PRESERVING SINGLE-ROOM OCCUPANCY HOTELS

by

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(Under the Direction of Eric A. MacDonald)

ABSTRACT

Single-room occupancy hotels are a unique part of the urban cultural landscape in America overlooked by the field of historic preservation. SRO hotels developed out of a need to provide cheap housing in urban centers to middle and lower class workers during the early twentieth century. Historic preservationists have only recently recognized the significance of these structures and the part they have played in the development of American cities. These buildings provide an important link to the early women's liberation and gay rights movements in America. The current residents of SRO hotels rely on the building to provide shelter and social services. Due to their location downtown and the sources of funding available, rehabilitating SRO hotels is an economical option for housing. Historic preservationists must begin to recognize the significance of SRO hotels and their place within the urban landscape.

INDEX WORDS: Historic Preservation, Single-Room Occupancy Hotels, SRO, Hotel

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels are a unique and vital part of the urban landscape, serving as important cultural artifacts. However, these hotels have been overlooked by historic preservationists and city governments. This thesis will examine how SRO hotels have been an overlooked part of urban history, especially regarding the various urban sub-populations that made up the bulk of the SRO population. It also will explore how historic preservationists have recognized these historic hotels, and the challenge of creating an effective preservation policy for SRO hotels. Preservationists must begin to look at the historic function of SRO hotels as a culturally significant building type.

SRO hotels are an American building type, developed out of a need to house large numbers of people near a centralized urban core. As American cities lost populations to suburbs, SRO hotels and their surrounding neighborhoods were razed in the name of urban renewal, leaving their populations jobless and homeless. Since the 1980s this trend of demolition has given way to gentrification; hotels have been rehabilitated into apartments and more residents have been displaced. Social service providers and anti-poverty advocates have recognized the importance of SRO hotels and begun to fight for their preservation as low-income housing. Historic preservationists should recognize the cultural, social, and economic importance of SRO hotels, and to lend their expertise to saving these valuable resources. Preservationists need to recognize the importance of SRO hotels to early-twentieth century urban development, and consider how these buildings can continue to serve urban residents.

I. Review of Current Literature

Historic preservationists and city governments have ignored SRO hotels as an important resource as low-income housing. There is little specific scholarship on the topic of SRO hotels, with much of the information spread throughout various sources. One particular exception is *Living Downtown: A History of Residential Hotels in the United States*[1] by Paul Groth, a cultural geographer at the University of California at Berkeley. *Living Downtown* chronicles the development of the SRO hotel, from the high-society palace hotels with servants, suites of rooms, and formal spaces for entertaining to the lowly lodging house, with barely enough room for a single person to lie down.

There are few books that directly relate historic preservation to SRO hotels. Early preservationists did not deal with the poorer neighborhoods of cities, focusing instead on commercial, upper-class residential, and landmark architecture. Preservation books such as *With Heritage So Rich*[2] and William J. Murtaugh's *Keeping Time*[3] focus on the principles of preservation rather than how preservation can be used for issues such as low-income housing or sustainable cities. The omission of vernacular urban architecture by preservationists was addressed obliquely by authors like Jane Jacobs in *Death and Life of Great American Cities*[4], who saw cities as living organisms that required elements such as affordable housing and a mix of old and new buildings.

To obtain an understanding of the historical and cultural significance of SRO hotels, this thesis examines the urban history to determine the hotels' contribution to SRO residents. Much of the information on SRO hotels comes from books on homeless and transient populations, such

[1] Paul Groth. *Living Downtown*. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1994).
[2] Albert Rains. *With Heritage So Rich*. (New York, New York: Random House, 1966).
[3] William J. Murtaugh. *Keeping Time*. (Pittstown, New Jersey: The Main Street Press, 1988).
[4] Jane Jacobs. *The Death and Live of Great American Cities*. ((New York, New York: Vintage Press, 1992).

as Todd Dipastino's *Citizen Hobo*[5] and Kenneth L. Kusmer's *Down & Out, on the Road*.[6] These books primarily focus on the populations that occasionally live in hotels, and provide a limited amount of information about SROs. The historical record of SRO hotels is primarily based on the transient and poorer occupants of the hotels, a problem reflected in the fact that the bulk of the historical material is found in books on hobos. When all of the various historical elements are pieced together the residents of SRO hotels emerge as a diverse population, both in class and profession.

The literature concerning the social benefits of rehabilitating SRO hotels involves polemics against gentrification and a righteous justification for doing whatever it takes to house the homeless. Much of the writing about the social benefits of preserving SRO hotels revolves around their use as housing for homeless persons. While the homeless make up a large portion of the SRO population, they do not represent the true diversity of the hotel residents. Books such as John Ingram's *Invisible City*[7] and Nicolas P. Restinas's *Revisiting Rental Housing*,[8] include material on the impoverished residents. This research does not reflect the various social groups, such as the elderly and veterans, who inhabit SRO hotels at the present.

Tax credits are integral to making rehabilitation projects financially feasible. Cities and non-profits, seeking to provide necessary social services to low-income and homeless citizens, require justification for the expense of rehabilitation of SRO hotels. In the 1980s, much of the material written about historic preservation and affordable housing involve SRO rehabilitation

[5] Todd Dipatino. *Citizen Hobo*. (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
[6] Kenneth L. Kusmer. *Down & Out, On the Road*. (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
[7] John Ingram. *Invisible City*. (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2008).
[8] Nicolas P. Restinas. *Revisiting Rental Housing*. (Washington, District of Columbia: The Brookings Institute, 2008).

projects. Pamphlets like the National Park Service's *Affordable Housing Through Historic Preservation*,[9] contain a variety of projects that utilize the historic rehabilitation tax credit.

The two major themes that reoccur in journal articles relating to SRO hotels are poverty and the elderly. This concentration reflects the limited scholarship about SRO hotels within a larger historical context. Journals, such as *The Gerontologist* and *Gerontology*, have a large number of articles about SROs. Hotels are a common type of housing for many poor elderly downtown residents. Most articles, including Maureen Lally's "Older Women in Single Room Occupancy Hotels," and "Older Women in the City" by Elizabeth W. Markson, focus on the specific problems the elderly face in living downtown.[10] Paul A. Rollinson's article "The Everyday Geography of Poor Elderly Hotel Tenants in Chicago" describes the businesses and services that make up the day-to-day life of older, single hotel residents. [11]

Homelessness is the dominant theme of most academic material on SRO hotels, including housing, health services, and the state of America's poor urban residents generally. The problems of creating a social service network have inspired a number of articles, including Stacy Row's "Social Networks in Time and Space," in *Annals of the Association of Geographers* and Peter H. Ross's "The Urban Homeless: A Portrait of Urban Dislocation," in *The Annals of the American Association of Political and Social Sciences*.[12] In other articles, SRO hotels provide a convenient study sample group. The dominance of homeless and low-income residents in SRO hotels allows researchers to have a concentrated population sample for a variety of health and

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[9] Susan Escherich, *et al*. *Affordable Housing Through Historic Preservation*. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, for the National Park Service, 2004).
[10] Maureen Lally *et al*. "Older Women in Single Room Occupancy Hotels,"*The Gerontologist* 19, no. 1 (1979). And Elizabeth W. Markson and Beth B. Hess. "Older Women in the City," *Signs* 5, no. 3 (Spring 1980).
[11] Paul A. Rollinson. "The Everyday Geography of Poor Elderly Hotel Residents in Chicago," *Geografiska Annaler* 27, no. 2/3 (1990)
[12] Stacy Row and Jennifer Welch. "Social Networks in Time and Space,"*Annals of the Association of Geographers*, 80, no. 2 (January 1990). And Peter H. Ross and James D. Wright. "The Urban Homeless,"*The Annals of the American Association of Political and Social Sciences* 501 (January 1989).

social service studies. Kim Hopper's "More than Passing Strange," in *The American Ethnologist* details the problems of mental illness in New York's homeless populations.[13] Nancy Scheper-Hughes performs a similar study in "A Proposal for the Aftercare of Chronic Psychiatric Patients," in *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*.[14] These studies highlight the concentration of poverty often found in SROs, and help to reinforce the idea that hotel residents have serious disabilities that make them incapable of returning to society.

The growing field of cultural geography has begun to recognize SRO hotels as a part of urban landscapes. Paul Groth, the author of *Living Downtown*, has written several articles that highlight not only SRO hotels, but the importance of understanding vernacular urban architecture as part of the history of America. The article "Generic Buildings and Cultural Landscapes as Sources of Urban History," in *Urban History*, describes Groth's thesis that generic building types contain some of the most important information about how everyday urban residents lived.[15] Several articles have also appeared in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, including Groth's "'Marketplace" Vernacular Design" and Eric Sandweiss' "Building for Downtown Living."[16] Both of these articles highlight the movement towards an understanding of SRO hotels as part of the larger urban cultural heritage.

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[13] Kim Hopper. "More Than Passing Strange," *The American Ethnologist* 15, no. 1, Medical Anthropology (February 1988).
[14] Nancy Scheper-Hughes. "A Proposal for the Aftercare of Chronic Psychiatric Patients,"*Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (Feb., 1983).
[15] Paul Groth. "Generic Buildings and Cultural Landscapes as Sources of Urban History," *Journal of Architectural Education* 41, no. 3. (Spring 1988).
[16] Paul Groth. "'Marketplace' Vernacular Design: The Case of Downtown Rooming Houses," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture II*. (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1986). And Eric Sandweiss. "Building for Downtown Living: The Residential Architecture of San Francisco's Tenderloin." *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture III*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1989.

II. Gaps in Current Literature

The review of the current literature on SRO hotels indicates that there are significant gaps in almost all elements of SRO preservation. In Paul Groth's *Living Downtown*, the architectural development of the SRO hotel is very clear, but the social history of the city and the SRO population is excluded. Therefore, an analysis of the history of the hotels is necessary to ascertain the cultural significance that makes SROs an important resource. Due to the gaps in the historical record, preservationists have not taken into account the cultural and historical significance of SRO hotels.

Social service providers have understood the usefulness of SRO hotels since the 1980s, but have not recognized the cultural and historical value of these buildings.[17] In the late 1990s preservationists began to recommend using historic buildings for low-income housing, and in so doing realized the value of SRO hotels. However, there is little documentation about the connection between SRO hotels and historic preservation for supportive and low-income housing outside of case studies about the cost of rehabilitation projects. These gaps in the literature reveal a misunderstanding of the true cultural value of SRO hotels. It is also important for preservationists and housing advocates to address the problems of gentrification. In most low-income housing preservation literature there is little said about the challenges of mitigating rising property values associated with gentrification.

While the social benefits have not been adequately discussed, the available tax credits have been examined at length in several pamphlets on the use of the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit program in low-income housing projects.[18] These materials do not adequately address the

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[17] David Levinson and Mary Ross. *Handbook for Homelessness.* (Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2007). P. 205.

[18] Including Susan Escherich's *Affordable Housing Through Historic Preservation* and Aleca Sullivan's *Case Studies in Affordable Housing Through Historic Preservation, No. 1: Pacific Hotel, Seattle* (1995).

additional benefits of preserving SRO hotels, such as their downtown location or the availability of established social service providers. Related to this issue is the fear expressed by developers and city boosters that a concentration of homeless people in downtown SRO hotels, or the cost of supportive housing in general, will bankrupt city governments and drive out middle class residents who make up the tax base. Thus, it is important to explore the realities of both rehabilitation projects using SRO hotels, in conjunction with the financial benefits of supportive housing over shelters, mixed use developments, and other homelessness programs.

III. Research Methods

The scarcity of materials on SRO hotels has created the need to investigate a number of different resources to construct an argument for SRO preservation. First, an examination of the history of SRO hotels provided a background to the cultural significance of the hotels and their surrounding districts. This history included skid row districts, which are commonly associated with SROs, as well as the various residents who occupied the hotels. To determine the architectural history of SRO hotels it is important to first examine the lineage of hotels as a building type. The social context surrounding the development of the hotel was examined, providing a frame of reference for both the rise of the hotel building form as well as the social groups that inhabited the hotels. Histories of American cities in general were consulted, as well as books on specific social, political, and cultural groups that dominated cities. These materials provided background not only on the SRO hotel, but the development of the surrounding hotel district.

