

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE  
OFFICE OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY  
NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

## **THE STATEWIDE ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY**

For four decades, the State Historic Preservation Office in the Office of Archives and History has conducted North Carolina's statewide architectural survey program. The Preservation Office sponsors and co-sponsors, assists and guides dozens of local and regional architectural surveys throughout the state--all part of the statewide program whose mission is to identify, record, and encourage the preservation of North Carolina's rich and varied historic and architectural heritage.

For each community and county, as for the state and nation as a whole, creating a photographic and written record of historic places is the first, crucial step in recognizing, valuing, and preserving the heritage of the past for the benefit of the present and the future. Each survey project provides a local base of information about community history and architecture. Ideally the surveyor and the survey serve as a prism--gathering information from many different residents and many different places, then reflecting that knowledge back to the community in a way that offers residents and others new understanding of the whole and its parts.

**Benefits of Architectural Surveys:** The bedrock of preservation planning and actions, a thorough local survey forms the basis for many preservation decisions. Survey reports, files, and maps are maintained as a permanent record with many long-term benefits: they permit evaluation of properties for nomination to the [National Register of Historic Places](#); facilitate decision-making about the potential impact of government funded or licensed projects on historic properties; benefit protection of local districts and properties by [local preservation commissions](#); and boost private investment in renovation and preservation of historic buildings for new uses. Over the years, architectural surveys in town after town and county after county have provided the first step toward preservation success stories--directing new attention to familiar sights and encouraging citizens to rescue long neglected houses, rejuvenate traditional neighborhoods, and focus new investment in the economy and quality of life in historic town centers.

**Architectural Survey Status:** County surveys have been completed in 76 of the state's 100 counties and regional overview surveys have recorded selected properties in an additional 21 counties. Municipal surveys have been completed in about 65 communities. Several thematic surveys encompass specific types of places statewide, such as truss bridges, county courthouses, and Rosenwald schools. Cumulatively, these surveys compose an important record of North Carolina's historic architecture.

**Architectural Survey Records:** Survey files, containing written materials and photographs and organized by county, are maintained at the Survey and National Register Branch, State Historic Preservation Office, in Raleigh and at the Western Office of the Office of Archives and History, along with survey project reports and detailed maps showing the location of every recorded property. The survey database is organized by county, property name, and site number. The extensive collection of survey files, maps, photographs, and reports constitutes a research and reference source on the state's architecture and history, as well as providing private citizens, preservation organizations, and government agencies with a guide to the historic places that merit recognition and protection. All designated properties and districts and most surveyed properties have been mapped in a Geographic Information System (GIS) which is available to the public online at <http://gis.ncdcr.gov/hpweb/>. Survey records are also available in local repositories.

**[Architectural Survey Reports:](#)** An important component of every architectural survey is the report that is prepared at the end of the project. The survey report describes and analyzes the historic architecture of the survey area within relevant historic contexts. Over the many years of the State Historic Preservation Office's survey program, the reports have taken a number of forms. Some of the reports have separate sections on the survey area's architecture and history while other blend the discussions of the area's historical and architectural development. From the mid-1980s into the first decade of the twenty-first century, most of the reports were prepared as a Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF), a National Park Service "cover" report that presents an area's historic contexts and property types in a manner that simplifies the future preparation of National Register of Historic Places nominations for properties identified by the survey as potentially eligible for National Register listing. All of the reports are on file at the State Historic Preservation Office. Reports that were prepared in a digital format (from ca. 2004 to the present) and have not been published are posted on this web site; earlier reports for unpublished surveys, including those prepared as

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MPDFs, are being scanned and posted as time permits. (Click [here to access PDFs of survey reports](#) posted thus far; click [here to access PDFs of MPDFs](#) posted thus far.)

**Architectural Survey Publications:** A hallmark of North Carolina's statewide preservation program is the publication of local architectural surveys. Because of the lasting public value of survey publications as popular, accessible sources of knowledge about each community's unique heritage, the statewide survey program emphasizes publication as a primary goal of any survey project. To date, 53 county surveys and 37 municipal surveys have been published. (Click [here](#) to see a list of publications.)

Most of these are books of several hundred pages offering a fully illustrated overview of local history and architectural development plus a catalog depicting and describing significant individual properties and neighborhoods. Thematic studies of courthouses, industrial complexes, truss bridges, early twentieth-century suburbs, and other topics have been published. In addition, several major books by HPO staff have grown out of the statewide survey, including *North Carolina Architecture* (1990), *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Eastern North Carolina* (1996), *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina* (1999), and *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Piedmont North Carolina* (2003). A number of these publications have won national prizes for excellence.

**Development of Architectural Survey Program:** To meet the basic goals of creating a lasting record of North Carolina's historic places and encouraging their preservation, the statewide survey program has changed and developed over the years. Working with communities, counties, and regional organizations, with private preservation and historical societies as well as government bodies--and often in public-private partnerships--the statewide survey program has proceeded in a variety of ways. Initial funding for recording selected historic places in 1967 was granted by the Richardson Foundation, and further funds for the survey were obtained from state and federal sources. This first phase of inventory developed as part of North Carolinians' and Americans' growing concern for historic preservation in the decades after World War II, but it built upon the accomplishments of earlier generations, particularly such work of the 1930s as the Historic American Buildings Survey and *The North Carolina Guide*. During the late 1960s and into the early and mid-1970s, Survey and Planning Branch staff members conducted surveys of several counties' most prominent historic sites with assistance from local preservationists and historians.

Beginning in the late 1970s, a program of [matching grants](#) to interested county and town sponsors generated a series of more comprehensive surveys that encompassed a full range of architecturally and historically significant properties. State funds have provided a strong basis for the statewide survey, both as direct funding to local survey projects and in support of the statewide program. Each year the Office is required by federal law to pass through ten percent of its national preservation funding as matching grants to [certified local governments](#), and most of these grants are for architectural surveys or survey publications. In other cases, localities have used local public and private funds for projects that are part of the statewide survey program. In some years, other sources of federal funding have facilitated a number of county surveys.

As understanding of the richness of North Carolina's heritage and the complexity of its architecture and history has expanded, survey projects have broadened to address the diverse places that make each community itself--from the earliest and most imposing buildings of the distant past to the more typical farmhouses and landscapes, neighborhoods, and town centers of the late 19th century and the 20th century. These strong local studies have enhanced knowledge of local and regional history and the relationship to national and state currents. They offer new understanding of the state's architectural traditions--both the familiar vernacular patterns of the rural landscape and the accomplishments of the architectural profession in growing towns and cities. At the same time these state and local studies, together with others conducted throughout the nation, are building a national body of fieldwork that is yielding new insights into American social and architectural history.

Currently in North Carolina, most municipal and county surveys are supported by state and Federal grants matched with local funds. They are conducted by professional architectural historians employed by the community and working under the auspices of both the State Historic Preservation Office and the community. The strength of the North Carolina survey program has drawn from the combination of state and local commitment to preservation, and the professional knowledge and energy of the surveyors who have created a lasting record of the heritage of towns and counties throughout the state.

FOR MORE INFORMATION on the Architectural Survey Program contact the Architectural Survey Coordinator (919/807-6573); for information on Survey Grants contact the Grants Administrator (919-807-6582), both at the State Historic Preservation Office, Office of Archives and History, 4617 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4617.