

Preserving Our Nation's Historic Resources

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America's historic places embody our unique spirit, character, and identity. They tell compelling stories that make our heritage real. Preserving historic places as living parts of communities helps us understand the sweeping diversity and magnitude of the American experience. Americans need to document, recognize, and preserve this evidence of what each generation has created, achieved, and experienced to chronicle our progress, teach us about our history, and enrich the quality of life for ourselves and future generations.

The National Park Service's Role as Custodian of Our Natural and Historical Treasures

The National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, provides leadership and assists in preserving

and telling the stories of historic places not only in national parks but in communities nationwide. While national parks may have either natural or historic values or both, most have been added to the National Park System primarily for historic or cultural significance. Ancient habitation sites that illustrate how Native Americans lived; battlefields and forts; homes and work places of presidents, inventors, civil rights leaders, artists, writers, and famous American women; industrial buildings; farms; canals; ships; internment camps; and a Cold War missile silo are just some examples.

The National Park Service is also responsible for expanding and maintaining the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register

now includes about 1.4 million historic properties recognizing not only historic areas in the National Park System and National Historic Landmarks significant to all Americans, but also historic properties of national, state, or local significance nominated by states, federal agencies and Indian tribes. Its primary goals are to foster a national preservation ethic, promote a greater appreciation of America's heritage and increase and broaden the public's understanding and appreciation of historic places. The National Register helps preserve historic properties by recognizing and publicizing their values, making them eligible to apply for federal preservation tax incentives and grants, and assuring that they are considered in the planning of federal projects.

What Makes Historic Places Eligible for Listing in the National Register?

The National Register criteria for evaluation are designed to recognize historic places that reflect the contributions of all our people to the country's history and heritage. The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that retain their essential historic character and that meet one or more of the four specific criteria. To be eligible for listing, a historic place may represent important historical trends and events; reflect the lives of significant persons; illustrate distinctive architectural, engineering, and artistic design achievement; or impart information about America's past.



Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, Pennsylvania. (Courtesy of the National Park Service)



A Preservation Case Study

The National Register counts among its many listings such famous historic places as Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello and Martin Luther King Jr.’s home, Taos Pueblo, Mesa Verde National Park, the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed house, Fallingwater, and Cape Canaveral, among others including bridges, boats, farms, and many commercial and residential neighborhoods. One example, the Savannah Historic District in Georgia, is recognized for its distinctive grid plan devised by General James E. Oglethorpe, founder of the British colony of Georgia in 1733, as well as for its 18th and 19th-century architecture. Its citizens have preserved this premier example of a local historic district that has benefited from the historic preservation programs administered by the National Park Service.

How You and Your Students Can Learn More About and Help Preserve the History of Your Local Community

Learning from historic places in parks and communities is powerful – and transformative. Students of all ages more readily retain information, grasp meaning, and adopt new behaviors when directly involved with heritage sites. Participating in the preservation of historic places nurtures an aware citizenry engaged to a greater extent in American public life and in the future, identity, and quality of life in communities and the nation. The National Park Service is dedicated to preserving historic places and to helping people of all ages understand the meaning and values of this irreplaceable heritage.

We invite you to visit the National Register’s website at cr.nps.gov/nr, where lists and other information on registered historic places and how to become involved in protecting historic places in your community can be found. By searching the historic preservation theme index of the National Register’s Teaching with Historic Places lesson plan series, teachers can quickly access lesson plans with activities for students such as identifying and evaluating



