This thesis examines the potential of popular media to be a positive educational tool for historic preservation. The current methods of educating the general public about historic preservation are briefly analyzed, as well as the influence of popular media. Nine case studies, from current television programs and magazines, are presented as examples of preservation representation. Necessary changes in popular media’s message are discussed and several related topics for future research are proposed.

INDEX WORDS: Historic preservation, Historic preservation education, Popular media, Home and Garden Television, Arts and Entertainment Channel, Old House Journal, This Old House, House Beautiful, Better Homes and Gardens
POPULAR MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR PRESERVATION EDUCATION

by

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This thesis is dedicated to my mother, for her strength, support and love.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

“The current pace of preservation effort is not enough. It is as though the preservation
movement were trying to travel up a down escalator.”¹

This quote from With Heritage So Rich illustrates a sentiment as valid today as it was in
1966. Published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1966, this provocative book
directly influenced the creation of the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The
NHPA established the provisions that are the basis for historic preservation today. Despite the
success of these provisions, preservation still lacks broader appeal. Current newsletters,
fundraisers, conventions and conferences target those already associated with the preservation
field. This “preaching to the choir” mentality often misses perhaps the most important
preservation constituency: the general public. In his book, A Richer Heritage, Robert Stipe said:
“The challenge is to demonstrate the relationship between material culture - a building, a group
of buildings, a landscape, a structure, an archaeological site - with the larger set of intangible
social and environmental values we (preservationists) seek to portray and preserve. But are the
finite, descriptive emphases on material culture found in the Venice charter, or in the National
Register criteria or the Secretary’s Standards, the best way to describe the totality or range of
values we seek to promote? How do we move beyond the traditional ways of defining who we
are and what we do, and how do we explain persuasively to a larger public?”²

¹ National Trust for Historic Preservation, With Heritage So Rich (New York: Random House, 1966; reprint,
Methods of effectively educating the general public have been a long standing issue in preservation. Preservation advice and information are available to the public through three general outlets: 1. nonprofit organizations and established preservation groups, 2. house museums, and 3. the media. The first two areas will only be explored briefly, as these two areas require that interested individuals seek out for themselves opportunities to be educated. The focus of this study is the use of popular media as a tool for efficient and effective preservation education. This thesis will seek to demonstrate where current popular media is successful and where it needs improvement.

Popular media is divided into electronic media and print media. Electronic media consists of radio, television, film and the internet. Print media is books, magazines, newspapers and even junk mail. For the purpose of this thesis, only television and magazines were examined. Radio and newspapers were omitted due to their limited geographical distribution. The overwhelming amount of information available on the Internet makes it too broad for inclusion in this thesis, though it could be the sole topic to explore in another. Finally, books were used as references for information to support ideas, but not as topics of study. This thesis focuses on the readily available media sources that reach the largest number of people. For the remainder of this thesis, television and magazines will not be referred to as electronic media and print media, but will be addressed under the generic term: media.

Several magazines were included in this study. Years of publication range from 2002 to early 2006. Over 90 hours of television programming was reviewed for this thesis, dating from December 2005 to March 2006. These programs were from the cable channels Home and Garden Television (HGTV) and the Arts and Entertainment Channel (A&E). Magazine titles and programs will be discussed in a later chapter.
CHAPTER 2

Current Efforts in Preservation Education

Nonprofit Organizations and other Preservation Groups

Current historic preservation education for the general public is limited. Most preservation non-profit organizations offer educational programs for their local area. Some of these programs are aimed at school children in an effort to encourage heritage preservation interest at an early age. However, the current curricula in public schools offers little time to add additional subjects and every other special interest group is vying for those same precious minutes. Many programs are aimed at local citizens and can be in the form of brochures, posters or fund raising events, such as auctions or concerts. These programs vary in their success, as many non-profits suffer from a lack of funding and a lack of volunteers. Sometimes the best ideas cannot be implemented due to these impediments. Another major obstacle for non-profit education efforts is the stubbornness of the public. People, as a general rule, attempt to avoid persuasion and often become incensed when they feel others are trying to influence them. This “no one is going to tell me what to do” attitude can alienate the non-profit from the local public.

In 1976, James Biddle, President of the National Trust, wrote in his introduction to America’s Forgotten Architecture that the book “should put to rest forever that arbitrary habit of
singling out environmentalists and preservationists as ‘them’-the other side. There is only one environment out there, and what happens to it is not up to any vague or far-removed ‘them’, but to us.”3

Most non-profit support comes from those already interested in historic preservation. Fund-raising activities, educational outings and informative materials are directed at members whose time and money are already invested in the organization. While this practice serves to maintain the organization financially, it does little to encourage education of the general public.

Other preservation groups, such as the State Historic Preservation Office and the Historic Preservation Division of the National Park Service, offer advice or technical assistance. Several web sites, including the National Park Service, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, offer extensive information on preservation. The main problem with these avenues of preservation education is that a prior interest is required to access these groups or sites.

The Historic House Museum

Another common form of preservation public education is the historic house museum. House museums provide a tangible link to the past and allow the visitor to see, smell and touch history. They provide the visitor the ability to see historic artifacts in a period setting. This “back in time” experience is partially why house museums are so successful.

Despite the great benefit of this physical link, house museums face several issues. “Their main deficiency, in light of contemporary knowledge and cultural attitudes, is the elitist, upper-

class bias of their interpretation, educational programs and publications.”4 This possibly extends from preservation’s upper-class roots, but is more likely a stigma assigned by the general public itself, as most house museums are high style and former homes of the famous and influential. These fancy spaces are, by their very nature, automatically interpreted as arrogant.

Often the interpretation of house museums and their accuracy are questionable. The general public does not always realize the authenticity of what they are viewing, and this ignorance sometimes leads to indifference. Diane Barthel relates one example in her book *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity*.

“The public visits historic sites to see the evidence, to get in touch with history. Their encounter with history is not, however, an unproblematic one. The public implicitly accepts that what it sees is the real thing. But authenticity, as preservationists recognize, is an elusive goal. For example, the historic Huntington Hotel in Pasadena, California, was razed to the ground despite a concerted campaign waged by preservationists. In its stead, a brand new hotel was erected, nostalgically incorporating the earlier hotel’s name, exterior appearance and even specific architectural and interior features.