Historic preservation as a field has begun to take note of vernacular urban buildings. The National Register of Historic Places is one of the primary gauges of how historic preservation

recognizes cultural and historic significance. To identify how preservationists value SRO hotels, this thesis includes the results of an analysis of nominations of SROs to the national register. It was first necessary to determine how many SRO hotels are listed on the national register, which required navigation through the various names used for the hotels (including hotel, SRO, single-room occupancy, and apartment hotel). This analysis provided a base number of properties to examine. After obtaining the actual nomination forms, various elements, such as the owner of the building and the statement of significance, were cross referenced with current uses of the nominated buildings to determine how the national register was being applied to the buildings.

In the late-1980s, historic preservation began to address SRO hotels through low-income housing. To ascertain the extent of the historic preservation field's involvement in rehabilitating SRO hotels this thesis examines the National Park Service and National Trust public relations literature on affordable housing. This information was compared to the work performed by non-profit and government groups, who use rehabilitated SRO hotels for affordable housing, to ascertain how preservationists were engaging housing activists. The non-profit group rehabilitation projects also revealed how housing advocates were using the tools of historic preservation, such as the national register and the historic rehabilitation tax credit.

IV. Chapter Summaries

The first chapter presents the purpose of this thesis and examines the current literature on the components of the thesis, including historic preservation, history of the hotel building form, cultural value of SRO hotels, the social benefits of SRO preservation, and the economic reasons for preserving SRO hotels. After assessing the current literature, an analysis of the gaps in the literature will be presented, forming the basic questions and purpose of the thesis.

The second chapter examines the historical development of the SRO hotel both as an individual architectural form and as a building type within the context of the development of American cities. From the palatial hotels of the rich to the flophouses of the transient poor, hotels provided some of the cheapest accommodations in cities. After the Second World War hotel living began to decline in popularity, owing to the rise of suburbia. By the 1970s, SRO hotels were associated primarily with the indigent poor residents who were left in the city when industrial jobs moved first to the suburbs, and then overseas. As cities undertook urban renewal, they demolished many SRO hotels, creating a problem of the visible poor. This has led to a reassessment of SRO hotels and a movement to preserve the remaining hotels to return to low-income housing.

The third chapter examines the primary deficiency of the historic preservation field: the lack of cultural significance presented in histories and in national register nominations. The history of the people who inhabit SRO hotels is primarily limited to the poorest residents, such as hobos and travelling salesmen. By examining the history of other primarily urban subgroups, including homosexuals and artists, it is possible to ascertain how the SRO hotels had an impact on the development of these subgroups. In many cases, the social structure that evolved out of the SRO hotels created a network that ties together both the building residents and the residents of the surrounding neighborhood. Through interaction in bars, cafes, and stores, some groups were able to declare their sense of independence, such as middle class women who moved to the city in the early-twentieth century. In other cases, this isolation led to the creation of an entire subculture, as in the case of the gays and lesbians who congregated in the bars and cafes of hotel districts.

In the fourth chapter, the field of historic preservation is scrutinized, especially within the context of the period of urban renewal that followed World War II and suburbanization. Historic preservation has been responsible for much of the work of gentrification in the United States, and has only slowly begun to shift its focus to being inclusive of uses, such as low-income housing. Beginning in the 1980s, with the housing crisis, the National Park Service and the National Trust for Historic Preservation began to publish materials about using historic preservation for affordable and low-income housing. While an analysis of the National Register presents evidence that preservationists are starting to see a cultural value to SRO hotels, the specific urban populations that used the hotels have thus far been overlooked.

The fifth chapter examines the challenges to establishing an effective preservation policy for SRO hotels. There is a stigma of poverty attached to single-room occupancy hotels, which is reinforced by the media and available academic research on the building type. Preservationists should help to both restore the SRO hotel, as well as its reputation. By diversifying the use of the hotels and their commercial spaces, historic preservation can play a part in both integrating hotel populations into the urban community, as well as providing housing for a wide variety of income levels. Various organizations have used historic preservation to rehabilitate SRO hotels and return the buildings to use as housing. In an effort to make SRO rehabilitation profitable, many social service organizations have used the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HRTC), which requires eligibility or listing on the National Register. Furthermore, it is difficult to find some way of preserving the surrounding community, which is integral to an understanding of the hotel in the urban context.

The sixth chapter, the conclusion, will present a synthesis of the thesis findings. The information gathered about the history and cultural value of SRO hotels and their residents is combined with the actions taken by preservationists to save these important resources. The information about the social and economic viability of preserving historic SRO hotels provides the preservation field with information to help the cause of recommending the rehabilitation of SRO hotels to housing activists.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY & DEVELOPMENT OF SINGLE-ROOM OCCUPANCY HOTELS

The single-room occupancy (SRO) hotel is an important part of the urban cultural landscape. These hotels provided downtown housing to a variety of classes and incomes, from the wealthy descendants of America's earliest businessmen to the working classes that struggled to make ends meet. Living in the urban core, these residents helped to produce unique neighborhoods characterized by a combination of services and entertainment that met the needs of the SRO population. Over time, the benefits of living downtown were overshadowed by the desire to have a detached house and a yard in the suburbs—to achieve the American Dream. In the drive to attract middle class residents back downtown, cities demolished many of the SRO hotels, leaving poorer residents homeless. After years of urban renewal and the destruction of over one million SRO units, cities have come to realize that these hotels are part of the solution to the growing problem of affordable housing.[1]

I. Architectural History of the SRO Hotel.

Although today they are associated with homelessness and low-income housing, SRO hotels have had a long history that began with the original palace hotels that dominated the social life of East Coast cities in the early nineteenth century. The four primary residential hotel types, as described by Paul Groth, are the palace hotel, the mid-priced hotel, rooming houses, and the lodging house/boardinghouse/flophouse. Each hotel type was considered residential, though

[1] Colin Asher. "A Home, No Matter How Humble." *The San Francisco Chronicle*. January 21, 2007.

each provided different services at a range of costs.[2] Services ranged from laundry, cleaning, meals, or even social events like balls and grand dinners. The term residential refers to the length of stay. Special rates were used by hotel proprietors when guests stayed over a week, or if they stayed on a monthly basis.[3]

It is difficult to distinguish between hotel types, since the populations and reputations of the hotels and their residents are fluid. This difficulty arises in part from the lack of a detailed history of SRO hotel residents. Palace hotels had the distinct high-style architecture and opulent décor that matched the wealth of their guests. Below palace hotels, there was seemingly a sliding scale of hotel quality, stretching from the mid-priced hotels to rooming houses. The rank of the hotels is easily characterized by the ratio of bathrooms to residents. Palace hotels had private baths, middle-priced hotels usually had one or two rooms to a bathroom, rooming houses had a one-to-four ratio, and the cheap lodging houses usually had ten to twelve residents per bathroom.[4] One of the unifying features of all four hotel types was the presence of commercial space on the lower floors, which supplemented the building owner's income during the lean times out-of-season.[5] The rooms in palace and mid-priced hotels used for permanent housing were only a small portion of the residential hotel building stock, as little as 6% according to Groth.[6] However, the services provided in these higher-priced hotels established many of the functions, such as laundry services and a restaurant in the hotel lobby, which lower-priced examples aspired to, establishing their importance in the hierarchy of hotels.

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[2] Paul Groth. *Living Downtown*. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1994), 20-25.
[3] *Ibid*, 60-61.
[4] Paul Groth. "'Marketplace' Vernacular Design: The Case of Downtown Rooming Houses," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture II*. (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 181.
[5] Groth, *Living Downtown*, 250-251.
[6] *Ibid*, 24.

The palace hotel was the top of the line hotel. Hotels like the City Hotel in New York, constructed in 1794, and the Tremont House in Boston, constructed in 1827, provided the blueprint for the luxury and amenities that have continued to modern hotel businesses.[7] The palace hotel usually had a large, opulent lobby, as well as several lounges, bars, and restaurants. For guest-residents, these hotels provided a suite of rooms, servants to clean and tend to the rooms, and a hotel dining room that served food prepared by a chef.[8] Palace hotels were the most expensive residential hotel option, though they were far cheaper than maintaining a large residence in either the city or the country.[9] By the 1860s hotels were the choice of *nouveaux riche* city residents, providing both a downtown location and immediate status as a resident of one of the most prominent buildings in town.[10] Set apart from the other residential hotels by their high prices, palace hotels represented their own social class. They rarely had much to do with the lower hotel classes, other than employing them. As an option for urban living, palace hotels began to fade in popularity with the growth of apartment and street car lines in America.[11] While out of reach for middle class workers, palace hotels were less expensive than maintaining a townhouse or other urban dwelling.

The next tier of hotel was the mid-priced hotels, serving a diverse mix of young professionals, executives, as well as some young families. Due to the inclusion of primarily upper-class and married couples, women were socially accepted as residents in these hotels.[12] This inclusion was unusual in the 1870s, when women rarely travelled alone. However, after the

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[7] A.K. Sandoval-Strausz. *Hotel: An American History*. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2007), 24-25.
[8] Nikolaus Pevsner. *A History of Building Types*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 175.
[9] Groth, *Living Downtown*, 40.
[10] *Ibid*, 26-27.
[11] *Ibid*, 100.
[12] *Ibid*, 64-68.

First World War, mid-priced hotels became more popular and had a larger female population.[13] While not as opulent as the palace hotels, mid-priced hotels provided residents with many of the same amenities as their upper-class cousins. The Hotel Ambassador (Figure 1) is an example of a typical San Francisco mid-priced hotel. These middle class hotels had many of the same laundry, cleaning, and restaurant services as palace hotels, but had less opulent decorations and lesser social reputations.[14] Architectural historian Eric Sandweiss calls the mid-priced hotel the "Family Hotel," a concept used by the hotel owners to distinguish themselves from the cheaper and less-respectable lodgings elsewhere.[15] In some cases young couples would move into these mid-priced hotels, but the bulk of residents were single men and women. The rooms were either one large room, with a kitchenette and a Murphy bed, or a suite of two small rooms.[16]

Figure 1: Hotel Ambassador, Tenderloin District, San Francisco, CA.
Photo: Mark Ellinger

[13] *Ibid*, 57.
[14] *Ibid*, 62-64.
[15] Eric Sandweiss. "Building for Downtown Living: The Residential Architecture of San Francisco's Tenderloin." *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture III*. (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 164.
[16] Groth, *Living Downtown*, 76-80.

The next step down in quality and price in the hotel scale was the rooming house. These hotels included individual rooms with locking doors, a small set of furniture, including a bed/cot, a small cabinet/wardrobe, and a sink, and a downtown location.[17] Residents of the rooming houses include secretaries, clerks, traveling salesmen, and other low-wage professional positions. Many of these hotels were dominated by male residents, making it often socially unacceptable for women to live in some of the lower class hotels. Instead of a proper lobby, these cheaper hotels simply had a hallway that widened at the clerk's desk, eliminating the familiar shared public space.[18]

Downtown boarding houses were the cheapest housing. These buildings served a very distinct population, and they have come to characterize the typical skid row of cities across America. Cheap boarding houses served the primarily transient population of day laborers, hobos, and other non-permanent residents.[19] The hotels themselves ranged from converted lofts to rooming houses built with thin partitions and a chickenwire ceiling.[20] There was no lobby area, and the buildings often had poor ventilation. In general, boarding houses were the poorest of accommodations, both residents and critics alike saw them as the last step before homelessness.

Charity and social/faith based dormitory-style hotels constitute a fifth category of SRO hotel. The YMCA is the most prominent of these dormitory hotel types, with branches across the United States. Begun in the early 1840s, the original goal of the YMCA, and many other service organizations, were to instill the proper Christian values in the men who used their

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[17] *Ibid*, 97.
[18] *Ibid*, 103-109.
[19] Kenneth L. Kusmer. *Down & Out, On the Road*. (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2002), 150-151.
[20] Groth, *Living Downtown*, 147-148.

facilities.[21] Beginning in the 1900s, YMCAs began to provide dormitory spaces for men in an effort to prevent the increase in homelessness and moral degeneracy.[22] They provided housing, meals, and a variety of social and educational resources, including employment classes and job fairs.[23] In terms of accommodation, they were characterized as either "high class lodging houses or third-rate hotels", though living conditions were better than in a flophouse.[24] The buildings usually consisted of dormitory-style rooms which housed two or more young men. The price of the room and board was still less than many hotels.[25] Similar organizations, such as the Eleanor Hotels in Chicago and the Mills Hotels in New York, established charitable hotels on a local scale. The goal of these charities, as well as the more typical SRO hotel designs, was to provide an economical means of living downtown.