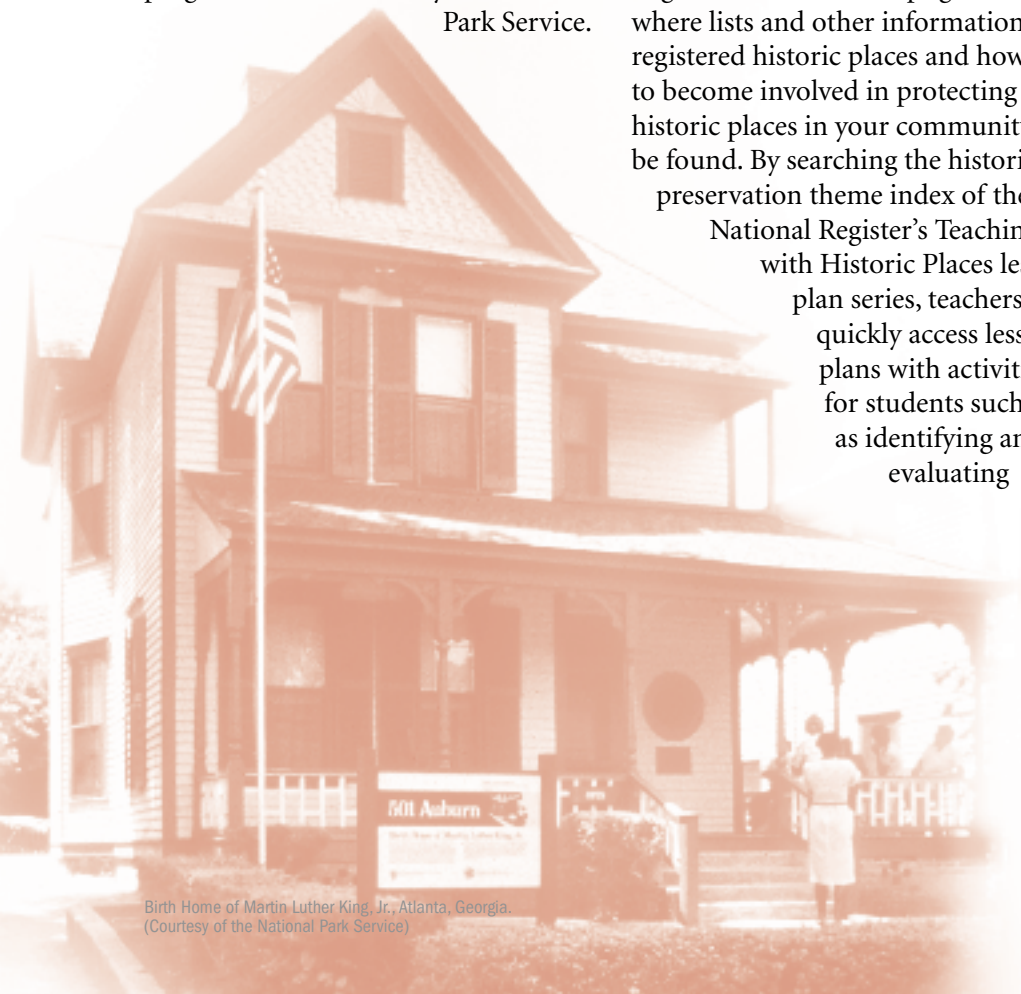
National Registration Homepage. (Courtesy of the National Park Service)

historic sites and nominating them for registration, creating photographic displays, or developing a conservation plan, promotional brochures or walking tours. All lesson plans include activities leading students to the history and historic places in their own communities.

Educational Resources for Teachers from the National Park Service

The National Park Service has developed educational programs and tools to use historic places as primary resources for teaching and learning about the interconnections of human culture and nature, natural systems, the values of America’s diverse heritage, and the principles of democracy. Two useful websites, nps.gov/learn and cr.nps.gov, contain links to curriculum-based programs and lesson plans for national parks and community sites listed in the National Register of Historic Places and other information about cultural resources and how to protect them.

The NPS website at nps.gov is the gateway to all the units of the National Park System and their education programs, information on preserving America’s history and culture in parks and communities, and NPS tools for learning.



Birth Home of Martin Luther King, Jr., Atlanta, Georgia. (Courtesy of the National Park Service)