



A service of the National Park Service

DISTRIBUTED BY INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION, WASHINGTON, D.C.

1a

WHAT ARE THE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA?

The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's roster of properties important in the history, architectural history, archeology, engineering, and culture of the United States, its States and regions, and its communities. The National Register is maintained by the National Park Service, and expanded through nominations by individuals, organizations, State and local governments, and Federal agencies.

The National Register criteria identify the range of resources and kinds of significance that will qualify properties for listing in the National Register. They are applied to each nomination in order to determine whether the nominated property qualifies. The criteria are also applied by Federal agencies, State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPO's) and the National Register staff to unevaluated properties that may be affected by Federal agency actions, to determine whether they are eligible for consideration during agency planning (See "What is Section 106 Review?"). Local historic preservation commissions and chief elected officials in Certified Local Governments use them in commenting on nominations to the Register, and many local governments have used them as the basis for their own evaluation systems.

Some Introductory Questions

What kinds of properties can be included in the National Register? The National Register includes buildings and structures such as houses, commercial buildings, and bridges. It also includes sites such as battlefields, parks, and archeological sites. It includes districts — groups of buildings, structures, or sites that make up a coherent whole, such as a neighborhood or an industrial complex. Finally, it includes objects — not portable museum objects, but large properties such as fountains and monuments.

What kinds of significance must properties have in order to be registered? Properties important in history, prehistory, architectural history, engineering history, archeology, or culture may be listed in the National Register. In other words, a property associated with the history of a community may be listed, and so can a prehistoric archeological site, an example of a type of architecture, landscape architecture, or an engineering process, or a place of continuing but traditional cultural importance to a community (e.g., a place associated with an American Indian tradition or a well-preserved rural landscape).

What level of significance must a property have in order to be registered? The National Register includes properties determined to have significance at the national, State, and local

levels. In other words although the Register is "National," it is designed to include properties of importance to the people of the nation where they live, in their communities, not just great national landmarks. A general store, your community's park, its mainstreet, or its Indian mound, may be just as eligible for inclusion in the National Register as Independence Hall or Gettysburg Battlefield.

The National Register criteria are designed to guide the Keeper of the National Register, State Historic Preservation Officers, Federal agencies, local governments, preservation organizations, and members of the general public in evaluating properties for entry in the National Register. Decisions concerning the significance and integrity of historic properties can be made only when the criteria are applied within related historical contexts.

The Criteria

Criterion A: A property may be registered if it is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

This means that a property can be registered if it is associated with a particular event — for example, the founding of a community, a battle, or an invention — significant in history at the national, State, or local level. It also means that a property can be registered if it is associated with a series of events or processes that have been significant parts of "broad patterns" of national, State, or local history. Examples of the latter might be the economic growth or decline of a community during a particular period, the development of a transportation or communication system, a pattern of agricultural land use, or a period of prehistoric environmental or cultural change.

Criterion B: A property may be registered if it is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

This criterion means that a property can be registered if it is associated with an individual important in history at the national, State, or local level. Examples include the founder of a community, an important writer or inventor, a political figure, or a community leader.

Criterion C: This is a complex criterion with several subparts.

The first subpart provides that **a property may be registered if it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.**

This means that a property may be registered if it is a good example of a particular kind of architectural style, a kind of engineering, a kind of landscape architecture, or the informal ("vernacular") forms of construction used in a region during a particular period.

The second subpart provides that **a property may be registered if it represents the work of a master.**

This allows the registration of properties designed or built by master architects, engineers, landscape architects, or builders. The individual responsible for the property does not necessarily have to be known by name; sometimes the work of a master builder or artisan can be

if there is no other building to represent a particular important event or person, a relocated building may be registered.

Criteria Consideration C provides that a birthplace or grave is not eligible for the National Register, unless it is that of a historical figure of outstanding importance and there is no other appropriate site or building directly associated with his or her productive life. Thus the birthplace or grave of a community's founder is ordinarily not eligible, but if there is no other place where the founder can be remembered, the birthplace or grave may be registered.

