences for graduate students whose degree programs are in architecture, landscape architecture, urban planning, construction science, and land development.

In addition to the courses available in the college, students are encouraged to consider graduate courses in heritage tourism, cultural geography, anthropology, archeology, and history to support their career objectives. In the last five years, increasing numbers of students in these disciplines have enrolled in preservation courses in the College of Architecture.

Many of the field studies have a significant community impact. The Grimes County Courthouse documentation (1989) drew public attention to the need to restore the exterior of the building and to develop a master plan for total rehabilitation of this important example of Texas heritage. Through an ISTE A grant to the county the exterior work is now in progress under the direction of a Houston architectural office. A similar documentation project at the Union Trading Post in Fort Davis, Texas, provided invaluable base data for Jeff Davis County, the owners of this adobe and rock complex dating back to 1880, to examine future uses for the structure and to guide immediate repairs. This documentation received first place in the Charles E. Peterson Prize for 1997.

During the spring of 1997 the Historic Resources Imaging Laboratory, supported in part by a grant from the NPS National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (NCPTT), hosted a workshop on the use of Computer Assisted Drawing (CAD) in HABS/HAER documentation. Draft guidelines, paralleling the existing published guides to traditional documentation, were field tested in summer projects in Texas and South Carolina. Both projects involved students from Texas A&M University. The first was a series of log structures associated with the 1855 John Seward Plantation at Independence; the second was Fort Hill, the Clemson, South Carolina, home of John C. Calhoun and later Thomas Green Clemson, built in 1803. While the analysis is not complete, the style and construction differences



The snow stays long at the Continental Divide! A HABS team member works in June to document the log Boreas Pass Section House, now restored as a shelter for walkers and winter sports enthusiasts. Photo by the author.

between these structures will provide an interesting test of the computer drawing technology. The laboratory continues to work on the development of the CAD guidelines in conjunction with the national HABS/HAER specialists and other professional and academic consultants.

The laboratory is participating in two NCPTT grants addressing documentation technology. In collaboration with the Texas Historical Commission's Courthouse Preservation Alliance, a Ph.D. student and visiting faculty member are developing a digital database system for recording Texas Courthouses. The study team also includes faculty at the University of Texas at San Antonio. A second project will evaluate non-linear documentation strategies that can be applied to detailed solid modeling in historical building surveys.

Working with Texas communities through its Target City program, the Urban Planning program has encouraged consideration of historic resources in community revitalization. Giddings, an 1871 city with extensive historic resources, provided such an opportunity, and one of the students working on this project assumed the position of Historic

Preservation Officer in Natchez, Mississippi, upon graduation. Outreach activities in 1998 will update the Residential Historic District Guidelines for Galveston, and develop an Urban Image Analysis for Nacogdoches, an East Texas city dating back to Spanish Texas.

The Landscape Architecture component of the preservation program includes a course on the conservation of historic and cultural landscapes. Research studies have included the history and interpretation of



the colonial indigo plantations, and historic gardens at the Samuel May Williams home in Galveston, and the Kraitchar House in Caldwell, Texas.

Through the Department of Recreation, Parks and Tourism Science, the laboratory has been able to further the understanding of unique historic resources through innovative interpretive programs. Before its closure in 1937, the Boreas Pass railroad was the highest rail crossing of the Continental Divide in Colorado. Documentation of the dilapidated Section House at the summit led to its rehabilitation as a shelter for walkers and winter sports enthusiasts. Working with

the college's nationally-recognized Visualization Laboratory, the study team developed a video reconstruction of the High Line, which interprets the route between Como and Breckenridge for the many visitors who follow the line by car, bicycle, and on foot.

International work at Narbonne Cathedral in France provided new insights into medieval construction techniques. Most recently the Abbey at Valmagne has been the focus of documentation and analysis of medieval stone construction. In the fall of 1997, a team from Texas A&M University assisted the community of New Plymouth in the Bahamas in identifying and documenting vernacular structures from the period before the 1930 hurricane, and will develop guidelines for their conservation and for new construction that is compatible with the historic community.

Interdisciplinary courses and field study provide the basis for sound professional preparation, and the outreach programs provide an effective connection with communities and individuals who develop a better understanding and appreciation of the significance and value of historic and cultural resources. Texas A&M University can see the evidence of these efforts across the state, the nation and abroad as graduates develop their careers, and maintain the university's tradition of service to community.

David G. Woodcock, FAIA, RIBA, coordinates the Historic Preservation program at Texas A&M University and is Director of the Historic Resources Imaging Laboratory.

Window details at Narbonne Cathedral require concentration as well as good sense of balance! The studies found complex design geometry at the cathedral. Photo by Vivian Paul.