II. Development of Urban Hotel Districts

Hotels became popular places to live because they were cheap, provided housing near most jobs and entertainment, and allowed for a level of privacy and independence unavailable in a single family home. Middle class residents wanted the chance to be near the conveniences of the city, and since many of them were not yet married or at least didn't have children, they found hotel life acceptable.[26] Residential hotel districts, such as the Upper Tenderloin of San Francisco, the Gateway in Minneapolis, Larimer Street in Denver, and the Bowery in New York, developed

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[21] Thomas Winter. *Making Men, Making Class*. (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 2-3.
[22] *Ibid*, 3.
[23] John Donald Gustav-Wrathall. *Take the Young Stranger By the Hand*. (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 2.
[24] Norman S. Hayner. *Hotel Life*. (College Park, Maryland: McGrath Publishing Company, 1969), 30.
[25] Groth, *Living Downtown*, 101-103.
[26] Sandweiss, 160.

to house the urban workforce.[27] Hotel districts developed in proximity to public transportation lines, port and railroad functions, and factories and mills.[28]

Nineteenth century hotels were sometimes indistinguishable from other urban housing types, including apartments and tenements. Almost all urban building types lacked proper kitchens, and many middle and lower-class apartments and tenements had hall bathrooms.[29] The shift towards a more modern apartment type, usually attributed to an early-twentieth century development, was primarily based on the inclusion of a kitchen/cooking area.[30] By 1910, many cities began to classify proper dwellings, where a person could reside permanently, as a room or suite with cooking facilities. Thus, in many cases, hotel residents were, by default, homeless.[31]

As a distinct housing type, in the 1900s and 1910s SRO hotels developed their own unique urban landscape. Since the hotels lacked many of the amenities as a house or apartment, including kitchen and laundry facilities, a resident's life became centered on the city. Rather than coming home in the evening to eat, do laundry, and relax, hotel dwellers would stay out in the city, eat at a restaurant after work and then see a movie or a theater performance—their life was staged around the neighborhood around their hotel.[32] Due to the differences in patrons, various hotel districts had different businesses to serve their clientele. In the upper class residential hotel districts such as Madison Avenue in New York, the district was dominated by restaurants and cafes. The transportation available, like subways and busses connected the district with the city at large.[33] In contrast, areas like San Francisco's South of Market district

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[27] Anne Bloomfield and Michael Corbelt. *Uptown Tenderloin Historic District.* National Register of Historic Places Register Form. Listed February 13, 2009. §8, 12-17.
[28] Peter Shaver. *Prince George Hotel*. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Listed February 12, 1999. §8, 1-3.
[29] Elizabeth Collins Cromley. *Alone Together*. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), 102.
[30] Groth, *Living Downtown*, 7.
[31] *Ibid*, 255.
[32] Christopher Gray. *New York Streetscapes*. (New York, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2003), 112-113.
[33] Shaver. §8, 1-8.

developed a number of businesses that catered to the poor and transient populations.[34] The skid row districts formed a web of saloons, billiard halls, cheap cafes, and second hand stores that catered to the slim wallets of the residents.[35] The Tenderloin (Figure 2) represents another of San Francisco's hotel districts, with rows of hotels and cafes catering to low-wage residents. These lower-class areas became the most prominent of the hotel districts, housing a fluctuating crowd of men looking for work, and passing the time between jobs. Part of this notoriety was based on the *exposé* journalism of Jacob Riis and others, who led lifelong crusades against slums and shiftless bums.[36] Public perception, fueled by the works of Riis and popular Progressive politicians, was that skid row was full of men unwilling to work. In reality, areas like Chicago's West Madison Street became a clearing house for transient work, servicing a railroad employment network that stretched from Omaha to Pittsburgh and Nashville to Minneapolis.[37]

Hotel districts were not stagnant. Beginning in the 1920s new building types such as the apartment, as well as the advancement of public transportation to the suburbs, began to draw some of the city population away from the hotels.[38] SRO districts continued to evolve, going through successive declines and rebirths, depending on the economy. The best example of the transformation of a hotel district is the Bowery, located in the Lower East Side of New York City. Originally a theater and mid-priced restaurant district, beginning in the late nineteenth century the Bowery's fortunes began to give out.[39] Soon the district began to be dominated by cheap lodging houses, adding a distinct element of poverty to the businesses. Saloons and bawdy

[34] Kusmer, 149.
[35] *Ibid*, 156.
[36] See: Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*. (New York, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914).
[37] Todd Depastino. *Citizen Hobo*. (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 73.
[38] Sandweiss, 169.
[39] Robert M. Dowling. *Slumming in New York*. (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 48-49.

theaters replaced the middle class amenities, and by the 1920s the Bowery had become a center of cheap housing in New York.[40]

Figure 2: Jefferson Hotel and 400 Block, Eddy Street. Tenderloin District, San Francisco, CA. Photo: Mark Ellinger

The Great Depression of the 1930s saw a rise in the homeless population in many urban centers. In response to the large loss of homes federal programs like the Housing Act of 1934 helped to increase the movement of middle class families out of the city by providing cheap loans for new houses.[41] While the middle class population of central cities began to dwindle, the industry that remained in large cities employed the remaining transient and unskilled labor. With the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, factories and production plants began springing

[40] Kusmer, 149.
[41] Joseph. B. Mason. *History of Housing in the U.S., 1930-1980*. (Houston, Texas: Gulf Publishing Company, 1982), 9-10.

up around large cities and military bases.[42] During the war, many of the hotels became part of the emergency effort to house soldiers. This was a boon to hotel owners, who saw the highest occupancy rates since before the Depression.[43] By the end of the war, many hotel owners had become wealthier on the increased rents charged to both the steadily employed migrants, as well as the federal government.[44] The hotel boom did not last, however, and following the end of the war many hotel owners found themselves struggling to meet the needs of the post-war city.

III. Impact of Suburbanization and Urban Renewal on SROs and Hotel Districts

Following the Second World War, American cities began to see a serious trend in depopulation, as well as a more pro-suburban legislation from the federal government. The middle classes that had been trickling out of central cities during the pre-war years now began to stream out, bolstered by the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 (commonly called the GI Bill) and other pro-suburban legislation. Cities were old, cramped, and losing jobs to the suburbs, prompting many returning veterans to take their young families out to the new developments outside the city limits.[45] The populations that remained were the very rich, and the very poor. The old hobos who had ridden the rails stayed on in the old hotels, abandoned by the middle classes.[46] The numbers of the homeless and poor began to swell with the influx of new immigrants from Latin America and an immigration of other poor residents, creating a newly diversified urban poor.[47] By the 1950s, areas like the Lower East Side and the Bowery had become "tired and worn thin" by change, losing businesses and generally deteriorating rather

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[42] *Ibid*, 33-36.
[43] Groth, *Living Downtown*, 265.
[44] Robert W. Lotchin. *The Bad City in the Good War*. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003), 35-55.
[45] Mason, 44-46.
[46] Depastino, 229-230.
[47] Kusmer, 232-233.

than flourishing with the new diverse residents.[48] As manufacturing and industrial jobs began to move to the suburbs, men found little replacement work to help pay for their cheap hotel rooms.[49] As a result, many men either moved to the suburbs or continued to live in hotels, slowly sinking into poverty.

At first, only the poor hotel districts suffered from decreased population. Paul Groth states that in the years immediately following the Second World War, many single young men and women continued to live in the middle class hotel districts of cities like New York and San Francisco.[50] However, as the 1950s continued, the hotels aged and less money was put into maintaining the formerly high standards. As cities passed zoning ordinances to eliminate skid row districts they also in effect began to kill off the middle class hotels.[51] As jobs moved out of the city, the middle class followed. This migration emptied many of the rooming house districts.

Urban centers across the United States began feeling the strain of suburbanization by the mid-1950s, with the continued exodus of the middle class tax base. In order to entice residents back within city borders, urban planners began to use federal funding to create new housing and convention center developments. The federal government had passed the Housing Act of 1949 to promote the creation of suburban homes, but the act also had included a provision for slum clearance in inner city neighborhoods.[52] At first, the Housing Act was used primarily for new suburban development, such as the creation of Levittowns and other large-scale single-family home developments. The provisions of the act were purposefully vague, allowing cities to define blight and slums as they saw fit. As a result, many cities began to identify prime,

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[48] Christopher Mele. *Selling the Lower East Side*. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 139.
[49] *Ibid*, 126.
[50] Groth, *Living Downtown*, 167-168.
[51] *Ibid*, 167.
[52] Miles I. Colean. *Renewing Our Cities*. (New York, New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1953), 29.

underdeveloped real estate that they could declare blight and demolish in hopes that new development would bring back residents.[53]

Demolition of SRO hotels appeared to be a good idea, as the GI Bill provided enough money for many residents to move out, creating a glut of underused SROs.[54] However, the first targets of redevelopment were the cheapest hotels, where the lowest-income residents still resided. These districts were poorly organized, with residents subsisting off welfare checks and handouts, and possessing little political power.[55] Demolition forced these poor people either to find new housing at a higher rate (and often lower quality) elsewhere, or to become homeless. New housing blocks were built on the outskirts of cities, but the bulk of these developments were designed and priced for a family's combined income, putting the cost of these units outside of the financial means of many SRO residents.[56] Urban renewal turned a serious problem into an outright crisis, as cities strove to eliminate the poorer residents by demolishing skid row districts and delaying the construction of appropriate replacement housing. The goal of the cities was to eliminate the poorer neighborhoods and replace them with modern office towers, which would attract new businesses back downtown.[57]

The result of this discrepancy between government action and aid was an explosion in the homeless population. Historian Kenneth L. Kusmer points out that during the 1950s the depiction of Skid Row residents shifted significantly from the carefree hobo to that of the drunkard who shirked responsibility and avoided work at all costs.[58] In reaction to this perceived evolution from transient worker to shiftless bum, cities like Minneapolis and Philadelphia

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[53] Scott Greer. *Urban Renewal and American Cities*. (New York, New York: The Bobs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), 20.
[54] Charles Hoch and Robert A. Slayton. *New Homeless and Old*. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1989), 173.
[55] *Ibid*, 174.
[56] Joel Schwartz. *The New York Approach*. (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1993), 125-145.
[57] Kusmer, 235.
[58] Kusmer, 222-223.

demolished their hotel districts early in the 1960s, leaving large gaps in the urban fabric.[59] SRO districts were disappearing, and their residents were left with no option but the streets.

IV. Resurgence of the SRO Hotel as Low-Income Housing

As cities strove to remake their downtowns at the expense of the SRO hotels and their populations, a resistance to urban renewal was forming. During the 1960s the forms and practices of urban design that dominated the renewal projects, such as monumental housing blocks and interstate highways slicing through downtown, were protested by few at first. Authors like Jane Jacobs, in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, wrote extensively about how new housing developments did not necessarily rejuvenate cities; rather, in some cases they effectively killed urban areas.[60] Activists for homeless rights and low-income housing advocates joined the call for an end to urban renewal projects that were completed at the expense of the poor. Chester Hartman, in his book *City for Sale*, chronicles the development of the Yerba Buena Gardens convention center in San Francisco. The project, which developers chose to locate in the South of Market SRO district, involved the forced removal of SRO residents so that developers could demolish their hotels. When SRO residents began to raise legal challenges to the development, developers began to harass hotel residents to force them to move out, leaving the poor and elderly citizens to find affordable housing in the notoriously expensive Bay Area. Despite the fact that the SRO hotels housed many of the workers who were constructing Yerba Buena Gardens, city authorities agreed with the developers and allowed many residents to be forced out of their homes. This action highlights the lengths to which civic leaders would go to

[59] Joseph Hart. *Down & Out*. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 14.
[60] Jane Jacobs. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. (New York, New York: Vintage Press, 1992).

rid their cities of blighted properties.[61] In retaliation, many SRO residents began to band together to make their collective political voice heard.