The public appeared delighted with this phoenix, much to the chagrin of editor Arnold Burke of Historic Preservation News, the newsletter of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. As he cautioned his colleagues, ‘The general public does not think of preservation as preservationists do-as the comprehensive practice of saving, preserving or restoring, reusing and interpreting a large and varied number of old buildings, structures, vessels and sites. The public pictures preservation far more generally as a movement that tries to save landmarks.’ Coming to the point he concluded, ‘The nature of those landmarks and of the preservation process is not something people dwell on.’ It’s the end result they care about, and whether what they see seems to do the job as a social marker as well as or better than what was there before.’5

Some people find the actual house museum experience frustrating. The personality of the docent, the pace of the tour and the restricted path via velvet ropes can be grating, despite an interest in the site and the accuracy of the interpretation. The most popular house museums often require extensive waits in long lines for admission, only to be rushed through and pushed into a

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5 Barthel, 7.
museum shop. “An exhibit can be authentic and credible without being pleasing, educational without being entertaining.”\textsuperscript{6} In an effort to draw more crowds, many historic sites and house museums have started offering movies, interactive exhibits and multiple sites on one ticket.

The question arises: are house museums and exhibits an antiquated way of educating the public compared to modern technology and popular media? Absolutely not; house museums will continue to have an important place in preservation education due to the physical link to history. Seeing a photo of a space does not compare to actually walking through it. “The physicality of the exhibited objects provides at least the potential of a direct link between contemporary viewer and historical period, above and apart from the interpretive sound. With the media, the direct physical link is missing. We have only the images of the screen or in the magazine.”\textsuperscript{7}

The Media

Media has an advantage over the house museum in the numbers of people that can be affected by publications and television. It is a form of potential education that is easily accessible to everyone and can influence the preservation attitude of the general public without their even realizing it. Many people lack the money for admission to a house museum or the ability to travel to historic sites. They may be unwilling to join a preservation organization, but everyone has access to media. It is accessible at the bookstore, at the grocery or just by flipping channels at home. The strength of the media as an educational tool is that it provides the opportunity for education without leaving a personal comfort zone. Robert Stipe points out the billions of dollars spent on preservation work and that “preservation in America has become a major industry, thanks to public television’s “This Old House” and the emergence of the do-it-yourself

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid, 72.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid, 119.
industry…” However, he also counters, “Programs tailored and targeted to commercial, primetime TV viewers would reach a much larger audience than a three hour special on public television. Here, once again, is an area where larger institutional backing that reaches beyond existing preservation organizations could be of immeasurable help.”

Stipe complains that programs tailored to preservation are not currently available on national primetime TV. Yet he also mentions “This Old House” and credits the program with encouraging private sector preservation involvement. Is he saying that there are not enough programs, or that the one he mentions does not do a sufficient job? This conflict highlights the issues facing preservation on television…and popular media in general. Are programs showing any modification to historic buildings or structures considered a preservation presence on TV? What do these media representations teach the public about preservation? To answer these questions, we must examine the way preservation is represented in the media and the message that is being sent to the general public.

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8 Stipe, 477.
9 Ibid, 479.
CHAPTER 3

Research Selections and Influence of the Media

Several magazines and television programs were reviewed as research for this thesis. The following list contains the names of the publications and programs and a brief description of their main intent.

The Magazines

This Old House Magazine – This magazine is probably the most popular preservation publication due to the exposure of its multiple companions on television. The magazine features articles on various topics such as historic hardware, window performance, drywall installation and home organization. The emphasis in most of the articles is on older homes. The magazine, started in 1995, and TV programs feature several personalities that have become well known to the readers. Each of these personalities has a professional specialty and they answer questions submitted to readers concerning specific old house concerns.

Old House Journal- A product of the Clem Labine preservation empire, Old House Journal is similar to This Old House in content, but without the accompanying personalities. First published in 1973, Old House Journal does not focus on specific reader queries, but does seem to make an effort to educate its readers concerning preservation terminology, financial benefits and regulatory practices more than This Old House.
**Old House Interiors**- Published since 1995, *Old House Interiors* divides its coverage between actual historic homes and period inspired homes. As the focus is interiors, most of the content concerns furniture and finishes.

**Southern Living**- Since 1966, this enormously popular magazine has been known for its travel tips and delicious recipes. Southern architecture, both new construction and older homes, are usually covered in every issue as well.

**Better Homes and Gardens**- First published in 1924, Better Homes and Gardens is another magazine that mainly concentrates on gardening, entertaining, and recipes, but also regularly features articles on older homes and their owners.

**Southern Accents**- This magazine, started in 1977, covers a variety of topics in each issue, including decorating, travel and antiques. There is also a preservation section in most issues which often covers topics not normally mentioned in other “home fashion” magazines. For example, the September/October 2005 issue highlighted four preservation leaders in North Carolina, describing their individual successes and future hopes.

**House Beautiful**- Published since 1896, this magazine focuses on house decorating, but also frequently includes articles on older homes.

**The Television Programs**

“**This Old House Classics**”- The television version of the popular magazine, “This Old House Classics” is broadcast on HGTV, A&E, and Public Broadcasting networks. It features the personalities made popular in the magazine and follows the renovation of one house at a time, from start to finish, in a series of episodes.
“Ask This Old House”- A television version of the question and answer section of *This Old House* magazine, the program usually answers three or four reader questions per episode concerning old house problems. The program, aired on A&E, goes to the home of the selected reader and helps them solve the problem while explaining the process to the viewers.

“Inside This Old House”- Another spin-off of the *This Old House* magazine, “Inside This Old House”, broadcast on A&E, takes two topics per episode concerning older homes and thoroughly explains to viewers how to incorporate the tips shown into their own home renovation.

“Generation Renovation”- This daily program on HGTV focuses on the rehabilitation of three older buildings per episode. Due to the rehabilitation focus, this program became a main target of research for this thesis. Most of the buildings featured are houses, although occasionally a barn or commercial building was shown. The modifications range from minor additions to complete transformations. Positive examples on this program were rare. The host of the show, Gaard Swanson, has a habit of using negative adjectives to describe anything old, with “nasty” being his favorite.

“ReZONED”- This program on HGTV is similar to “Generation Renovation,” except that the focus is on non-residential spaces converted to single family residences. Former commercial buildings are most often shown, although churches, factories and grain silos have also been shown. These conversions often include major demolition as the original intent of the buildings did not support living spaces.

“Flip This House”- This program on A&E follows the money making endeavors of Trademark Properties, a company located in Charleston, South Carolina. They buy older homes and “flip”, or renovate, the houses within two weeks, doing whatever is necessary to get the
resale. The owner of the company walks through the subject house at the beginning of each episode and points out the significant historic characteristics, not because he appreciates the architectural integrity, but because he can ask a higher price. The quick turn-a-round time always insures major demolition.

“Buy Me”- Another program that focuses on the resale of older properties, “Buy Me” on HGTV is usually milder than its A&E counterpart, “Flip This House.” The emphasis is on modifying the space to make it more appealing to buyers. Minor demolition is often included, but the majority of the work is cosmetic.

“Before & After”- This program on HGTV follows the rehabilitation of one house from start to finish. Demolition is usually minor, but occasional examples feature complete removal of interior walls.

