

A training initiative of the Alliance of National Heritage Areas

In Their Own Words: Sharing a Heritage Area's Stories

One of the National Park Service's suggested criteria for National Heritage Area designation stipulates that "the area reflects traditions, beliefs, customs and folk life that are a valuable part of the national story." At times, the designation process can become focused on an area's resources, emphasizing tangible landscapes and sites rather than the underlying events and experiences that made those locations significant. While historical, cultural and natural resources are undeniably a vital and necessary aspect of any heritage area, it is important to remember that the stories of human experiences are a critical part of what makes each heritage area unique.

Why is it so important to effectively tell a heritage area's stories? Heritage areas often encompass large surface areas, and resources can be diverse and far-reaching. However, disseminated locations can be powerfully connected through a region's collective history. Traditions, historical movements, and customs can be utilized to unite sites that are far in proximity yet closely bound by shared heritage. Authentic stories also help draw visitors to heritage areas. Finding a connection to another person's experiences, emotions, and accomplishments entices travelers to visit heritage resources. Efforts to interpret the "whole story" of a region also enable heritage area sites to be inclusive to all residents while attracting larger, more diverse groups of travelers.

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The narratives within a heritage area are best told through the words of the people that live within it. Local residents with a common heritage and history can provide authenticity and a sense of place in a world that is becoming increasingly homogeneous. Encouraging residents to participate in sharing their histories also provides a means for greater community-based partnerships and local support for heritage area projects. These local stakeholders are a key factor in determining the long-term sustainability and success of a heritage area; without community participation, it is challenging for any preservation-based initiative to succeed.

A powerful example of the importance of authentic stories is evident in the Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area, a six-county area that borders the Gulf of Mexico and highlights the diversity of Native American, English, French, and Spanish settlers. The recent devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina emphasized the vulnerability of historic, natural, and cultural sites and landmarks, not only in this region but across the country. Although the hurricane caused extensive damage to many of the area's resources, the intangible aspects that make the Mississippi Gulf Coast NHA unique and nationally significant

remain. The region's cultural traditions, shared heritage, contributions to our nation's history and development, and most importantly, its residents, remain strong and vital through the stories of the past, and their inspiring stories of the present and future as they rebuild.

Regional stories have the power to bring residents and stakeholders together through a commitment to preserving their sense of identity and community. The key lies in remembering that national heritage areas are living landscapes, allowing residents and visitors to celebrate heritage, live in the present, and plan for the future.



Spotlight on NHAs: MotorCities National Heritage Area

Experience Everything Automotive!

MotorCities NHA is the host for the 2007 International Heritage Development Conference. Located in southeast and central Michigan, MotorCities preserves and celebrates automobile heritage and strives to educate visitors about the impact of the automobile industry both regionally and nationally. Capitalizing on a 13-county region that boasts nearly 1,200 unique auto-related resources, MotorCities networks with its regional partners and communities to increase heritage tourism and preservation in the area through resource identification and documentation, guidelines for adaptive reuse, site interpretation, and educational programs.

For more information on this heritage area,
visit
www.experienceeverythingautomotive.org.



Walter P. Chrysler Museum, Auburn Hills, MI



Durant-Dort Headquarters, Flint, MI

Upcoming Events of Interest

Society for Historical Archaeology Annual Conference
January 11-15, 2006
Sacramento, CA
www.archaeocommons.org/sha2006

Saving Places 2006: Building on the Past
Colorado Preservation's 9th Annual Historic Preservation Conference
February 8-10, 2006
Denver, CO
www.coloradopreservation.org or info@coloradopreservation.org

National Archives and Records Administration
20th Annual Preservation Conference
March 16, 2006
College Park, MD
www.archives.gov

Additions to Your Heritage Development Reading List

Upcoming publications on the basics of National Heritage Areas as well as setting up state heritage area programs will be available soon!

- Mahon, Edward T. and Shelly S. Mastran. *Better Models for Development in Pennsylvania*. Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, 2005, available at <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/brc/grants/2005/Bettermodels.pdf>.
- National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers. *Tribal Consultation: Best Practices in Historic Preservation*, available from www.nathpo.org/special_projects-Best_Practices.htm.

For a comprehensive list of sources related to heritage development, visit www.heritagedevelopmentinstitute.org/research. This bibliography is updated monthly.

Future of the National Heritage Areas Program

A Partnerships Committee was formed earlier this year to make recommendations to the National Park Service Advisory Board regarding the future of the National Heritage Areas program within the National Park Service. The Advisory Board will use this report to make recommendations to the Director of the National Park Service and the Secretary of the Interior.

For a copy of the report, visit <http://www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas/> and click on "Interim Report."

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The Alliance of National Heritage Areas (ANHA) established the Heritage Development Institute (HDI) as a way of providing leadership to the heritage development field as well as creating training and analysis of the best practices in our heritage areas across the country. The HDI Newsletter is sponsored by the ANHA, Middle Tennessee State University's Center for Historic Preservation, and the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area. To submit information and update e-mail addresses, please e-mail us at hdi@mtsu.edu.