The forced dislocation of the SRO hotel population in the face of urban renewal created a new voice for the homeless as well as SRO tenants. In the 1980s, following several decades of development that wiped out skid row districts, residents of these districts began to gain a voice. San Francisco, despite the battles of the Yerba Buena Gardens, retained a large amount of its SRO hotel building stock. To fight continued development, citizens organized the Tenants and Owners Development Corporation (TODCO) to work with developers to restore SRO hotels, provide seismic retrofits, and prove that residents were able to take care of their properties.[62] Cities across the United States saw the benefits of SRO hotels, especially in the face of increased health care and prison costs in dealing with the homeless crisis. The federal government began to react to the destruction of SROs by passing the Stewart B. McKinney Bill in 1987, which allowed Department of Housing and Urban Development funds to be used for SRO hotel rehabilitation.[63] These federal funds, combined with more flexible zoning ordinances in cities like San Diego, San Francisco, and New York City have provided the historic SRO hotels with new life. Instead of being a problem for the city, SRO hotels now are part of the solutions to homelessness in the United States. In the 1990s, non-profits, like Central City Concern in Portland, Oregon, and Common Ground Community in New York City have taken the SRO hotel and turned it into low-income and transitional housing.

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[61] Chester Hartman. *City for Sale*. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002).
[62] *Ibid*, 216.
[63] Groth, *Living Downtown*, 289.

V. Conclusion

SRO hotels have evolved along with cities, providing cheap housing to the working classes and decadent rental mansions to the rich. By the early-twentieth century industrialization had created large numbers of jobs, at a variety of skill and pay levels. To accommodate these workers, entire districts of SRO hotels were constructed near the central business districts, allowing workers to easily commute to work. The design of the hotels, a single room, usually without a kitchen, forced residents to patronize local businesses for most needs, e.g., public baths and laundries. These districts formed a distinct urban cultural landscape, which provided the essentials for resident's daily life. Following the demolition of many SRO districts after the Second World War it became clear that these districts were a necessary element to containing the homelessness problem. Historic preservationists focused on the landmark buildings of the city, but with the increasing crisis of homelessness it became necessary for preservationists to reassess the SRO hotel.

CHAPTER 3

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SINGLE-ROOM OCCUPANCY HOTELS

The socioeconomic importance of single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels is based on their current uses as affordable and low-income housing; however SRO's cultural significance arises from the part they played in serving the large urban populations of the early to mid-twentieth century. Out of the larger population, various subgroups have emerged with distinct and important cultural significance. SROs have served a wide variety of urban sub-populations such as artists and writers, women, homosexual persons, and transient workers, giving the buildings an added significance that may not apply to average apartments or single family homes. Preservationists have overlooked the part SRO hotels have played in developing and maintaining social and artistic groups. SROs are a unique element of cities, which require recognition and preservation.

The large migrations of people to cities during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were fueled by the promise of jobs in the industrialized metropolis. In response to this increase in population, developers built SRO hotels. While the bulk of SRO residents were middle and lower-class workers, some residents of SROs have included: artists, writers, and musicians; early members of the burgeoning liberated women's and gay communities; and transient workers. All SRO residents' lives were based on the streets: the bars, shops, restaurants, and cafés that surrounded their hotel.[1] This close proximity of diverse people encouraged the development of a community spirit, a sense of independence, and a belief in

[1] A.K. Sadoval-Strausz. *Hotel: An American History*. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2007), 163.

social and political non-conformity.[2] These underlying currents manifested themselves in different ways, depending on the class, social standing, and financial means of the SRO residents.

Each of these subgroups represented a different class or population, though they were united in one simple characteristic: they lived alone. The "single" in single-room occupancy has imbued the SRO hotel with a very unique history in American urban culture. Middle-class hotel living meant that the resident's daily life was lived as part of the city: morning coffee at the corner café, work downtown, lunch at the corner drug store, supper at the diner, and a movie at the theater before home to sleep.[3] The young professional chose to live in the city, yet they were limited by the housing options and the high cost of living.[4] The hotel provided a way of living downtown that appealed to many residents, and allowed them to experience the life of the city without paying an exorbitant amount for an apartment or house. For others, like the transient workers and hobos, the hotels were a way of life.[5]

Several subgroups played a role in the development of the significance of SRO hotels. It is essential to understand where each group fits within the history of SRO hotels. While the buildings changed little, their inhabitants helped shape American history. The significance of these cultural and social subgroups varies depending on the viewer and their lifestyle and history. Most Americans would agree that artists and writers have had an impact on the nation's culture. However, other SRO populations have had varying degrees of influence and acceptance. It is important for both historians and historic preservationists to recognize how these groups have influenced the urban cultural landscape.

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[2] Christopher Mele. *Selling the Lower East Side*. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 13.
[3] Christopher Gray. *New York Streetscapes*. (New York, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2003), 114-116.
[4] Groth, *Living Downtown*,. 75-77 and 103-109.
[5] *Ibid*, 131-132.

I. Artists, Writers, and Musicians

The cultural elements of the SRO hotels, the artists, writers, musicians, and poets (sometimes called bohemians), make up the most well-known segment of the SRO population. The decentralized and uncensored realm of many hotel districts, like the Lower East Side in New York City, provided many of these artists and writers with an audience for their works.[6] Furthermore, these SRO hotels and surrounding districts provided space for activities that were outside of the mainstream, middle class norm. Studios, beat pads, and other artistic spaces were not common sights in 1950s suburbia. "Cultural bohemia is by definition an insider's revolt against prevalent middle class mores and values."[7] In some cases, the groups were united by similar beliefs or writing style, such as the Beats.[8] The draw to these districts was based primarily on the cheap rents offered in the marginalized neighborhoods, as well as the connection to the artistic community that surrounded the hotels, cafes, and stores.

An example of this distinctly urban artistic space was CDBG, a punk rock club that developed in the Bowery section of New York's Lower East Side. Known for introducing punk rock to the northeast during the 1970s, the club's performers and patrons lived in the cheap hotels and tenements that lined the district.[9] A similar attachment between music and SRO hotels is found in the 1982 film *The Blues Brothers*. While a brief scene, the movie depicts the brothers residing temporarily in a Chicago SRO hotel. The implied meaning of this scene is that artists are poor and thus forced into cheap accommodations.

This association between SRO hotels and the artistic subclass has not gone unnoticed by preservationists. Both the Chelsea and Barbazon Hotels in New York City are listed in the

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[6] *Ibid*, 164-165.
[7] Les Wright. "San Francisco," in *Queer Sites*, ed. David Higgs. (New York, New York: Routledge, 1999), 167.
[8] Steven Watson. *The Birth of the Beat Generation*. (New York New York: Pantheon Books, 1995), 5.
[9] Mele, 212-219.

National Register of Historic Places for being associated with a number of artists, actors, and writers. The Chelsea Hotel (Figure 3) built in 1884 and serving as a hotel since 1905, has served a wide range of artists and musicians. Writers such as William Burroughs, Dylan Thomas, Mark Twain, and Arthur Miller resided for some time at the Chelsea Hotel.[10] The hotel has also become a part of popular culture, with several artists, including Rufus Wainwright, Ryan Adams, and Leonard Cohen, writing songs about the Chelsea. The Barbazon Hotel is another notable New York landmark SRO hotel with ties to artists. Catering exclusively to middle class women, the Barbazon provided housing for a number of aspiring singers, writers, and actresses, including Candice Bergen, Sylvia Plath, and Farrah Fawcett.[11] Preservationists have recognized the famous artists that have lived in these hotels, but the more pedestrian artists in everyday SRO hotels have been overlooked.

Figure 3: Hotel Chelsea. New York, NY.
Photo: Getty Images

[10] Lawrence E. Golbrecht. *The Hotel Chelsea*, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Listed December 27, 1977. §8.
[11] Anne B. Covell. *Barbazon Hotel for Women.* National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Listed October 29, 1982. §8.

The bohemian cultural attachment to SRO hotels continues to the present day, with a growing number of artists still living in SRO hotels, and lending their artistic vision to their less fortunate neighbors. The online *Poor Magazine* is the work of a number of scholars, reporters, and artists who work with residents and tenants of San Francisco SRO hotels. The project serves to both educate the residents of the Bay Area, as well as serve the residents by providing a voice for their concerns to both politicians and the public.[12] The Bowery still has an active artist's community, much like that of San Francisco. However, the pressures of gentrification have had a greater influence on the cost of living in Manhattan, and the formerly cheap artist's spaces have given way to mainstream artists. The New Museum has established its headquarters on the Bowery, adding to the gentrification of the former skid row of New York.[13] The political message used by many of the artists who exhibit their work in the New Museum is meant to reflect the conditions surrounding the Museum. The building itself is a white box-like modern structure, standing among a row of old tenements and SRO hotels. The gentrification of the neighborhood occurs when more affluent residents move into districts like the Lower East Side and buy up the property, hoping for an increase in value as the museum and other institutions follow.[14] The cheap rents that maintain the artist communities are often raised, driving artists out of the community.

Supportive housing programs have made it a priority to include studio space in the rehabilitated SRO buildings. This inclusion, when space for housing is so scarce, indicates the importance of this use to the livelihood of the residents. In the Prince George SRO, rehabilitated and maintained by Common Ground Communities in New York City, areas on the top floor have

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[12] *Poor Magazine*. www.poormagazine.org.
[13] *The New Museum*. "The New Museum Homepage." www.newmuseum.org.
[14] Christopher Mele. *Selling the Lower East Side*. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 228-233.

been left open for artists studios, compensating for the small room size.[15] In Grand Rapids, Michigan, the Dwelling Place affordable housing has teamed up with the Avenue for the Arts program to both provide artists space and to organize shows of residents art.[16] In many ways, SRO hotels have served the artists community for years. The Christopher (Figures 4 and 5), another Common Ground Communities property, located in the Chelsea district of New York City also housed Tennessee Williams and Andy Warhol in its previous use as the Robert McBurney YMCA.[17] These ties to former artists may serve as an inspiration to new generations of artists seeking to make a living in New York or any large city.

Figures 4 and 5: Christopher Hotel, Common Ground Communities. New York, NY. Exterior and Interior of Residential Room. Photos: Common Ground Communities.

[15] Common Ground Communities. "Common Ground Communities Homepage." www.commonground.org.
[16] Dwelling Place, Grand Rapids. "Dwelling Place, Grand Rapids Homepage." www.dwellingplacegr.org.
[17] Fred A. Bernstein "Living Small, Thinking Large." *The New York Times*, October 8, 2006.

II. Women and the SRO Hotel

Women's history has been recognized as an integral part of American history. From the working women of urban mills to the garden clubs who worked to preserve the nation's historic gardens, the contribution of women to history and historic preservation have been well documented. However, the association between women and SRO hotels has not been well explored. The connection between women and SRO hotels was that the buildings provided a cheap place to live downtown. In providing this housing downtown, hotels helped to create an independent urban woman. When moving to large urban centers, whether married or not, women found a new social life outside of the home. From the early hotels of the nineteenth century Victorian society scorned women who lived in hotels, whether married or not. The main concern of society matrons and sociologists alike was that the women were abandoning their domestic duties to the hotel staff. This left time to enjoy the city: shopping, socializing, and enjoying the cultural amenities urban life has to offer.[18] Most of the upper class hotel women had husbands and children. Middle class hotel residents were commonly single, professional women, such as secretaries or bank tellers. By the 1900s, women could live alone in hotels and experience the city on their own terms. "For many women, the rise of the hotel engendered not alienation or anxiety, but a new optimism about the possibilities for genuine self-expression and fulfillment."[19] Part of the benefits of hotel living was that women could afford a hotel room on their modest income.[20] It was the presence of the SRO hotel and similar institutions like the YWCA that maintained a relatively low female homeless population in the early twentieth century.[21]

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[18] Sandoval-Strausz, 270.
[19] Todd Depastino. *Citizen Hobo*. (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 148.
[20] Groth, *Living Downtown*, 60-62 and 107.
[21] Sam Davis. *Designing for the Homeless.* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2004), 43.

This movement towards the liberation of women from the constraints of family life was cut short by the Second World War and the subsequent suburbanization that dominated the United States. By the 1950s, when films like *All About Eve* (1950) and *Vertigo* (1958) came to theaters, the main characters who lived in hotels were ultimately destroyed by loneliness and ambition.[22] This shift followed in the footsteps of suburbanization, when the womanly ideal was again tied strongly to the idea of tending a husband, children, and a single-family detached home. Women who lived downtown did not have the responsibilities of their suburban counterparts, and were thus able to live more freely.[23] It is this freedom that helped begin the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 70s.

SRO hotels lost their appeal as a housing option in downtown areas, overshadowed by suburban single-family detached homes. However, during the 1960s and 1970s, when divorce rates were on the rise and jobs were scarce due to employers' discrimination against women, many women found themselves falling into poverty and homelessness. By 1980 two out of every three poor adults in America was a woman.[24] Some women looked to SRO hotels and other rooming house accommodations for cheap housing.[25] As many women began to find themselves again in search of a place to live in the city, SRO hotels have become an important source of shelter.