Several other shows on HGTV feature cosmetic work on older homes. This work is almost always limited to paint, furniture and landscaping. These shows include “Room to Improve,” “Curb Appeal,” “Divine Design” and “Design on a Dime.” “House Detective” also features older homes, but focuses on house inspection and solving the problems found.

It is interesting to note the lack of publications and programs that focus strictly on preservation. It is reasonable to assume that there is a direct correlation between the deficiency of information outlets available to the public and the lack of public knowledge. Of the magazines, only three focus on preservation. The others are preservation conscious, but do not always identify the articles are preservation related. Most simply feature stories about old houses while omitting relevant preservation information such as the appropriateness of modifications or the involvement of a local preservation commission. Despite the fact that most of the magazines did
not focus on preservation, magazines, in general, were far more sensitive toward preservation than television.

Of the television programs, the “This Old House” series, “Generation Renovation, and “ReZONED” focus on historic buildings and rehabilitation. However, as the following chapters will demonstrate, these programs do not always accurately portray preservation, despite their concentration on historic buildings.

Influence of the Media

The amount of influence the media has on the general public has been actively debated in recent years. Although most studies focus on the political ramifications of media’s power, several opinions concerning the general influence of media have also been published. Some have “suggested that the media destroys the individual’s capacity to act autonomously.”

However, Professor John Thompson of the University of Cambridge, who studies sociology of the media, thinks that individuals do not absorb information from the media passively. He suggests that the information the general public receives from media is personally interpreted and transformed into personal knowledge. If the information received from media is accurate, then the subsequent knowledge is a benefit to the individual and society. In this situation, media is a positive educational tool. The opposite is also true. When poor or

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
erroneous information is relayed through media, the general public, uneducated in the subject discussed, will form inaccurate opinions that can have a detrimental effect on the way that subject is perceived.

This theory of media perception, when applied to historic preservation, questions the interpretation of preservation information received from the media. Positive preservation presentation should include sensitive and respectful treatment of historic buildings and structures, explanation of the regulatory processes, and encouragement of responsible stewardship and public involvement. While demonstrating appropriate solutions to preservation dilemmas, popular inappropriate notions of preservation could be debunked. One study stated that “media provides an invaluable source of multicultural information which enriches one’s perception of the world and of life and allows for a well-balanced opinion.”\textsuperscript{13} When media is used as a positive educational tool, perhaps media does contribute to a well-balanced opinion. But a truly well-balanced opinion can only come from being aware of the pros and cons of a situation, and that knowledge comes from education.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
CHAPTER 4

Case Studies

Introduction to Case Studies

Most of the media viewed for research showed basic modifications with varying degrees of sensitivity and/or common sense. The examples chosen as case studies do not necessarily represent the best or worst examples of preservation shown in the media, although the examples shown do demonstrate the range of preservation representation. Each of them makes a different statement about the messages that are being sent to the general public. Some are more obvious than others, but all are issues that face the modern preservationist.

It should be noted that, even among preservationists, there is always discussion about the appropriateness of particular modifications. Some preservationists lean toward a purist stance, while others are more liberal. The opinions expressed in this thesis are strictly those of the author and, in many instances, The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards have been quoted as justification for those opinions. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards are published by The National Park Service and are guidelines for the appropriate treatment of historic buildings.

1. “This Old House Classics,” HGTV, January/February 2006

“This Old House Classics” on HGTV featured a series of episodes detailing the rehabilitation of an 1865 Second Empire style townhouse in Boston. The project was also featured in an article in This Old House magazine in Fall 2001. Dan and Heather Beliveau
bought the corner lot in 2000 to convert the basement and first floor into a rental space while utilizing the top two floors for their own home.\textsuperscript{14} Due to the division of the space into separate living areas, new entry doors had to be created and egress windows added. Eager to capture the maximum square footage allowed for their lot size, the couple decided to build onto a flat roof at the rear of their top floor. Because the neighboring buildings blocked the view of the harbor, Mr. and Mrs. Beliveau also decided to flatten part of their mansard roof to add a roof-top deck.

One of the show’s hosts, Norm Abrams, toured a neighbor’s townhouse to demonstrate a nearby rehabilitation success. The single woman proudly pointed out her restored windows and period appropriate light fixtures and wallpaper patterns. “I tried not to demo where I could,” she said.\textsuperscript{15} However, the lack of a harbor view led her to completely remove the roof from her townhouse in order to add a fourth floor, creating enough height to see the water. After examining the old roofline, still visible on the interior, the ever-cheerful host said of the addition and resulting view: “Wow, it was worth it!”\textsuperscript{16} This comment was one of many inappropriate remarks made by the hosts, as it infers that a harbor view was justification for the complete removal of the historic roof. This act violates several of the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, including Standard number two, which states: “The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.”\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} “This Old House Classics,” Episode TOH-2201, Home & Garden Television (7:00am, 21 January 2006).
\textsuperscript{15} “This Old House Classics,” Episode TOH-2202, Home & Garden Television (7:30am, 21 January 2006).
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
The owners of the subject townhouse hired an architect to help them through their rehabilitation. They did veto his suggestion to make the rooftop addition a modern style with submarine “light scoop” windows, but he did successfully lobby for larger openings and some additional demolition. The final appearance of the rooftop addition, as well as the approval granted by the local preservation commission, may be debatable. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, number nine, states: “New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the historic property and its environment.” The ultra modern submarine proposal does not meet the Standards due to its massing and differing architectural features. The second proposal maintains those elements but

18 “This Old House Classics,” Episode TOH-2203, Home & Garden Television (7:00am, 28 January 2006).
19 National Park Service.
the proposed materials were never mentioned. This addition would meet the Standards if the materials do not attempt to match the originals exactly. As the meeting with preservation commission was not shown, the basis for their approval of the second proposal is not known. The same can be said for the commission’s approval of the rooftop deck. The alteration of the mansard roof would also violate the Standards, in particular numbers two, quoted above, and five: “Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.”

Certainly, a mansard roof on a Second Empire style building would qualify as a distinctive feature, but the reasons for approval were not discussed.

The series followed the project as kitchen chimneys were removed, windows were replaced, new stairs added, basement brick piers were replaced with pipe columns and concrete floors poured. Throughout, the hosts praised the modifications and additions, declaring them more economical, reliable or just better looking.

Figure 2 “Light scoop” architectural rendering, “This Old House Classics.” . Still image by author.

\[\text{20 Ibid.}\]
It should be noted that many of the changes made were necessary due to the deteriorated condition of original materials, codes or the basic modernization of the building. However, even when presented with major demolition of viable historic fabric, “This Old House Classics” did not raise objections or offer alternative solutions on camera. Both the magazine and program present a special problem concerning preservation in the media. The hosts of the show undoubtedly know what they are doing and are very knowledgeable, but do not always apply their knowledge or skills to create sensitive solutions. *This Old House* is the most recognizable preservation presence in the media. Even Robert Stipe, as quoted in Chapter 2, credits the program with encouraging private sector involvement in preservation. As a trusted source of preservation information for the general public, “This Old House Classics,” the television program, should be more consistent in its effort to responsibly educate its viewers.