Criteria Consideration D provides that cemeteries are not eligible for the National Register, unless they derive their primary significance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events. This consideration excludes many ordinary cemeteries, but many cemeteries are included in the Register. A cemetery containing the remains of many historically important people may be registered, as may one whose tombstones or mortuary architecture are particularly distinctive, or one where particular historical events have occurred. Prehistoric and early historic cemeteries are usually eligible because of their age and their association with events reflective of important historical processes.

Criteria Consideration E provides that a reconstructed building is not eligible for the National Register, except under certain exceptional circumstances. A reconstructed building can be registered if the reconstruction is historically accurate, if the building is presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and if no other, original building or structure survives that has the same association. In other words, "stage set" reconstructions of historic places, such as "ghost towns" created out of whole cloth where no historic town ever existed, cannot be placed in the National Register, but buildings or structures can be registered if they are the only properties representing a particular event, person, period, or type of construction.

Criteria Consideration F provides that properties that are primarily commemorative in intent cannot be registered, unless design, age, tradition, or symbolic value invest such properties with their own historical significance. Thus the statue of a town's founder cannot be placed on the National Register, unless it is an extremely good example of an artistic or architectural tradition, or associated with traditions or events that give it its own significance, apart from that of the founder.

Criteria Consideration G forbids the registration of properties achieving significance within the past 50 years unless such properties are of exceptional importance. Fifty years is a general estimate of the period of time necessary for the development of the historical perspective necessary to evaluate significance. Properties associated with the Depression are now becoming eligible for the National Register, for example, and more and more attention is being given to properties associated with World War II. Properties associated with space exploration are now being listed in the Register even though they are less than 50 years old, because of the exceptional importance of the events with which they are associated.

recognized in the vernacular architecture of a region, or even in the prehistoric archeological record, when the name of the individual has long been lost.

The third subpart provides that a **property may be registered if it possesses high artistic values.**

Such a property might be a building that includes fine murals or stonework, or finely designed landscape, or a site containing particularly impressive prehistoric rock art.

The final subpart provides that a **property may be registered if it represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.**

This criteria exception recognizes districts. A district may be significant as a whole even though it may be composed of elements — sites, buildings, structures and objects — that would not qualify individually. The identity of districts results from the grouping of their features and from their interrelationships. For example, a group of warehouses, which do not individually look very significant, may be important as a group because of their collective representation of an architectural style, their collective use of space, or their collective association with a community's industrial development.

Criterion D: A property may be registered if it has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

This criterion is usually applied to archeological sites and districts, representing either historic or prehistoric time periods. It could also be applied to a building, structure, district, or object that could yield important information in architectural history, engineering history, or another field. Information may be important if it can bear on a particularly significant research question about the past, or if it is likely to be useful in addressing research questions that may be developed by archeologists or others in the future.

The Criteria Considerations

The Criteria Considerations are partial exceptions to, or limitations on, the eligibility of properties for the National Register.

Criteria Consideration A provides that a religious property is not eligible for the National Register unless it derives primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance. Thus a church may not be registered unless it has architectural or artistic value, or is associated with historically important events or processes. The site of a religious rite cannot be registered unless the site, the rite, or both are associated with broader cultural patterns of historical significance.

Criteria Consideration B provides that a building or structure removed from its original location is not eligible for the National Register unless it is significant primarily for its architectural value or it is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event. This consideration recognizes that the original locations of most historic properties contribute to their significance, so that their relocation may effectively sever them from their significant associations. A structure significant for its architecture without reference to its surroundings may be eligible for the National Register even if it has been moved, however, and

Integrity

Besides meeting one or more of the National Register Criteria, a property must also have **integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association** in order to be eligible for the National Register. This means, in effect, that if a property has been seriously compromised by unsympathetic alterations, it may not be eligible for the National Register.

Integrity must be judged with reference to the particular Criterion or Criteria under which a property is thought to be eligible. For example, if a property may be eligible for the information it contains (Criterion D), its "feeling" and "association" may be irrelevant, and it may not need to retain integrity in these areas. It must also be recognized that alterations to a property may themselves have historical or architectural significance, reflecting changing perceptions of style, changing construction techniques, or changing social and cultural processes.

For Further Information

For a copy of "How to Apply the National Register Criteria" and other information on the National Register, contact:

The National Register of Historic Places
Interagency Resources Division
National Park Service
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127

Prepared by Patricia L. Parker, National Park Service, May 1987