

From the

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National Register 101

Eligibility Criteria

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IN THE DECEMBER issue of *Preservation in Print* this series explained that the National Register of Historic Places is the nation's list of resources that are considered important because they illustrate something about American history or culture. Naturally, such a prestigious program must be selective in evaluating which candidates to honor. For this reason, Congress established specific eligibility requirements when it created the Register in 1966. However, interpreting these guidelines can sometimes be complicated. This installment of "National Register 101" will discuss two of those requirements: significance and age. Next month's article will explain the third consideration — integrity.

Some applicants mistakenly believe that a property should be added to the National Register simply because it is old. However, to qualify for listing, a candidate must be important, or significant, for a reason in addition to its age. The Register recognizes four broad categories of significance, which can exist at the local (community, parish, or region), state, or national level. It calls these categories "criteria" and assigns each an identifying letter. The significance criteria are: A) association with a historic event or trend, B) association with a significant person, C) an important example of design or construction, and D) archaeology.

Criterion A allows the recognition of properties that are associated with events that mark important moments in American history or have made significant contributions to the broad patterns of our history. An event may be a single occurrence or a group of activities that form a pattern or trend. Events are generally evaluated within historic contexts. The latter are patterns, themes or trends that contributed to the history



St. Francisville's 3V Tourist Court is listed under Criterion A because it is part of a historic trend — the transportation industry that played an important role in the development of Louisiana.

and development of the community, state or nation. (Historic contexts will be discussed in more detail in an article to appear later this year.) To qualify for the Register, a candidate's association with the event in question must also be important, i.e., direct and obvious.



Also listed under Criterion A, the Bank of Slaughter recognizes a specific event, the arrival of banking services in that East Feliciana Parish community.

Criterion B encourages the listing of properties that are linked with the lives of significant persons. This category is sometimes hard to interpret. The Register is not meant as a tool to honor living people and draws a distinction between persons who were prominent (even extremely so) and those who directly impacted history in some important way. For example, a building associated with a governor who did no more than occupy the office without making major contributions would not qualify.



The Register recognizes the Silas J. Fenton House under Criterion B because it was the home of the man who founded the Jefferson Davis Parish community of Fenton.

As is the case under Criterion A, a building nominated under Criterion B must be directly associated with the important person as well as with his or her contribution. In another example, the retirement home of a great artist would not be eligible if the building in which the artist actually produced his/her greatest works survives. Occasionally, multiple buildings associated with a significant person can be eligible if each illustrates a different and important phase of that person's work.

Criterion C focuses upon properties that are important because their design or construction reflects America's response to culture and technology. To qualify in this category a resource should possess the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; represent the work of a recognized master architect or craftsman; possess high artistic values; or be a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction (i.e., a district). The category includes works of art and examples of high-style buildings, folk architecture, landscape architecture, and engineering design. Be aware that not all works of a master are eligible. A Register candidate must be among that person's best work, represent a phase of his career or reflect a theme of his work.

Criterion D recognizes properties associated with information potential and generally applies to archaeological sites. These resources must either have already provided important information about human history or prehistory or have the potential to do so.

Evaluation of what is "important" is based on clearly identified research questions designed to confirm previously discovered information, fill current data gaps, test a scientific hypothesis, explore alternative theories that challenge existing ideas, or study priority areas identified in state or federal management plans.

The most important thing to remember about the Register's age requirement is the number 50. Because one needs objectivity and the time for scholarly studies to have taken place, a building, structure, object, site, or district usually must be at least 50 years old before it can qualify for listing. Age and significance can often be interrelated. Thus, when considering a candidate associated with a historic event or a person's contributions to history,



Shreveport's McNeil Street Pumping Station is listed on the Register under Criterion C in the area of engineering because it documents the technological evolution of a late-19th-early-20th-century waterworks.

those events/contributions also must have occurred 50 or more years ago. However, the Register recognizes that some relatively recent events are exceptionally significant, i.e., they are so important that they deserve listing despite their failure to meet the 50 year age requirement. Properties associated with the nation's space program and the Civil Rights Movement are examples of types that may qualify despite their "youth." Exceptional significance will be discussed more fully in another article to appear later this year.



Donauldsville's Fort Butler is an example of a site listed under Criterion D: Archaeology.