III. Queer Space in the SRO Hotel

Much like the women in hotels who felt liberated by an absence of family duties, the homosexual community, particularly gay men, found in the SRO hotel a sense of liberty that

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[22] Sandweiss, 172.
[23] Peter Calthorpe. *The Next American Metropolis*. (New York, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993), 18-19.
[24] Depastino, 257.
[25] Davis, 42-43.

allowed them to express their sexual identity. New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles had significant gay populations, and a very large stock of SRO hotels. Other cities had similar gay areas, predominantly around YMCAs and related predominantly-male organizations. In the mid-nineteenth century, before the idea of a homosexual individual was conceived, the Barbary Coast in San Francisco was the red light district of the city, and served as a meeting place for the gay men of the surrounding Tenderloin and South of Market hotel districts.[26] In New York City the hotels and bars of the Bowery were the primary areas for gay men to meet socially, and where a distinct gay culture began to emerge.[27] Part of the reason for this development was the large number of single men who came to large cities and were away from the prying eyes of their family for the first time.[28] In the early-twentieth century, districts of single men and women began to develop around the hotels, fueling the construction of more hotels to house the growing numbers of residents.[29] The gay community itself developed out of a sense of camaraderie, as well as in reaction to the strict policing of "deviant" behavior that threatened to damage the reputation of any gay man.[30]

One of the best documented connections between gay men and SRO hotels is the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). John Donald Gustav-Wrathall has written a book about the history of same-sex relations in YMCAs, documenting everything from scandals to the infamous cruising of the YMCA locker rooms and dormitories.[31] When young men first arrived

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[26] Wright, 168-169.
[27] George Chauncy. *Gay New York*. (New York, New York: Basic Books, 1994), 45-48.
[28] Barbara Berglund. *Making San Francisco America.* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 17-19.
[29] *Ibid*, 66.
[30] Daniel Hurewitz. *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics*. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2007), 240.
[31] John Donald Gustav-Wrathall. *Take the Young Stranger By the Hand*. (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

in a large city the first place they were pointed to was the YMCA.[32] The Denver Central YMCA building's National Register Nomination goes so far as to state that as early as 1910 the downtown YMCA was a center for regional gay culture.[33]

While this theme has been recognized in recent YMCA nominations, it is a theme that has been overlooked in representing the SRO hotels in the national register. In the Upper Tenderloin national register listing there is a mention of 101-121 Taylor Street, home of the Compton Café. It was at this site in 1966 that the first documented riot against police by gay and lesbian men and women took place.[34] The Compton Café Riot is one of the few examples available that indicates that there was any such connection between not just the homosexual community, but the beginnings of the gay rights movement, to SRO hotel districts.

IV. Working-Class SRO Residents

Much of the SRO hotel district population is poorly paid working class, including hobos and skilled workers. In the mid nineteenth century industrialization led to a boom in jobs centered on the railroad hubs and port cities. Along with the various desk jobs that accompanied this business boom, new hotel districts began to spread in cities across the United States. By the early-twentieth century "armies of hobos, clerks, salesmen, and secretaries now flocked to commercial hotel districts, where they forged new identities based on the independent living and the public commercial attractions of the street."[35] The rise of a middle class working district

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[32] Jessica I. Elfenbein. *The Making of A Modern City: Philanthropy, Civic Culture, and the Baltimore YMCA.* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2001), 113-115.
[33] Diane Wray. *Downtown Denver YMCA Central Building and Annex*. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Listed July 3, 2004. §8, 9.
[34] Anne Bloomfield and Michael Corbelt. *Upper Tenderloin Historic District*. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Listed February 13, 2009. §7, 86.
[35] Depastino, 147.

provided the significance to the Upper Tenderloin Historic District in San Francisco. This influx of population created a need to develop "apartment and hotel life in San Francisco."[36]

An important element of the working class population was the hobo. Hobo culture was developed out of the railroad culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when men gave up their homes and most of their material possessions to ride the railroads and find work wherever available. These men sought to "live in relative obscurity and with minimum of interference from the police," and were distinguished from the poor working classes as being disproportionately transient.[37] The SRO hotel was important to this population since it provided the temporary housing necessary to work for a seasonal job, or to live near the employment agencies when work was scarce. An example of the development of hotels near industrial districts is found in Spokane, Washington. The proximity of SROs to the industrial heart of Spokane inspired the nomination of the hotels of the central business district of Spokane as a multiple property national register listing in 1993. The nomination cites the cultural significance of the properties as "association with properties built to house working class people during a period of rapid growth of the city of Spokane."[38] These working men, and the SROs built to house them, represent a significant change in the development of the City of Spokane, much like it represented the sudden increase of working class men and women in San Francisco's Tenderloin district.

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[36] Bloomfield, §8.
[37] Kusmer, 153-154.
[38] Craig Holstine. *SRO Hotels of the Central Business District of Spokane.* National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Registration Form. Listed September 14, 1993.

V. Conclusion

While the importance of SRO hotels lies with their socioeconomic uses today, they also have been an important part of the urban cultural landscape. The historic uses reinforce the rehabilitation of SROs for housing, by serving as a gateway to independence for the young, the poor, the middle class, and the transients—many of the same groups that may have used the hotels in the past. These hotels also represent a dying way of life. All of the sub-populations that used hotels relied on the networks of stores, restaurants, and service to provide for their everyday needs. The value of SRO hotels extends beyond the actual building, to the function of the hotel and the surrounding businesses. SRO hotels illustrate the interconnectedness of urban living, particularly in the pre-war period. In the post-war period, hotel living lost much of its prestige.[39] However, with the rehabilitation of SROs these historic and culturally significant buildings can again become contributing elements to the sustainable city.

These hotels provide an important physical link to a diverse segment of the urban population. The subgroups that utilized these hotels in the past have become integral parts of America's cultural heritage. The importance of artists' communities has been well documented, with two SRO hotels listed on the National Register based on their significance to writers and artists. However, women's liberation and gay rights are fairly new movements and cannot therefore be evaluated for significance. The working class residents of SRO hotels have been recognized by some National Register nominations. These workers have had a significant effect on the development of urban culture, both lower and middle class. Without the large influx of workers to cities following the industrial revolution, SRO hotels would not have become the prevalent housing source they are today.

[39] Sandweiss, 164-165.

Historic preservation plays an important part in bridging the gap between the historical social significance and the modern uses of SRO hotels for low-income housing. Preservationists can celebrate the actions and accomplishments of past residents while rehabilitating the building for continued use. In this way historic preservation provides an important link to the past, which connects residents of low-income housing with the city in a way that a new building cannot.

CHAPTER 4

HISTORIC PRESERVATION & THE SINGLE-ROOM OCCUPANCY HOTEL

Historic preservationists have often ignored single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels, focusing instead on urban landmarks and districts of single-family dwellings. This concentration on large and important buildings has developed out of the field's architectural history background. This focus has made the field of historic preservation complacent with urban renewal through gentrification of poorer neighborhoods. This disregard of the cultural and historical value of SRO hotels continues to the present day. Much of the recognition SRO hotels have received from historic preservationists is based on the density of urban living they created, or the scarcity of the hotels left in a particular city. Part of the challenge to preserving SRO hotels is that their function is part of the significance of the building type. SRO hotels are tied to the surrounding urban landscape, meaning that their preservation is tied to the surrounding businesses.

The preservation of SRO hotels has progressed in a reverse order from the rest of the field. Buildings have their cultural significance identified, whether train stations as part of the mobility of the industrial revolution or barns as part of America's agricultural heritage, and then preservation efforts follow. With SRO hotels, the process has been reversed. Since the 1980s SROs have been utilized by social service organizations, low-income housing advocates, and city governments as affordable housing, using Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits and other financial incentives derived from historic preservation as part of their funding. To use these credits means that the buildings have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, often under

criteria for architectural significance. In the 1990s, preservationists began to recognize the cultural significance of SRO hotels, and have since begun to expand their recognition of SRO hotels and the importance of the surrounding urban landscape.

I. Early Relationship Between Historic Preservation and SRO Hotels

The origins of historic preservation in the United States lie in the work of various groups and organizations to preserve the landmarks of America's history. In the mid-nineteenth century, historic preservation focused on three primary areas: patriotic sites, sites associated with prominent founding fathers, and sites of natural beauty.[1] Landmarks were the primary concern of preservationists, leaving the bulk of the urban fabric to be erased and rebuilt as development dictated. Early historic preservation efforts focused on the need to save American architectural history, not concepts like providing affordable housing or creating homeless shelters. William J. Murtaugh's *Keeping Time* pressed for the general preservation of buildings that represented the best of American architecture, rather than some larger social cause.[2] Cities like New York constantly remade themselves, demolishing older or poorer neighborhoods in what architectural historian Max Page calls "creative destruction."[3] This creative destruction is based on the efforts of many cities to remain new, vibrant, and relevant to the modern world. Accomplishing this modern style required the demolition of many older buildings to make way for newer structures. In the 1950s and 1960s, as cities all across the United States embraced urban renewal, historic preservation began to become a force for maintaining a collective sense of urban history.

[1] William J. Murtagh. *Keeping Time*. (Pittstown, New Jersey: The Main Street Press, 1988), 25-77.
[2] George Zabriskie. "Window to the Past," in *With Heritage So Rich*. (New York, New York: Random House, 1966), 57-63.
[3] Max Page. *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan.* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

The urban renaissance was seen as a time to rebuild cities on the newest modern design, to make downtowns efficient places, full of clean lines and free of clutter.[4] Under the auspices of men such as Robert Moses, cities like New York, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles sought to remake their urban core. The results of their efforts were not well accepted, especially by those who lived in the cities. While the era's most significant single architectural loss may have been New York City's Pennsylvania Station, demolished in 1965, it was the loss of countless everyday, utilitarian buildings that began to truly galvanize the historic preservation field.[5] In many cases, the historic main streets and skid rows were the first targets of developers, primarily because these areas were cheap and the residents had little political power to resist.

In Minneapolis, the destruction of the Gateway district was not challenged by historic preservationists or anyone else, save the remaining hobos and homeless men who inhabited it. Chronicled in photographs by Edwin C. Hirschoff, the Gateway demolition began in 1959 and extended over several years, erasing buildings ranging from the landmark 1890 Metropolitan Building, the first skyscraper in Minneapolis, to scores of old SRO hotels and lodging houses. While the Metropolitan's demise in 1961 attracted some concern, the general city consensus was that the district was blight on the Minneapolis waterfront area. It was not until the entire area was gone that the citizens of Minneapolis recognized their loss. Writing in 2002, Joseph Hart states "even in today's climate, which favors restoration and historic preservation, few of the Gateway's tired, utilitarian structures would pass the test of architectural or historical

[4] Hilary Ballon. "Robert Moses & Urban Renewal: The Title 1 Program" in *Robert Moses and the Modern City*, eds. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson. (New York, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007), 96-97.
[5] Carl Feiss. "Our Lost Heritage," in *With Heritage So Rich*. (New York, New York: Random House, 1966), 132.

significance required for protection. But in the aggregate the demolition of skid row represents an indisputable architectural loss for the city."[6]

In Denver, a similar case of skid row demolition resulted directly in a more comprehensive approach to city-wide historic preservation. Larimer Street was once the main thoroughfare in Denver, where city hall and a large portion of civic and social functions took place. However, by 1900 City Hall had moved further uptown, and Larimer Street began to suffer serious decline. Missions and SRO hotels moved in, providing a seedy atmosphere to the formerly grand street. "Slave markets," as the employment agencies that offered work to the SRO residents were called, set up alongside the various missions offering housing and food.[7] In 1950, a twelve block section of Larimer Street had "46 bars and liquor stores, 57 flophouses [SRO boarding houses], 17 pawn shops, 22 second-hand stores, and 10 missions."[8] Despite a report by Professor Edward Rose of the University of Colorado at Boulder that stated that the skid rows of Denver were contained and relatively safe, the city of Denver began demolition in the mid-1960s. By 1967, the demolition of both the SRO hotels and the historic civic buildings along Larimer incensed preservationists. Using the federal National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the city organized the Denver Landmarks Commission to protect civic landmarks. The 1400 Block of Larimer Street was preserved, including many SRO hotels. However, while the buildings were preserved, their historic function was not. Subsequent development has turned the area into a shopping district.[9]

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[6] Joseph Hart and Edwin C. Hirschoff. *Down & Out*. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 47.
[7] Thomas J. Noel *Denver's Larimer Street*. (Denver, Colorado: Historic Denver, Inc., 1981), 23-25
[8] *Ibid*, 23-28.
[9] *Ibid*, 38.