Dove Hill was constructed in 1903 in St. Paul, Minnesota and was featured on HGTV’s “Generation Renovation” on January 23, 2006. The 45 room Georgian Revival style house
endured several uses including a convention center and yoga studio before it was purchased by Nancy Nicholson for use as a single family residence. The house appeared structurally sound but required major cosmetic repair. Several rooms featured intricate plaster work and wood moldings. The library was paneled in mahogany with carved pilasters and the ceiling had plaster ribbon-work. “In the library, her goal was to keep that incredible ceiling and all the mahogany intact.”21 Hand touch operated wall sconces were mounted in a way to avoid damage to any wood trim and the rest of the light fixtures in the house are controlled by remote to prevent the application of electrical switch plates on the walls.

In the kitchen, she kept the original sink and cabinets, choosing to re-stain the original cabinets rather than replace them. Unlike most other examples in which the owners assume that older cabinets are unusable, here the owner demonstrates the successful reuse of original materials. To avoid the contrast of modern appliances in the kitchen, Ms. Nicholson had a custom island created to match the original cabinets that contained the drawer refrigerators, dishwasher and trash compactor.

Figure 4  Library at Dove Hill, “Generation Renovation.” Still image by author.

21 “Generation Renovation,” Episode HGREN-209, Home & Garden Television (6:00pm, 23 January 2006).
The mansion featured a massive mahogany paneled ballroom with a domed geometric pattern plaster ceiling incorporating skylights, originally installed in 1912. The ceiling and skylights were repaired, as was the ballroom’s pipe organ.

This house is very high style and the average viewer may dismiss the amount of effort put into the rehabilitation as a rich person’s endeavor of conspicuous consumption. While high style houses can be more expensive to rehabilitate, they often inspire the owners to salvage more of the original material due to the amount of detail frequently present. This example shows the owner’s dedication to restore her home to its original grandeur. It is very acceptable for modern

\(^{22}\) Ibid.
conveniences to be installed in a historic house, as these conveniences make the house a comfortable and efficient home for today’s owners. In this example, however, creating a location for modern appliances in the historic kitchen would have necessitated the removal of original cabinetry. Likewise, the original woodwork would have been damaged by the installation of electrical switch plates. The owner’s clever disguise of the kitchen appliances and remote controlled light fixtures prove that modern conveniences can be incorporated into a historic home without destruction of original materials.

Figure 6  Ballroom at Dove Hill, “Generation Renovation.” Still image by author.


A 1920’s stone house in Winchester County, New York, was the subject of an article in *House Beautiful*, entitled “Back in Time.” The owners of the house are referred to only as “the

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wife” or “the husband”, and the only exterior photo of the house shows the building half obscured by foliage.

The couple was disappointed in the house because it did not contain a home theater and they felt the kitchen was too small. “We began to realize that the architecture was optimum for 1920, but not for today. We didn’t have an eat-in kitchen or a comfortable place to watch a movie together.” “Achieving these seemingly simple wishes was complicated by a back staircase that ran from the basement to the third floor, directly through the ideal spots for a new kitchen and home theater.” To solve the problem, the couple demolished half of the house and rebuilt two-thirds of it. “The result, say the owners, looks indistinguishable from the old, and possibly even better.”

This is an excellent example of owners wanting to insert modern spaces into an older house, although in this case, the owners chose to demolish most of the house instead of adding the typical addition. This alternative not only destroys the interior spatial arrangements but the original footprint of the house. The average reader may believe that the owner’s solution in this article is an ideal way to preserve the exterior charm of an older house while adding all of the conveniences of modern construction. Unfortunately, before and after floor plans were not included with the article, nor was a before photograph. It is not known if there was any preservation commission involvement in this project. However, the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, number nine, quoted earlier, states that new work shall be differentiated from the old. In addition, Standard number ten states: New additions or adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and

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24 Ibid, 94.  
25 Ibid, 95.  
26 Ibid.
integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.”27 The owners believe that the work they have done is indistinguishable from the original, implying that they are attempting to mislead passers-by concerning the original exterior. Obviously, the amount of destruction incurred in the changes makes any potential return to the original form impossible. This article conveys the message that any amount of destruction is acceptable as long as the end result conceals the evidence. The better solution would have been to demonstrate how to sensitively include the sought-after modern conveniences.

Figure 7  Subject house, “Back in Time.”

27 National Park Service.

“So eager was the Meyers family to live on just the right street in just the right neighborhood…” begins the article titled “Open House” in September 2005’s *Better Homes and Gardens*.28 Architect George Meyer and his wife purchased a 1500 square foot Dutch Colonial Revival style house and enlarged it to 5000 square feet, which involved “months of planning and work with the Kensington (Maryland) Historical Society. They were concerned that tripling the size of the house would overwhelm the original house.”29 The result was that most of the additional square footage was added in the rear of the house. The open plan concept was incorporated, which resulted in a “new, open, kid-friendly layout.”30 “I like to see across the house into multiple spaces, like from the front hallway to the back family room,” Mr. Meyers said.31 Mrs. Meyers teased her architect husband about future remodeling projects. “She says I have a building disorder. I can’t help it – It’s what I love to do,” he said. He then adds, “There are always out-buildings I can plan.”32

This example demonstrates the power of location. The couple chose to convert the only house available in the desired neighborhood into a modern house inside a partial historic shell. In this instance, the modifications are only slightly tempered by the local preservation organization. Although a before photograph was not include in the article, the floor plans show that the façade was altered by the enlargement of the entry porch. Alteration of the façade is usually discouraged by preservation commissions, but the extent of their involvement is unclear. If the open plan concept had been applied to the new construction only, the result would have been far more sensitive. As the floor plans show, however, the interior walls were removed in the

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29 Ibid, 219-220.
30 Ibid, 222.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
historic areas as well. Again, it would have been better if the magazine had demonstrated more sensitive solutions to the owner’s dilemmas. Similar to the previous case study, this article is focused on the transformation of a historic space into a modern home plan, without regard to the original layout.

Figure 8  Before and After floor plans for the Meyer home.
The conversion of a typewriter company into a single family residence was the subject of HGTV’s ReZONED on January 15, 2006. Cecil and Mary Jane Steward had wanted to move into Lincoln, Nebraska from the suburbs for some time, but could not find a suitable location. “We had been interested in living downtown, we had looked at a couple of other places that didn’t work,” Mrs. Steward said. It was Mr. Steward that discovered the abandoned typewriter company building. “Cecil found something he was sure would work. As the University of Nebraska Dean of Architecture, he instantly had a vision. While he spotted the potential right away, Mary Jane wasn’t sure it was her type of place.” “I know my husband is a really good architect, but I don’t think he can do anything with this building,” she recalled thinking.

