### The Preparation and Use of Historic Structure Reports

Preservation Brief 43  
[**http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief43.htm#Report Organization**](http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief43.htm#Report Organization)

A historic structure report provides documentary, graphic, and physical information about a property's history and existing condition. Broadly recognized as an effective part of preservation planning, a historic structure report also addresses management or owner goals for the use or re-use of the property. It provides a thoughtfully considered argument for selecting the most appropriate approach to treatment, prior to the commencement of work, and *outlines* a scope of recommended work. The report serves as an important guide for all changes made to a historic property during a project--repair, rehabilitation, or restoration--and can also provide information for maintenance procedures. Finally, it records the findings of research and investigation, as well as the processes of physical work, for future researchers.

*"Just as an art conservator would not intervene in the life of an artistic artifact before obtaining a thorough knowledge of its history, significance, and composition, so those engaged in the preservation of buildings...should proceed only from a basis of knowledge. Too often in the past, the cultural integrity of countless buildings...has been compromised by approaches to restorations grounded on personal whim, willful romanticism, and expedient notions of repair...The preparation of a historic structure report is the first step in adopting a disciplined approach to the care of a historic building."* (From the introduction to*The University of Virginia, Pavilion 1, Historic Structure Report,* Mesick Cohen Waite Hall Architects, 1988.)

**Value of the Historic Structure Report**

The completed historic structure report is of value in many ways. It provides:

* A primary planning document for decision-making about preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, or reconstruction treatments.
* Documentation to help establish significant dates or periods of construction.
* A guide for budget and schedule planning for work on the historic structure.
* A basis for design of recommended work.
* A compilation of key information on the history, significance, and existing condition of the historic structure.
* A summary of information known and conditions observed at the time of the survey.
* A readily accessible reference document for owners, managers, staff, committees, and professionals working on or using the historic structure.
* A tool for use in interpretation of the structure based on historical and physical evidence.
* A bibliography of archival documentation relevant to the structure.
* A resource for further research and investigation.
* A record of completed work.

**Determining the Scope of Work:**

The following questions should be answered to determine the scope of work required for the study:

* Is the building's history well understood?
* Has the period of significance been established? Based on what?
* What archival documentation is available?
* Does the building represent a variety of periods of construction, additions, and modifications, not all of which may be significant?
* Does the building have physical problems that require repair? What construction materials and systems are known to exhibit distress or deterioration?
* Does the building have code or functional problems that interfere with its use?
* Is the building in use? Is a new or more intensive use planned?
* What funding is available to commission the report needed to address these requirements? If limited, can the scope of the report be reduced to answer critical questions in a limited report?
* Has the time frame for the overall project been established?

**Typical Content and Organization of Report**

Cover Page  
Table of Contents  
Introduction (*Origin of project, leaders and funders, needs & intentions*)  
Study Summary (*team involved, brief description of resource, study methodology, time frame*)  
Project Data (*landmark status,* *summary of findings, critical needs and high priority recommendations*)

**Part 1 - Developmental History**  
Historical Background and Context (*builder, architect, development history, users/occupants, changes & evolution*)  
Chronology of Development and Use (*annotated chronological timeline of important/relevant dates and events*)  
Physical Description (*material and architectural description of exterior facades and interior spaces by floors*)  
Evaluation of Significance (*why unique, use of traditional materials, construction techniques, involvement of important individuals, associated with significant events in local, regional or national history, etc.*)  
Condition Assessment (*noted and evaluation of deteriorated conditions of structure or mechanical systems or fabric or finishes, or inappropriate alteration to the original design; annotated photo. illustrations*)

**Part 2 - Treatment and Work Recommendations**  
Historic Preservation Objectives (*goals and rationale for repairs, reconstruction, reuse or interpretation*)  
Requirements for Work (*modern code analysis, preservation ordinance criteria, zoning regulations, or functional requirements.*)   
Work Recommendations and Alternatives

**Part 3 – Supporting Materials**

Footnotes or endnotes

Bibliography  
Appendices  
Supplemental Record of Work Performed (section often added later)  
Completion Report  
Technical Data (on work completed)

**Introduction.** This section includes a concise account of research and investigation findings and recommendations for treatment and use, and a record of project administrative data.

* *Study Summary* - a brief statement of the purpose, findings, and recommendations of the study, including major research findings, key issues addressed by the study, and a summary of recommendations for treatment and use.
* *Project Data* - a summary of project administrative data (e.g., location, ownership, and landmark status of property) and the methodology and project participants.

**Part 1 Developmental History.** This section consists of a narrative report based on historical research and physical examination documenting the evolution of the building, its current condition and causes of deterioration, and its significance.

* *Historical Background and Context* - a brief history of the building and its context, its designers and builders, and persons associated with its history and development.
* *Chronology of Development and Use* - a description of original construction, modifications, and uses, based on historical documentation and physical evidence.
* *Physical Description* - a description of elements, materials, and spaces of the building, including significant and non-significant features of the building.
* *Evaluation of Significance* - a discussion of significant features, original and non-original materials and elements, and identification of the period(s) of significance (if appropriate).
* *Condition Assessment* - a description of the condition of building materials, elements, and systems and causes of deterioration, and discussion of materials testing and analysis (if performed as part of this study).

**Part 2 Treatment and Work Recommendations.** This section presents the historic preservation objective and selected treatment (preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, or reconstruction), requirements for work, and recommended work that corresponds with the defined treatment goal.

* *Historic Preservation Objectives* - a description and rationale for the recommended treatment and how it meets the project goals for use of the building, e.g., rehabilitation for a new use, restoration for interpretive purposes, etc.
* *Requirements for Work* – (Code analysis, preservation ordinance criteria, zoning regulations, functional issues) an outline of the laws, regulations, and functional requirements that are applicable to the recommended work areas (e.g., life safety, fire protection, energy, conservation, hazardous materials abatement, and handicapped accessibility).
* *Work Recommendations and Alternatives* - a presentation of tasks recommended to realize the proposed treatment approach; evaluation of proposed solutions; and description of specific recommendations for work, including alternate solutions, if appropriate.

**Part 3 Notes, Bibliography and Appendices.**

* Footnotes or endnotes
* Bibliography, annotated if possible
* List of sources of information (e.g., archives, photograph collections)
* Appendices (e.g., figures, tables, drawings, historic and current photographs, reference documents, materials analysis reports, etc.)
* Index (if the report is particularly long or complex)

**Supplemental Record of Work Performed.** This section documents work performed, which may include planning studies, technical studies such as laboratory studies or structural analysis, or other investigation work that was not part of the scope of the original historic structure report, and records physical work on the building (construction documents, annotated drawings, photographs). The section is usually added later to update the report, as most historic structure reports are issued prior to implementation of the recommended treatment approach and specific work. It is sometimes referred to as Part 3 of the report.

* *Completion Report* - a record of the work accomplished, physical evidence discovered during construction, and how findings affect interpretation of the building.
* *Technical Data* - a collection of field reports, material data sheets, field notes, correspondence, and construction documents.