II. SRO Hotels as Part of Historic Preservation's Interest In Affordable Housing

During the 1980s, a shift began to occur in the focus of the historic preservation field. Organizations like the Vernacular Architecture Forum began to promote the importance of non-landmark buildings in an everyday context. The housing crisis, spurred on by the uneven financial markets in the 1980s and the sudden increase in joblessness, created a sense of urgency about the number of homeless men and women in cities across the United States. The remaining SRO hotels were full, and both developers and city politicians realized the benefit of the hotels as low income housing.[10] It was only as a housing crisis made rehabilitating historic structures for low-income housing a feasible option for city governments that historic preservation began to influence the rehabilitation of SRO hotels.

In the mid-1980s the National Park Service and the National Trust for Historic Preservation published several pamphlets and books that highlighted the benefits of using historic preservation for affordable housing. Among the case studies presented, SRO hotels featured prominently.[11] One of the primary benefits to the historic preservation movement's involvement in rehabilitating SRO hotels and other structures for low-income housing was the ability to use the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, established in 1976, which could alleviate some of the financial strain on developers who wanted to rehabilitate SRO hotels and other properties for use as low-income housing.[12] In 1981 the National Trust began its Inner-City Ventures Fund, a loan program aimed at promoting neighborhood-based housing and economic development. Part of the initiative was to promote the use of historic preservation to help with

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[10] Charles Hoch. *New Homeless and Old*. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1989), 175.
[11] Susan Escherich, *et al*. *Affordable Housing Through Historic Preservation*. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, for the National Park Service, 2004).
[12] Bradford J. White. "30 Years of Federal Tax Incentives for Historic Buildings," *Forum Journal* 21, no. 1. (Winter, 2006): 1.

low-income housing.[13] In 1989 the National Trust's *Forum Journal* editor, Nora Richter Greer, penned the article "Affordable Housing Crisis Sparks Evolutionary Solutions," which emphasized the growing ties between historic preservationists and affordable housing advocates. Greer specifically highlighted the fact that many housing advocates were returning to "an old housing type—the residential apartment or, in modern terms, the single-room-occupancy (SRO) hotel."[14] That same year, the National Trust's annual conference was focused on the theme of affordable housing. This partnership between preservationists and affordable housing advocates has produced a number of both government and non-profit programs that seek to utilize historic preservation to aide in funding SRO rehabilitation for low-income housing. Organizations like Common Ground Communities in New York, Dwelling Place in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Central City Concern in Portland, Oregon, have all rehabilitated SRO hotels as part of their housing programs.

By the 1990s and 2000s, historic preservation had begun to be used by more organizations to rehabilitate historic buildings for affordable and low-income housing. Organizations like Common Ground Communities, a New York City non-profit that builds and rehabilitates supportive housing, have not only used the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, but worked to involve preservationists in their rehabilitation projects. Two of Common Ground's principal SRO buildings, the Times Square and the Prince George, contain large public spaces, which were painstakingly restored with the help of the Parsons School of Design and the Brooklyn High School of the Arts (Figure 6).[15] Historic preservation was involved in the rehabilitation project, rather than serving only as a funding tool for non-profit organizations.

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[13] National Trust for Historic Preservation "Inner City Ventures Fund." www.preservationnation.org/main-street/resources.
[14] Nora Richter Greer. "Affordable Housing Crisis Sparks Evolutionary Solutions," *Forum Journal* 3, no. 3 (Fall, 1989).
[15] *Common Ground Community*. "Common Ground Community Homepage." www.commonground.org.

However, the development of interaction between affordable housing advocates and historic preservationists does not indicate a significant shift in the interpretation of SRO hotels by preservationists.

Figure 6: Times Square Hotel, Common Ground Communities. New York, NY. Photo: Author.

III. Significance of SRO Hotels on the National Register of Historic Places

Using the National Register as a guide, it is possible to chronicle this progress of attitudes toward SRO hotels in the field of historic preservation. However, the register is not a perfect guide. The terminology for SRO hotels is not standardized, and thus many buildings may escape notice simply because they are known by a first name only (such as The Christopher). Furthermore, there are over 1,242 hotels listed on the National Register, including palace hotels, SRO hotels, and the typical commercial transient hotel. However, using several non-profit groups that focus on SRO hotels for their housing programs, it is possible to illustrate some of the hotels that have been preserved.

Two of the earliest examples of residential hotels on the National Register are the Chelsea Hotel and the Barbazon Hotel for Women, both in New York City. Both of these hotels, though not strictly SRO hotels, were listed on the register due to the number of famous people who utilized them. The Chelsea Hotel, built as an apartment building in 1883 and converted to a hotel in 1905, is noted for the sheer number of artists and writers that have inhabited the building, ranging from Dylan Thomas to Edward Burrows.[16] The Barbazon Hotel (Figure 7), constructed in 1927, has a different significance in that it was a mid-priced hotel that catered exclusively to women. Designed to provide living spaces for the modern women of New York City, the building was nominated for serving a number of women who have since become prominent singers and actresses, including Liza Minnelli and Grace Kelly.[17] These nominations illustrate the early SRO hotels on the National Register that were based on important or famous people, rather than the buildings.

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[16] Lawrence E. Gobrecht. *Chelsea Hotel.* National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Listed December 27, 1977. §8.

[17] Anne B. Covell. *Barbazon Hotel for Women.* National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.. Listed October 29, 1982. §8.

Figure 7: The Barbazon Hotel. New York, NY.
Photo: Peter K. Steinberg

While there are several palace hotels listed on their cultural merits, most of the buildings that have been used for housing have historically been mid-priced SROs. The Ogden Hotel is one of the few SRO hotels left in Minneapolis, a rare survivor of the urban renewal of the city. In nominating the hotel, the City of Minneapolis recognized that the Ogden is one of only two middle-class residential hotels left in the city. The distinction of being one of the few SROs left reflects the urban renewal of the 1960s, and the loss of a large amount of hotel buildings. By 1992 historic preservationists were able to look back and realize that they had lost a significant

part of the shared urban architectural heritage. The Ogden, renamed the Continental Hotel, serves as low-income housing and is maintained by the Aeon supportive housing group.[18] In New York, Common Ground Communities had the former mid-priced Prince George and Times Square hotels listed in the National Register to receive the 20% Rehabilitation Tax Credit.[19] These hotels were listed both for their architecture, and their significance in the development of Madison Avenue and Times Square, respectively. In the post-World War One building boom, New York City saw a significant influx of middle class workers, as a result developers had to find ways of housing large numbers of people. The residential hotel was deemed the answer. This development reflects the changes in architecture, but not the social changes in the population. The changes in significance for National Register nominations between The Hotel Chelsea and the Ogden Hotel reflect the growing understanding of the importance of everyday urban buildings to historic preservation.

The largest designations of SRO hotels lie with three historic districts listed on the National Register: The Single Room Occupancy Hotels of the Central Business District of Spokane, Washington, listed in 1993; the Lower Nobb Hill Apartment Hotel District in San Francisco, California, listed in 1991, and containing 297 contributing buildings and structures; and the Upper Tenderloin Historic District, also in San Francisco, California, listed in 2009 and containing 410 contributing buildings and structures. These three districts represent the largest concentrations of SRO hotels in the country, and are important because they represent not only the importance of the building type, but the social importance of the hotel as a style of urban living. The nomination for Lower Nobb Hill specifically states that the district is "a very large,

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[18] Michael Coop. *Ogden Apartment Hotel.* National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Listed January 13,1992. §8.

[19] Peter Shaver. *Prince George Hotel.* National Register of Historic Placed Registration Form. Listed February 12, 1998.

Peter Shaver. *The Times Square Hotel.* National Register of Historic Placed Registration Form. Listed May 4,1995.

virtually intact, architecturally consistent, densely packed inner city residential area."[20] This is the earliest nomination for an SRO district, and reflects the common historic preservation practice of focusing on architecture in districts, rather than specific social conditions.

In 1993 the nomination for the SRO hotels of Spokane's Central Business District clearly states that the district is eligible for listing both for the significance of its architecture, and for the district's associations with the worker's housing of Spokane during the early twentieth century, when the city was growing at a rapid pace. This growth caused a significant amount of new housing to be built, and the SRO hotel was the prime method of fitting such a large amount of people within close proximity to the Spokane River and the numerous railroad lines that converged on the town.[21] The Grand Coulee Hotel in Spokane (Figure 8) is an example of the large-scale SRO hotels built in downtown Spokane. The shift towards recognition of the importance of working class residents to the development in Spokane signifies a change in attitude towards the SRO hotels as an individual resource. The Spokane multiple property listing reflects not only the living conditions of the transient population of Spokane, but also the significance of the SRO hotel to the city's urban landscape.

[20] Anne Bloomfield. *Lower Nobb Hill Apartment Hotel District*. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Listed July 3, 1991. §8.
[21] Craig Holstine. *The Single Room Occupancy Hotels of the Central Business District of Spokane.* National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Listed September 14, 1993. §8.

Figure 8: Grand Coulee Hotel. Spokane, WA.
Photo: Historic Spokane

The significance of San Francisco's SRO hotel building stock is further highlighted by the nomination of The Upper Tenderloin Historic District, directly adjacent to the Lower Nobb Hill district. [22] At one point in 1983, these two districts were surveyed as a single national register nomination with over 860 properties, almost 740 of which were contributing. The district did not go forward at the state level, since local leaders were focusing on changing the height ordinance and did not want to encourage speculative development and gentrification before the rezoning was passed. The Central City SRO Collaborative, a non-profit devoted to politically organizing tenants in San Francisco's SROs, was instrumental in reviving the district nomination. Part of their reasoning for restarting the nomination process was to gain access to financial incentives for property owners. Based on earlier surveys the Tenderloin was considered historic by San Francisco's Planning Department, but since it was not a state or

[22] Anne Bloomfield and Michael Corbett. *Uptown Tenderloin Historic District*. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Listed February 13, 2009.

national register district it could not receive any tax credits.[23] The recognition of the district's historical significance by both the State of California and the federal government has provided further impetus for the creation of the Tenderloin History Tours, which seeks to show tourists the unique architectural and cultural offerings of the Tenderloin district.[24] The Tenderloin is especially noteworthy for being one of the largest intact SRO neighborhoods in the United States (Figure 9).

From these National Register nominations it is evident that the relationship between SRO hotels and historic preservation has evolved since the 1960s. The hotels have gained recognition as an important part of urban development in the early-twentieth century, but in very general terms. The National Register tracks the cultural and historic value placed on SRO buildings and districts, and it has shifted from the Chelsea Hotel's famous patrons to the plebian residents of Spokane's Central Business District SRO hotels.

IV. Conclusion

Historic preservation as a field has evolved a great deal from its early-nineteenth century beginnings, expanding in scope from the great landmarks of the Colonial Era to the everyday architecture of early to mid-twentieth century American city. Accompanying this broadening of interest, historic preservation has made itself an invaluable tool for many different social, economic, and environmental issues. In engaging housing advocacy groups, historic preservation has encountered SRO hotels as an important part of America's urban heritage.

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[23] Majorie Beggs. "Tenderloin and its SROs—making of a historic district." *The Central City Extra*, December-January 2007. 6-7.
[24] Randy Shaw. "Uptown Tenderloin Approved as National Historic District." *Beyond Chron*, February 17, 2009. http://www.beyondchron.org/news/index.php?itemid=6610.

Figure 9: 200 Block Leavenworth St., Tenderloin District, San Francisco, CA.
Photo: Mark Ellinger

The value of SRO hotels must be addressed by preservationists. However, there are many challenges to effectively preserving these hotels, especially since they are so intricately tied to their surrounding businesses. Historic preservationists must develop new policies that address the importance of the function of SRO hotels, as well as their place within a larger urban context.