The 5000 square foot building now has a zen garden to separate the public sidewalk from the private entry and a thirty foot high living room ceiling inside. The couple removed half of the

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33 “ReZONED,” Episode HREZD-109, Home & Garden Television (7:00pm, 15 January 2006).
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
second floor to create a loft area, now containing two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a library.

“We destroyed 2500 square feet in order to get this height in the living room and to get that garden opening,” Mr. Steward said.

Figure 10 New loft area, “ReZONED.” Still image by author.

Figure 11 Typewriter building prior to rehabilitation, “ReZONED.” Still image by author.
This episode is an example of the creativity of professionals transforming spaces that would not have been approached by the average person. This type of rehabilitation sparks controversy among even the preservation faithful. Is extreme demolition acceptable if the building is unusable without it? There is little doubt that the typewriter company building was unsuitable for a residence prior to the modifications, but was the extent of the modifications necessary? While this question may not be answered easily, it is very clear that the rehabilitation was made possible by the experience of the architect owner. Although the demolition was extreme and his Asian decorating unsuitable to the building’s style, his direction allowed the successful transformation of a former commercial space into a family home. The message this episode sends to the public is that old buildings can have a second life, even one vastly different from its original.


A 1903 San Francisco Victorian house owned by Stephen Lewis and Barbara Pollak was featured on HGTV’s “Generation Renovation” on February 9, 2006. The house featured the formal division of interior spaces typical of the era. Ms. Pollak was unimpressed with the house prior to their renovation: “The outside was okay, but once you walked in, the rooms were really small, ugly paneling everywhere, the kitchen was completely unusable.”37 Host Gaard Swanson summarized the changes made to the house: “The couple knocked down walls to open up the living room, bumped out the back of the house to create a new kitchen and upstairs…a new

37 “Generation Renovation,” Episode HGREN-309, Home & Garden Television (6:00pm, 9 February 2006).
master suite.” Because the owners wanted a “loft” look, they added massive cedar beams to compensate for the loss of load bearing walls.

The modifications shown in this episode fail to comply with The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, in particular number two, which cautions against the removal or alteration of historic spaces. The couple completely destroyed the interior spatial arrangement of the house to create an interior incompatible with the style of the house. This example demonstrates to the typical viewer that the style of a house need not be considered during interior renovations and that original spatial arrangements are completely expendable. A more responsible episode would feature ways to implement the couple’s unique style without compromising the integrity of the house.

Figure 12 Cedar beams used in an open plan, “Generation Renovation.” Still image by author.

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
Rick and Kathleen Bailey’s 1850’s Victorian style farmhouse in Maryland was the subject of the January 24, 2006 “Generation Renovation” on HGTV. The couple moved the house across their own property so they could have creek vistas from the second floor. “We couldn’t move the water to the house, so it was easier to move the house to the water,” said Mrs. Bailey. The floor in the family room, formerly the kitchen, was lowered to accommodate ceiling fans, and new floor to ceiling windows were added to allow more light. Walls were removed to open the family room to the kitchen. “I don’t like being walled off,” Mrs. Bailey stated. The Bailey’s biggest problem with the house was in the foyer. “The grand old staircase needed a grander setting, so Rick and Kath opened up the foyer with a trimmed out tower.” The couple removed the ceiling in the foyer and added a multi-story tower to the front of the house, creating a new entry and foyer. Mrs. Bailey explains, “It just felt flat…didn’t feel right…just felt closed in.” To finish their renovation, the couple added fanciful trim unoriginal to the house on the exterior.

The average viewer would probably think that the tower was a wonderful addition to the old farmhouse; after all, towers and turrets were common features in Victorian architecture. However, as a farmhouse, the tower is out of character, as well as other elements that the couple added. The couple took a formal foyer typical of 1850’s Victorian architecture and turned it into a modern 2 story foyer. The trim on the exterior of the house was also typical of high-style Victorian houses, but adding such fancy moldings to the farmhouse was misrepresenting the building’s past. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, number three, states: “Each property

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40 “Generation Renovation,” Episode HGREN-210, Home & Garden Television (6:00pm, 24 January 2006).
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other historical buildings, shall not be undertaken.\textsuperscript{44} This example is one that is especially misleading to the general public as it leads the average viewer to believe that any element typical of the period belongs on or in any house of that same period, regardless of the original intent or use of the structure.

Figure 13  Victorian farmhouse, Before, “Generation Renovation.” (Note: Image is reversed.) Still image by author.

\textsuperscript{44} National Park Service.

“Generation Renovation” on January 31, 2006 featured a 1920’s shotgun house in Kansas. Owners Kim and Tracy Sterns said of the house, “It was awful. It was disgusting.”45 Everything but the location, that is. The couple transformed a one story clapboard house into a two story gabled ell with metal board and batten style siding. Host Gaard Swanson called the house “the funkiest farmhouse in Kansas.”46 Despite the obvious disregard for the architectural style of the house, the most disturbing part of this segment, and the reason for including it as a case study, was the couple describing their demolition efforts. Mr. Sterns said of removing an

45 “Generation Renovation,” Episode HGREN-302, Home & Garden Television (6:00pm, 31 January 2006).
46 Ibid.
addition: “We see on the shows and everything, where people rip something off by hauling it with a truck. So we thought, just for fun, we’d try to get it ripped down with my tractor.”  

While large equipment is often used to aid in demolition, it is a technique best left to those with demolition experience. When executed by uneducated and inexperienced homeowners, this technique can cause serious damage to the main structure and be extremely dangerous. This example demonstrates the influence of media on uneducated viewers and the irresponsible use of information received from media.

Figure 15  Demolition using tractor, “Generation Renovation.” Still image by author.

47 Ibid.

All preservation represented in the media does not emphasize physical modifications. Stewardship is the topic of an article featured in *Old House Journal*, entitled “Pass It On.” The cottage in this article was designed by Prairie School architect William Grey Purcell as the home of his construction foreman, Fritz Carlson. The house had remained unchanged when Richard Mann purchased it in 1988. Intrigued by the architecture, Mr. Mann researched the architect and Prairie School architecture. “Living in the house deepened his appreciation for Purcell and the architecture of the Prairie School.” Many interior fixtures were also designed by Purcell’s architectural firm and Mr. Mann refused to remove these key elements. “He turned down a substantial amount of money for the light fixture in the dining room.” The fixture was a key part of the house. We felt the integrity of the house depended on it,” said Mr. Mann.

Mr. Mann sold the cottage to Charlie Koch in 1997. Mr. Koch was impressed with Mr. Mann’s preservation philosophy. “Understanding Richard’s stewardship, I wanted to follow,” Mr. Koch stated. He also researched the architect and even interviewed Carlson family members concerning their memories of the house. “Like Richard Mann before him, Koch is cautious about any move that might disrupt the integrity of the house.”

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49 Ibid., 57.
50 Ibid., 58.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 59.
54 Ibid.
Figure 16  Subject cottage, “Pass It On.”

Figure 17  Original rendering of cottage, “Pass It On.”
Without flashy pictures and demolition, this article is not likely to attract the attention of the average reader uneducated in preservation. The thought that these men and their families have chosen to live in an old house, without adding on conspicuous additions to contain various spaces deemed imperative to modern living, would probably puzzle most people. Another person’s respect for a high-style house and its architectural significance is something that the general public can understand, even if they are often unwilling to show the same respect themselves. But respect for the architecture of a small cottage would most likely be incomprehensible. It is this lack of respect that is at the center of the general public’s lack of preservation understanding.

Notes Concerning Case Studies

As these cases demonstrate, the message being sent by the media concerning preservation is not entirely negative. However, the positive examples are definitely in the minority. These examples show that the media’s representation of preservation is not limited to simple modifications, but range from responsible stewardship to irresponsible replications of previous media presentations. The degree of responsibility in these cases was not established by the size or prestige of the structure or by the presence of supposedly knowledgeable help. The positive examples featured individuals who were sensitive to the architectural significance of their homes and did the necessary research to make appropriate decisions. In short, the homeowners who were educated made the better preservation decisions.
CHAPTER 5

Portrayal of Preservation in the Media

General Overview

Most people do not have an ingrained sensitivity to the architectural beauty and integrity of historic buildings. They simply know what they want in a home and do what is necessary to transform what they have into what they desire. Older homes do require minor modifications to allow for certain modernizations necessary for living today. For example, plumbing, electrical and mechanical systems should be properly operational. Most homeowners want certain features in their homes that will allow them to live in comfort and security. Others are influenced by what is currently popular in modern construction. The most common modifications shown during research were kitchen enlargements, “opening up” the floor plan, and the creation of master suites. These changes are not necessarily wrong in concept, but often were achieved by very destructive methods. It is perfectly acceptable to make modifications to a historic building; however, it is the extent of the modifications that are often questioned. Some examples demonstrate very good solutions by thoughtful homeowners. It should be noted that all of these details are popular in modern new construction and are major selling points for new houses.

Other common themes emerged during the course of research. Most of the houses shown are not high-style architecture, but vernacular in design. Architects, designers, or other professionals were frequently featured, although the benefit of their expertise is debatable. Older homes as an investment was a common theme as was the blatant lack of general preservation
information, such as terminology, financial incentives, or the involvement of a local historic preservation commission.

**Kitchen Additions**

Kitchens were enlarged mainly by bumping out the rear of the house or adding a rear addition. Usually these additions were minor, allowing just enough space to incorporate modern kitchen appliances and a work island or eating area. Several examples incorporated larger additions and extreme modern décor. These modifications were often adverse to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, in particular number ten, which states: “New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.”

“Generation Renovation” on January 25, 2006, featured an eighteen foot expansion in the rear of a 1940’s Colonial Revival style house for the kitchen, into which the owners placed a dropped square grid ceiling, with each square containing an individually controlled fluorescent light.

The homeowners featured on another “Generation Renovation” episode, on January 31, 2006, demolished bedrooms and bathrooms on the first floor to create a 650 square foot kitchen and even raised the ceiling height to accommodate their new hood vent. This modification not only affected the first floor ceiling, but presumably, the second floor spatial arrangements as well.

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55 National Park Service.
56 Generation Renovation,” Episode HGREN-210, Home & Garden Television (6:00 pm, 24 January 2006).
57 Generation Renovation,” Episode HGREN-302, Home & Garden Television (6:00 pm, 31 January 2006).
When such significant changes are needed to create a space, better solutions would have been the purchase of a newer home or customized new construction. In most examples, kitchens were reconfigured to face another area of the house, which was made possible by the application of the open plan concept.

The Open Plan

Several reasons were cited by homeowners for wanting to incorporate the open plan concept, including additional light, room for entertaining and needed family space. However, this process of transforming a historic house into a modern space not only destroys the original spatial arrangements, but removes many of the character defining features that contribute to the architectural integrity of the house. This is a common practice that disturbs many preservationists. “If you want to transform an old home into a new home, then buy a new
home,” says Amy McFeetters-Krone, President of Building History, a preservation consultancy in Portland, Oregon. 

The majority of the house renovations shown, both in magazines and on television, featured the integration of the open plan concept. HGTV’s “Before and After,” on January 15, 2006, featured a 1940’s Cape Cod makeover in which the owner declared, “I’m trying to save the foundation and the outside four walls, nothing else.” Two separate “Generation Renovation” episodes featured Eichler houses in which the owners removed the trademark center wall to allow a view of the living room from the kitchen. Removal of character defining features is discouraged by the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, number two, which states: “The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.” Unfortunately, the owners are sometimes convinced to make these changes based on the advice of a professional. “Buy Me” on HGTV, February 12, 2006, featured a real estate agent who advised tearing out multiple walls in order to make the condo more marketable. “I find it difficult when I go into anybody’s home when I find a wall that I can’t take down,” she said.

The popularity of the open plan concept in modern construction is an impediment to convincing homeowners to leave the original spatial arrangements in historic homes. Media could demonstrate methods of creating an open atmosphere without totally removing interior walls. Enlarging openings or creating pass-throughs leave the walls in place while allowing the

59 “Before & After,” Episode BBA-913, Home & Garden Television (9:00 am, 15 January 2006).
60 “Generation Renovation,” Episode HGREN-303, Home & Garden Television (6:00 pm, 1 February 2006).
61 “Generation Renovation,” Episode HGREN-303, Home & Garden Television (6:00 pm, 2 February 2006).
62 National Park Service
63 Buy Me,” Episode HBYME-105, Home & Garden Television (11:00pm, 12 February 2006).
visual openness desired by homeowners. Media could emphasize the cost savings of the partial open plan as opposed to total demolition.

Figure 19  Center wall prior to removal from Eichler home, “Generation Renovation.” Still image by author.

The Master Suite

While the open plan concept is the biggest factor in the demolition of the first floor, the most common cause for demolition on the second floor is the creation of the master suite. Programs, more so than magazines, demonstrated the overwhelming desire of homeowners to create expansive master suites with attached palatial bathrooms, spaces popular in modern construction, in their historic homes. While a few examples chose to locate this space in the attic or basement, the most common avenue to create the square footage necessary to accommodate the master suite was to demolish all of the smaller rooms on the second floor to create one large space. Another important part of creating a modern master suite is the cathedral ceiling, achieved by removing the ceiling and transforming the attic space into a vaulted area. One example, on the
February 1, 2006 “Generation Renovation,” featured homeowners who demolished all of the rooms on the second floor as well as an attic loft to create one large master suite with a cathedral ceiling, complete with multiple remote controlled skylights. The host believed, “the high tech features blend perfectly with the original hardware and trim.”