CHAPTER 5

BENEFITS & CHALLENGES TO PRESERVING SINGLE-ROOM OCCUPANCY HOTELS

Historic preservation is about saving and using historic buildings. Historically, the use of a rehabilitated building fell outside of the concern of the field of preservation. However, single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels pose a different challenge to preservationists: the use and function of the hotel is part of its cultural importance. The stigma of poverty is often associated with SRO hotels, making them difficult to integrate into modern cities. However, SRO hotels are uniquely situated to provide housing to low-income urban residents. Historic preservationists must work with sociologists, planners, and developers to help maintain this important source of housing, while also recognizing the value of additional middle-class income to cities. To successfully rehabilitate SRO hotels into appropriate housing, there are a number of challenges. Zoning ordinances and building codes may have provisions that make it difficult to use historic SRO hotels for permanent or semi-permanent housing. Even as ordinances and codes are modified to facilitate SRO rehabilitation, there is a need for project funding. Historic buildings are eligible for the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, but on the condition that the building is eligible, or listed in, the National Register of Historic Places. This tax credit is an important part of gaining support for rehabilitating historic buildings, and the provisions of national register listing may make it difficult for individual SRO hotels to receive necessary funds.

I. Challenges to Using SRO Hotels

The design and function of SRO hotels make them useful for low-income and affordable housing, as well as supportive housing initiatives that include social services such as job placement and drug rehabilitation programs. Their location downtown, however, makes SRO hotels well suited to redevelopment for retail spaces, apartments, and other middle- to upper-class housing. Using SRO hotels for low-income housing also creates a number of challenges, such as the concentration of poor residents and potential drug problems. SRO rehabilitation for middle-class housing has the effect of pushing poorer residents out of the city center, and possibly onto the streets.

One of the largest challenges to preserving SRO hotels is the stigma of poverty associated with the building type. The general perception of SRO hotel residents is that they are drug users, alcoholics, or simply living off welfare. Chronically homeless men and women often fit within the stereotypes of alcoholics, drug users, and mentally unstable individuals.[1] These urban residents often depend on shelters, while abusing the system and becoming dependent on the welfare that is supposed to help them get out of their problems. Since the chronically homeless are the most visible sub-group of the homeless population, they are the basis for the fears of business owners and residents. Part of this attitude relates to a sort of class xenophobia, brought on by the extreme differences between middle and upper-class residents and their poorer neighbors.[2] The reality of SRO hotels and their residents is far more complex than the face portrayed by the media and denounced by local residents and business owners.[3] SRO residents

[1] David Levinson and Mary Ross. eds. *Homelessness Handbook.* (Great Barrington, Massachusetts: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2007), 251.
[2] Timothy A. Gibson. *Securing the Spectacular City.* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2004), 237.
[3] *Ibid*, 230-231.

are men and women who are looking for jobs and trying to support themselves.[4] The lack of downtown housing can make it extraordinarily difficult to find work, since many service jobs are located within the downtown area.

Building codes and zoning ordinances, both controlled by state and local legislation, provide significant challenges to using SRO hotels for housing. Building codes, designed to protect residents from both health and safety hazards, are difficult to bend for SRO rehabilitation. One benefit of using an historic building, however, is that the codes may be different for historic buildings.[5] Also, in light of the difficulties in providing affordable housing, many cities have begun to make special provisions for low-income housing projects.[6] The safety and health standards are maintained, but density limits could be relaxed.[7] Zoning ordinances provide a more broad control on housing and affordability. In San Francisco, local zoning ordinances have been developed to provide SRO residents, primarily the low-income residents, with postal addresses and other legal rights as residents of the City of San Francisco.[8] Cities must also address historic zoning ordinances that place limits on residency. In the early-twentieth century, many cities required kitchen facilities in an apartment or tenement to designate a permanent resident. Since SRO hotels lack these facilities, they were effectively deemed homeless.[9] To effectively return SRO hotels to use as a residence, whether permanent, long-term, or temporary, then zoning ordinances must be changed accordingly. Each of these zoning and code elements

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[4] Todd. Dipastino. *Citizen Hobo*. (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 266-267.
[5] Marylin Kaplan. "Rehabilitation Codes Come of Age: A Search for Alternate Approaches," *APT Bulletin* 34, no. 4 (2003): 5-8.
[6] Sam Davis. *The Architecture of Affordable Housing*. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1995), 145-151.
[7] Gordon Berlin and William McAllister. "Homelessness: Why Nothing Has Worked and What Will," *The Brookings Review* 10, no. 4 (Fall 1992): 17.
[8] C.W. Nevius. "Postal Service Slights Tenderloin SRO Dwellers," *The San Francisco Chronicle*. February 24, 2009.
[9] Paul Groth. *Living Downtown*. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1994), 7.

are developed on a local and state level, meaning that there are differences between almost every city in the country.

One of the most significant challenges to preserving SRO hotels is maintaining the surrounding businesses. The restaurants, cheap cafés, laundries, bath houses, and other businesses that line the streets of hotel districts indicate both the type of housing as well as the social and economic status of the residents. Maintaining a diversity of businesses is integral to any city's economic well being. Donovan Rypkema, in his book *The Economics of Historic Preservation*, writes that a diversity of building types and businesses helps to stimulate the economy. [10] Using historic SRO hotels, with their variety of sizes and price ranges, helps promote this diversity. However, the desirability of cheap downtown accommodations may lead to problems of gentrification.

If SRO hotels are successfully rehabilitated, there is a danger that large-scale gentrification can occur. The integration of middle- and upper-class residents into a housing district can help secure additional tax funding for city operations, including social services.[11] However, when entire SRO districts are turned into middle-class condominiums, the cultural value of the district is lost. In the past, city governments saw the centralization of new cultural amenities, along with the restoration of the historic building stock, as the way of bringing back the urban middle class.[12] Some amount of gentrification is good, if not necessary, for cities to continue to provide the social services to their lower-income residents.[13] Furthermore, some scholars argue that gentrification aides in the integration of different socioeconomic strata in the

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[10] Donovan Rypkema. *The Economics of Historic Preservation*. (Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1994), 39-71.
[11] Jacob L. Vigdor. "Does Gentrification Hurt the Poor?" in *Brookings-Wharton Papers on Urban Affairs* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2002), 133.
[12] Sharon Sukin. "Gentrification: Culture and Capital in the Urban Core." *Annual Review of Sociology* 13 (1987): 129.
[13] Vigdor, 147.

city.[14] However, it is necessary for both city governments and preservationists to work with developers to avoid the conversion of entire SRO districts into middle-class neighborhoods, which can effectively cut poorer residents out of the community.

II. Benefits of Using SRO Hotels as Housing

Many low-income sub-populations have similar needs as the homeless, including support services, transportation, and affordable housing. Support services are government or non-profit supported programs designed to reduce "rehospitalization for mental illness, [prevent] homelessness, and [increase] economic self-sufficiency."[15] Single-room occupancy hotels are easily rehabilitated to accommodate social service organizations and supportive housing programs. In SROs, historic storefronts on the street level of the hotel can be used by social service offices. The prominence of these offices increases the visibility of available services to the entire community, in addition to the hotel residents. One of the most prominent aspects of the support services programs are medical and psychological help, including the transition back to regular society.[16] "Historically, our society had placed greater emphasis on the institutionalization of…people who needed assistance. This had the effect of relegating these people to environments which inhibited the development of self-sufficiency and community integration."[17] A way of overcoming this problem of impaired self-sufficiency is by providing access to services and transportation.

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[14] *Ibid*, 135.
[15] Melanie Shepard. "Site-Based Services for Residents of Single-Room Occupancy Hotels." *Social Work* 42, no. 6 (November, 1997).
[16] Lisa W. Foderaro. "A Rare Mix of Tenants; Working Residents Create a New Model for Welfare Hotels." *The New York Times*. December 28, 1994.
[17] John I. Gilderbloom and Mark S. Rosentraub. "Creating the Accessible City." *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 49, no. 3. (July 1990): 271.

Transportation is a key element to providing SRO hotel residents with access to jobs, services, and entertainment outside of their building. As early as the 1990s, it was noted that "homeless mobility…was largely shaped by the geography of human-service providers."[18] This geography is further limited by public transport. Inner city areas provide the greatest concentration of transport options, allowing low income residents the greatest mobility to find work and obtain necessary social services.[19] Furthermore, SRO hotels connect their residents with the inner city neighborhoods, allowing for interaction with the city at large.

An example of how historic SRO hotels are used for supportive housing is the Clayton Hotel in San Francisco's Chinatown district (Figure 10). In San Francisco, possibly the epicenter for SRO hotel development, a specific case in Chinatown highlights the various benefits of preserving low income housing. After a large amount of urban renewal and financial district expansion in the 1960s and 1970s, Chinatown lost much of its low income housing. These buildings were occupied predominantly by the elderly, particularly those with limited English skills and few ties beyond the Chinese and Asian community. The Clayton Hotel provides an example of how various smaller community development and preservation groups participate in the preservation of historic SROs. A thriving hotel teeming with the elderly, the building was threatened with demolition as expansion from the Transamerica Pyramid and the financial district spread. The Chinese Community Housing Corporation (CCHC) stepped in and bought the property, determined to save the building and the community that surrounded it. The corporation was the first to take a serious stand against developers, and its organizers hoped that

[18] Levinson, 152-155.
[19] Stuart S. Rosenthal. "Where Poor Renters Live in Our Cities: Dynamics and Determinants" in *Revisiting Rental Housing: Policies, Programs, and Priorities* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute Press, 2008), 73-74.

the corporation's project would spawn more action on the part of other organizations and social groups. [20]

III. Financial Benefits to Rehabilitating SRO Hotels

The use of SRO hotels, many of which were built prior to the Second World War and are therefore historic, adds an additional financial incentive in that they may be eligible for the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HRTC). The HRTC provides aid to rehabilitate historic properties as income-producing businesses.[21] This program is especially useful to former mid-priced hotels, but can be used for any eligible property as long as the project follows the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Combined with local and state tax programs, the rehabilitation of one or several SRO hotels is not only feasible, but may be profitable. The HRTC has four main guidelines: the property must be certified, usually as an individual building or a contributing element to a district on the national register; it must be an income producing project—private residences and owner-occupied buildings are ineligible; the project must adhere to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation; and the project must meet the substantial rehabilitation test, that is, the cost of the rehab project must be more than the amount paid for the building. Meeting all of these criteria makes the project eligible for the 20% tax credit. [22]

A number of rehabilitation projects have used the tax credits, and combined them with additional grants and financial incentives to return SRO hotels to regular use. The bulk of these

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[20] Gordon Chin. "Ethnic Diversity and SROs." *National Trust for Historic Preservation Forum: Solutions Database*. (July, 1992).
[21] National Park Service, Historic Preservation Services. "Tax Incentives." http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/tax/incentives/index.htm
[22] David Listokin *et al*. *Barriers to the Rehabilitation of Affordable Housing*, Vol. 1. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, for the Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2001), 20.

projects has been associated with housing, whether low-income or supportive, in some form. The aforementioned Clayton Hotel in San Francisco was rehabilitated using the HRTC, as well as a $30,000 Inner City Ventures Fund loan (IVCF) from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Figure 10: Clayton Hotel. San Francisco, CA.
Photo: Dave Schweisgoth

Newport, Rhode Island's 1911 Armed Services YMCA is an example of a converted YMCA dormitory building being used for low income housing (Figure 11). In an effort to provide housing for low income residents in Newport, especially those associated with the tourist industry, the city partnered with the Church Community Housing Corporation (CCHC) to restore the building and provide both housing and social services. The financing for the program came

from a number of sources, including a $45,000 IVCF loan from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, $200,000 from a HUD grant, and various state and local tax credits and grant programs for the social services provided in the building.[23]