While it is acceptable to make minor modifications, the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, number two, discourages the removal of spaces that characterize a property. It is reasonable to assume that removing all of the individual rooms on the second floor would not be compatible with this standard. As with the open plan concept, a newly constructed house would be a better choice for owners if such an elaborate master bedroom suite is considered absolutely necessary.

Figure 20  New master bedroom suite, “Generation Renovation.” Still image by author.

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64 “Generation Renovation,” Episode HGREN-303.
65 National Park Service.
Professionals in Preservation

How excusable are insensitive modifications and inappropriate additions by those who are not educated in a preservation-related field? Some would argue that these homeowners simply did not know better. Several of the rehabilitations incorporated professional help, although this help did not always result in the most preservation-friendly products. While this may be surprising to some, several preservationists have criticized the role of the modern professional in preservation. Clem Labine says “The architects to avoid are those who view an old house as a blank canvas upon which they can show off their own creativity. This type of architect is unable to subordinate his or her own ego to the original design concept of the house. They can’t wait to start tearing things out in order to make their “improvements.”66 This theory lends merit to the owner’s actions in Case Study number four.

James Marston Fitch blames the education system: “In these areas (architecture, landscape architecture, interior design), American undergraduate training has tended to be ahistorical, if not, indeed, antihistorical. On the one hand, it encourages them (students) to impose their own subjective tastes upon a building to be restored instead of accepting its own aesthetic parameters. On the other, an ahistorical training leads them consistently to underestimate the physical and economic viability of any old structure.”67

Despite these theories, the role of the architect was an interesting one to observe during research. Architects on television were generally more destructive than those depicted in print. Many of the magazines quoted architects as extremely sensitive to the integrity of their charges. Southern Accents quoted Charleston architect Glenn Keyes: “The goal was to take this very

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67 Fitch, 351.
significant house and add modern conveniences while preserving its historic character."68

Maryland architect Wayne Good was quoted in Southern Accents, “Respecting the architecture was key,” he said.69

Most of the homeowners featured on HGTV’s “ReZONED” were architects themselves. Most of the rehabilitations featured on this program contained heavy demolition, as the homes were formerly commercial buildings, warehouses or factories. Despite the destruction, it is interesting to ponder the feasibility of the conversions shown if not for the creativity of their architect owners.

High Style vs. The Ordinary House

Except for the rare high style house, most of the buildings shown were smaller “ordinary” houses or commercial buildings. Many of the cottages or bungalows featured are similar to those found in every city or town across America. There are those, even in the preservation field, that would argue that these common buildings are not worthy of special consideration. Others disagree. Clem Labine writes, “Every old house had an original design concept. This is true whether it was designed by a famous architect or an anonymous carpenter/builder. Discovering that basic design concept, and remaining true to it in your restoration, is the key to most successful old house revivals.”70 However, he also adds that properly renovating an ordinary house could be more difficult. “In some ways, it is harder to restore the ‘ordinary’ house than the historically important one. With the historical house, your course is clear: You want to make it as close to the historical original as possible. But with the ‘ordinary’ old house there is less

70 Labine, 24.
precedent to guide you.” It is worth noting that the high style houses shown suffered less
demolition and more sensitive treatment than the majority of their more ordinary counterparts.
This may be because high style houses contain more character defining features, features that
most likely contributed to the desire to purchase the house. High style homes often contain more
expensive materials that their ordinary neighbors, making even the most preservation unfriendly
owners loath to remove them.

Preservation as an Investment

Diane Barthel writes, “Historic preservation has emerged as an appropriate activity for
the investing of cultural capital, with the expectation of personal gain in status and financial
terms.” Stipe also mentions private sector investment: “The growth of private sector
involvement and investment in historic preservation has occurred in parallel with a changing
cultural ethos toward urban life and historical continuity in the United States.” But is the
public investing in historic preservation, or just investing? Comments made during programs and
in print confirm that people are moving into older neighborhoods because of the trendy nature of
these areas or proximity to urban conveniences. Certainly, the evidence presented in the media
implies that developers are merely taking advantage of the current popularity of these locales.
Older homes, in these instances, are not necessarily purchased for their architecture or history,
but for their location. Is private sector involvement and investment really about historic
preservation or personal financial gain? It is encouraging to believe that families and individuals
want to invest in historic neighborhoods. However, it is the developers, frequently featured in the
media, which are worrisome. Several programs, including A&E’s “Flip This House” and

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71 Ibid, 33.
72 Barthel, 12.
73 Stipe, 29.
HGTV’s “Buy Me,” focus on buying older properties, doing whatever is necessary to sell them quickly and making a profit. Historic details are noted on these programs, not for their beauty or craftsmanship, but for their ability to enlarge the selling price.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 21** Monetary benefits of historic details, “Flip This House.” Still image by author.

**General Preservation Information**

Finally, there is the issue of just how much effort popular media makes to seriously educate the reader or viewer concerning preservation. Several magazines, especially *This Old House* and *Old House Journal*, feature articles about specific styles of architecture, researching historic homes, and historic hardware and fixtures. Both occasionally print information concerning tax credits and historic districts. *Old House Journal* has even printed articles about the confusion prevalent in preservation terminology and preservation education in colleges and schools. Television, however, does not mention any of this information. Even the televised counterparts to *This Old House* magazine make no effort to explain the regulatory processes present in historic districts. When a historic district is mentioned, the prevailing attitude is that it is an obstacle. “Ask This Old House” and “Inside This Old House” do thoroughly explain how to
solve general maintenance problems on older homes. Their advice is always sound, although they usually lean toward replacement with new materials rather than repair.

A&E’s “Flip This House” even blatantly ignores the permitting process. In the Episode “We Don’t Need No Stinkin’ Permits” (January 22, 2006), the building inspector instructs the general contractor to stop work until proper paperwork is completed. The owner’s response to this is an expletive filled rant. “Those guys are a bunch of (bleep)ing know-it-alls behind desks. They don’t know what they’re talking about. I buy (bleep), fix it up and sell it all the time. Keep going, it can’t get any worse, keep going.” Later he said, “I’m not getting a permit. If they want to fine me a couple of thousand dollars for not waiting for a bureaucrat…great…whatever, but I work at a faster pace than the government.” It should be noted that they were forced to obtain proper permits by the end of the episode, but failed to do so in following episodes.

Figure 22  Non-compliance report, “Flip This House.” Still image by author.