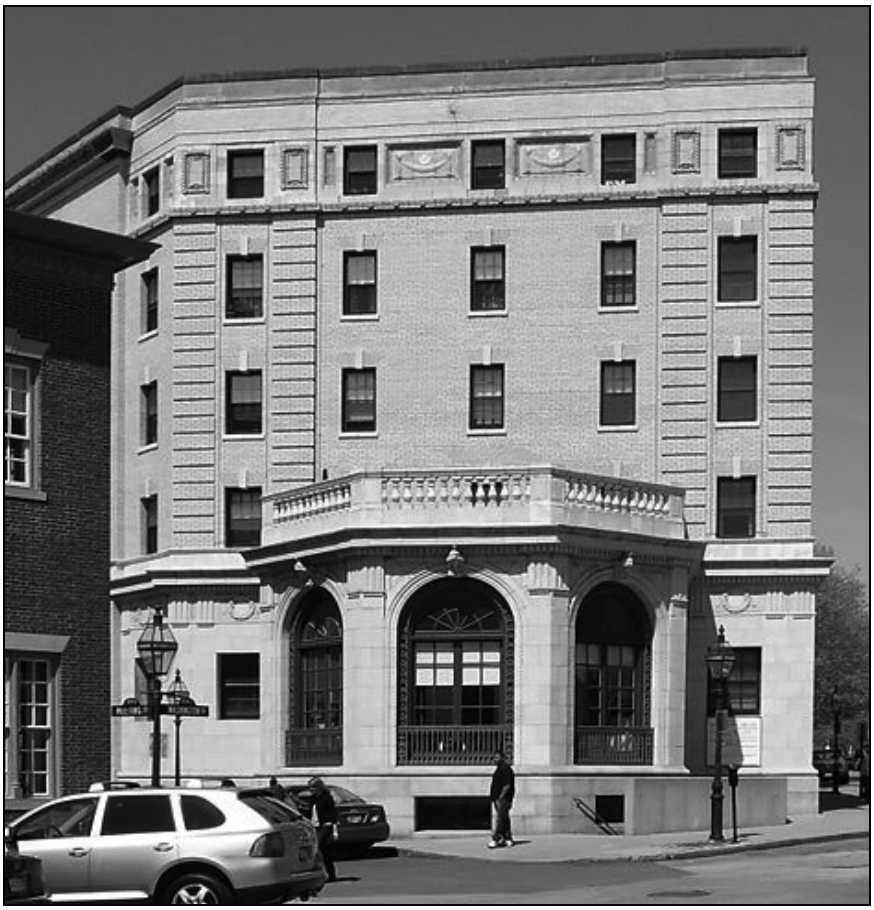

Figure 11: Army-Navy YMCA. Newport, RI.
Photo: M. Field

The Pacific Hotel in Seattle was built in two major stages, and contained both apartments with kitchens and SRO hotel rooms (Figure 12). The building is really composed of two structures, which share a lobby and courtyard space. In 1992, Plymouth Housing Group purchased the property with the intent of turning the entire building into low-income housing. In

[23] Stephen Ostiguy. "A Ladder Out of Homelessness." *National Trust for Historic Preservation Forum: Solutions Database* (July, 1989).

1993 the building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places, making it eligible for Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits. Since the building was dedicated to low-income housing, it was available to receive Low Income Housing Credits as well. The building has 112 units, 75 of which are SRO rooms for homeless residents. The rest of the units are one-bedroom and studio apartments. The combined equity received from the rehabilitation and low-income credits equaled $3,656,085.[24]

Figure 12: Pacific Hotel. Seattle, WA.
Photo: Joe Mabel

Common Ground Communities, headquartered in New York City, is a prime example of rehabilitating SRO hotels for mixed-use developments. They have taken on the challenge of

[24] Aleca Sullivan. *Case Studies in Affordable Housing Through Historic Preservation, No. 1: Pacific Hotel, Seattle.* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, 1995). The National Register of Historic Places listing for the Pacific Hotel lists the name of the hotel as the Leamington Hotel and Apartments.

utilizing SRO hotels for housing projects, including low-income, affordable, and supportive, while engaging the surrounding community and New York City as a whole. The example of Common Ground Communities is fairly extraordinary, given the diverse housing stock and the high cost of real estate in New York City. The unique financial situation of New York City makes it an ideal place for the development of a large organization such as Common Ground. While other non-profits may utilize many of the same tax credit programs and supportive housing techniques, the unique presence of numerous large-scale hotel buildings in New York makes it possible to develop the large, comprehensive programs that have made Common Ground a successful model for supportive housing.

An example of Common Ground's use of a former mid-priced SRO hotel is the Times Square (formerly the Times Square Hotel). The Times Square project involved several major steps. The first was organizing the rehabilitation of the building. In order to receive tax credits for historic rehabilitation, the building had to have all main public areas restored to their original appearance. The residents' rooms themselves were altered to allow for a small bathroom and kitchenette. The addition of a kitchenette allows residents to make their own food, lessening the financial strain of eating at a restaurant and keeping panhandling and begging to a minimum. The restoration returned the ballroom to its former glory, creating a space that could be rented out for public functions. The Historic Rehabilitation tax credits were combined with a patchwork of social service grants and tax credits, obtained on the federal, state, and municipal level. The inclusion of social services in their rehabilitated hotels allowed Common Ground to receive a variety of funds that would normally be tied to creating new social service offices. To further augment the income of the building, the retail spaces on the street level of the building

were leased to new tenants, including a Ben & Jerry's ice cream shop that provides a portion of their profits to Common Ground Communities.

In an effort to engage the local community, as well as the preservation community in New York City, Common Ground undertook a program that would benefit both their programs and the city. The Prince George Hotel ballroom was painstakingly restored by students and teachers from the Parson's School for Design and the Brooklyn High School of the Preservation Arts. This allowed the students to gain hands-on experience with historic preservation, while also rehabilitating the spaces to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Thus, the Prince George was eligible for the HRTC, providing much-needed funds to the social services located in the building. The ballroom can be rented out for social functions, and has even been featured on an episode of the Bravo Television show *Top Chef*. In addition to the ballroom, Common Ground Communities has organized a community supported agriculture program (CSA) that provides both residents of the Prince George and the surrounding New York City community with fresh, organic produce.[25] The financial incentives for rehabilitating SRO hotels depend on the use of the building. Each project has a unique set of circumstances, which allow some rehabilitation to capitalize on a number of preservation incentives.

IV. Conclusion

Single-room occupancy hotels are a unique part of the urban landscape, and present a challenge to the preservation field. The use of these historic structures is part of what makes them culturally significant. However, there are a number of challenges to using SRO hotels from a preservation perspective. One of the largest problems with SRO hotels is the stigma of poverty that has plagued the building type since the urban renewal of the 1960s. In overcoming this tie

[25] *Common Ground Communities*. "Common Ground Communities Homepage." www.commongrounds.org.

to homelessness and welfare, preservationists are able to recommend these buildings for a variety of uses that fall outside of the traditional low-income framework. Supportive housing, mixed-use developments, and a variety of other uses become viable options for rehabilitating these important elements of the urban landscape. To promote the preservation and use of SRO hotels, the tax credits and other financial incentives for historic preservation must be made available.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels are a vital part of the urban landscape in America and have been under-appreciated and under-represented by the field of historic preservation. The context of their history has not been well examined, and thus their reputation among developers and city governments has been tarnished by later social problems. Historic preservationists need to address the significance of the sub-cultures that have inhabited SRO hotels, as well as the surrounding urban landscape that both supports and defines SRO hotel districts. Preservationists must also address the challenges to creating an effective preservation policy that accounts for the diversity of the building type and the significance of the building's use.

I. Recognizing the Significance of SRO Hotels and Districts

The significance of SRO hotels lies both with their design and their function. The Spartan design or SRO hotels, which consisted of a bed, desk, dresser, and possibly a bathroom, made it necessary for residents to turn to the city and their neighborhoods for their daily needs. The result of this dependence on the city was both a sense of independence for the individual and a sense of community that developed between other residents and the proprietors of the surrounding restaurants, theaters, and cafes.

SRO hotels are fairly nondescript buildings—they are functional, providing a cheap place to live downtown. However, their simple design is part of what makes them significant. The minimal costs of living in hotels made them affordable to most urban residents, no matter their

income. The cheap accommodations provided opportunities for young men and women to move to cities. The result of this influx of people was the creation of a number of sub-populations. Artists and the working class residents of SRO hotels have been recognized in the National Register of Historic Places, with nominations for the Barbazon and Chelsea hotels in New York City, and the Single-Room Occupancy Hotels of the Central Business District of Spokane, Washington. However, there are a number of other sub-populations that have failed to be adequately recognized as being part of the significance of SRO hotels.

During the early-twentieth century, women who moved to SRO hotels found themselves under intense scrutiny for giving up their traditional homemaking roles in order to work in the city to support themselves. It was this early act of disobedience to the accepted cultural norm that gave women a sense of independence. While SRO hotels may not be directly associated with the women's liberation movement, it is clear that the lifestyle enjoyed by many middle class working women paved the way for greater freedom in the 1950s and 1960s. In a similar manner, homosexual persons found themselves living in hotels, isolated from much of the city and living in fear of being "outed." The sense of community that developed in the restaurants and bars surrounding hotel districts helped in the development of a shared gay identity. It was this identity that in part led to the events in the 1960s that began the gay rights movement.

The SRO hotel was integral in the formation of a collective sense of identity for these sub-populations, and yet this fact has not been recognized in any of the national register listings for SRO hotels. It is important that the histories of SRO residents been identified when making national register nominations, so that the entire cultural history of the building be recognized. It is also necessary for nominations to recognize that the function of the SRO hotel—that of providing affordable housing to new urban residents—be identified as part of its significance.

The side effect of hotel life was the creation of social networks that spurred the development of significant social movements in the United States. Preservationists should examine ways in which a function, such as housing, can be identified as part of the cultural significance when recommending buildings for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

II. Historic Preservation and SRO Hotels

Following the Second World War, SRO hotels fell out of popularity as a middle-class housing option, and the building type became associated solely with low-income and homeless residents. Historic preservationists have long been associated with the development pressures that resulted in the demolition or gentrification of many old SRO hotels. During the mid 1980s, non-profit groups that rehabilitated SRO hotels for affordable housing used rehabilitation tax credits to help fund their projects. Historic preservation was a tool for gaining funds, and not a source of pride or a means of recognizing the history of SRO hotels. This relationship between low-income housing advocates and historic preservationists evolved during the 1990s, when cities like Spokane, Washington, began to note the significance SRO hotels played in the development of its downtown industrial district. The recognition of SRO hotels has since grown in the 2000s, as San Francisco designated the Upper Tenderloin Historic District in 2009.

As historic preservationists continue to push for the recognition of SRO hotels as significant structures, they must position themselves to help promote the cultural significance of SRO hotels, as well as their viability as an option for downtown residential development. Historic preservationists need to recognize the importance of SRO hotels not only to the cultural landscape, but to the city as a whole. After decades of being complacent with urban renewal and gentrification, it is important for historic preservationists to recognize the contributions historic

buildings can make to affordable housing. The availability of historic rehabilitation tax credits has been recognized before. But SRO hotels present a unique opportunity to tie historic preservation to both the historic fabric of the building, as well as the historic use. It is up to preservationists to recommend historic SROs to housing advocates.

III. Benefits and Challenges to Rehabilitating SRO Hotels

There are a number of benefits and challenges to preserving SRO hotels. They are designed to provide cheap housing, yet this low price makes them desirable to both low-income housing advocates and middle-class residents. Preservationists, planners, social workers, and local governments have the challenge of balancing the process of gentrification with the retention of some low-income, supportive, and affordable housing developments to promote economic diversity in America's inner cities.

The historic significance of SROs can have a substantial effect on the value of the hotels in the modern city. There is a stigma of poverty associated with hotel living, brought on by urban renewal in the 1960s and 1970s, and exacerbated by the media and academia. The middle-class history of hotel living, and the cultural significance of those middle-class populations, provides a necessary foil to the perceived extreme poverty of SRO hotels.

SRO hotels are also useful for supportive housing measures, due to their prime location downtown, the proximity of mass transit lines to many SRO districts, and the availability of the goods and services of the city. These services are important to aid in integrating modern SRO subpopulations back into the community. The same sense of community that helped women and the gay community find social mobility can help returning veterans and single elderly residents find similar independence.

The economic benefits of preserving SRO hotels lies both within the building itself and the nature of the building use. The hotels provide a necessary service to a wide range of residents, not only to the stereotypical drunk bum. Veterans and elderly residents also need the services and help found in supportive housing SROs. The hotels were built for housing, and the fact that new hotels are being built indicates the usefulness of the building type. In addition to the funds available for low-income housing, SRO rehabilitation can use additional HUD money from SRO rehab grants, as well as the 20% historic rehabilitation tax credit. The tax credit requires a proper rehabilitation, following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, however this does not mean it is impossible. The process has been used many times before.

IV. Moving Forward in Preserving SRO Hotels

Historic preservation has long neglected the unique cultural value of single-room occupancy hotels. It is therefore necessary for preservationists to actively engage in rehabilitating historic SRO hotels, whether for middle-class mixed-use developments or supportive housing projects. The mixed income of many hotel districts can become a blueprint for how new developments in inner cities can be developed. The diversity of SRO districts, both socially and economically, help to support a plethora of businesses that, in turn, serve the community. This unique socioeconomic model of SRO districts serves as a reminder that historic preservation can serve as more than house museums, but also provide a lesson on how to move forward.

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