74 “Flip This House,” Episode “We Don’t Need No Stinkin’ Permits,” Arts & Entertainment Channel (6:00pm, 22 January 2006).
Preservation Terminology

To the general public, the terms *preservation*, *restoration* and *renovation* all have the same definition. Popular media does nothing to improve the confusion concerning preservation terminology. On TV and in print, all modifications are considered renovations. According to *Webster’s* dictionary, the definition of the word, *renovation*, is “to restore to a former better state (as by cleaning, repairing, or rebuilding)”\(^75\). By contrast, the following are technical preservation terms that should be used, according to Norman Tyler’s *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice*.

*Preservation* – The maintenance of a property without significant alteration to its current condition.\(^76\)

\(^{75}\) *Mirriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 10\(^{th}\) Ed. (Massachusetts: Mirriam-Webster, Inc., 1993), 996.

**Restoration** – The process of returning a building to its condition at a specific time period, often its original condition.\(^{77}\)

**Reconstruction** – Building a historic structure using replicated design and/or materials.\(^{78}\)

**Rehabilitation** – The process of returning a building to a state of utility. This process is often called adaptive use and usually requires a certain amount of modification to allow for a new use.\(^{79}\)

Rehabilitation is the proper term that should be used for most of the work seen in media. However, rehabilitation is rarely used to describe modifications made to a building because, to the general public, rehab is a place or process for dealing with substance abuse. To avoid confusion, or possibly due to ignorance, media has opted to call everything by one generic term.

\(^{77}\) Ibid., 24.  
\(^{78}\) Ibid., 27.  
\(^{79}\) Ibid., 28.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusions and Recommendations

Media has the capability to be a positive educational tool for historic preservation, but presently does not always operate in that capacity. Currently, media sends a mixed message to the general public. There are occasional positive examples, but most are focused on demolition, making money or completely transforming the old into something new. Indeed, there are even examples where the media has inspired the general public to commit acts of possible stupidity. In the context of preservation, one could agree with critics of the media and its message who say, “What has been set aside is common sense, the pursuit of excellence, the courage to engage uncomfortable truths, the responsibilities to the lessons of history. There is no future in this retreat.”  

However, it is the opinion of the author that this downward slide can be halted, and even reversed.

The same media that has influenced the public to transform historic interiors into modern palatial master suites with cathedral ceilings can influence that same public to consider clever alternatives to demolition. While some may interpret this influence as media brainwashing, it is merely the encouragement of renovation moderation and historical consideration, based on knowledge and research. Media baron Rupert Murdoch says “those who criticize the media status quo are ‘snobs’ who ‘want to be imposing their taste on everybody else.’”  But there is a massive difference between inflicting a personal taste and encouraging the translation of accurate

information. Professor John Thompson was quoted in Chapter 3 as saying that the public interprets media messages into personal knowledge. It stands to reason that if the current preservation presentation is showing thoughtless demolition and insensitive solutions, the public will interpret these messages as the correct methods of application. Likewise, if the message being sent encourages selective demolition, respect for historical buildings and consideration for architectural integrity, the public may respond in kind.

Despite the amount of modifications to historic buildings shown in media, it is overwhelmingly obvious that media supports the reuse of historic buildings. This may be considered a small victory for preservationists, as historic buildings must have a use in order to survive. It is the amount of modifications, as well as the attitude that media takes toward those modifications, that are at issue. In many instances, the façade is maintained while extensive changes are made to the interior and rear. That the façade be maintained is often the main (if not, only) requirement of a historic district. Although the common standards of historic preservation commissions is a topic for another thesis, it is noted by the author that many of the changes shown in the media may have, in fact, been approved by a review board based only on the maintenance of the façade. While media did not often mention the inclusion of a preservation commission, it does not necessarily mean that one was not involved.

Robert W. McChesney, in his book *The Problem of the Media* states, “Commercial media, due to the pressure to maximize profit, will invariably strive to ‘give the people what they want’.”82 If Mr. McChesney is correct, then publishers, and in particular, networks, must believe that people want to see demolition, extreme makeovers, and money making real estate endeavors. Based on his theory, the only method of affecting the messages being sent by the media, both countering the negative and bolstering the positive, is for people to inform the

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82 Ibid., 198.
Recommendations

1. Correct preservation principles should be conveyed, including the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, accurate preservation terminology, and respectful decisions by professionals.

2. Programming should avoid any insensitive or derogatory remarks by the hosts.

3. Selective demolition should be encouraged over the currently shown unrestrained methods.

4. Efforts should be taken to discourage the complete gutting of historic interiors or the construction of grossly inappropriate additions.

5. In instances when the exceptions must be made, the ideal situation should be explained as well as the valid reasons the application could not be used in the particular situation.

6. Those with knowledge must ensure that the knowledge is shared. This recommendation is directed not at the media, but at those who must influence the media. This may be individual preservationists or preservation organizations. Preservation leaders, such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation, can use their relationships with media organizations to encourage the establishment of minimum standards for preservation representation.

The problem with the solution is that in order for the public to receive accurate, responsible preservation information from the media, the public must ask for it. If the general public is unaware of what they are missing, how will they know to ask for it? The answer lies with the preservation educated and preservation sensitive percentage of the general population. It is their
responsibility to encourage media to change their message. This might be in the form of preservation students watching specific programs and writing to the networks as part of a class project. Or it might be a flyer from a preservation nonprofit asking its membership to email a particular magazine or network. Or, as mentioned above, it might be a well-established preservation organization, with existing media ties, promoting better representation through their current partnerships.

Future Research

While the focus of this thesis was the potential for media to be an efficient and effective tool for preservation education, several opportunities were presented for additional research. The following suggestions are offered as related topics for future research.

1. Future research could expand on the role of the house museum and nonprofit organizations in educating the general public and could explore methods of using media to further their individual goals.

2. Examine the educational opportunities offered by established preservation organizations, such as the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service.

3. The educational opportunity is but one facet of media’s potential impact on the preservation field. Several other opportunities could be examined, including the possibilities for raising awareness for specific programs, interest in local organizations and acquiring funds.

4. The success of past alliances between media and preservation organizations could be examined. An example is the partnership between the National Trust for Historic Preservation and HGTV for the “Restore America” program. How successful was this collaboration? What
benefits did each organization receive? Did the National Trust experience increased membership or inquiries due to this media liaison?

5. A long term study could be conducted, initiating contact with editors and networks concerning content and comparing their replies with any change in content. The theory of “giving the public want it wants” could be tested. The proposal could be made that these networks and publications form an alliance with a preservation organization or a university preservation program to ensure the appropriate preservation message is contained in their publications and programs.

6. Examine potential changes in the common standards used by historic preservation commissions, including interior regulations, and how media can enlighten the public on the role and benefits of a historic commission.

The media will not become a truly positive tool for preservation education until the current message is changed. If the theory that the media will give the people what it wants is correct, the solution is for the people to inform the media of the message it seeks: media representation that fosters responsibility and respect for historic preservation.
REFERENCES


