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National Register 101

Seven Aspects of Integrity

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A CANDIDATE MUST MEET three requirements to qualify for the National Register of Historic Places, as explained in the February issue of *Preservation in Print*. Two of these essentials — significance and age — were covered in that issue. The third qualification — integrity — is the topic of this and the following installments of National Register 101.

The National Register defines integrity as the ability of a property to convey its significance. However, “integrity” is a word generally used to describe a person’s honesty and sincerity. So, why is a word usually associated with humans used to designate a National Register eligibility requirement? The answer can be found in *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, which adds “completeness” to integrity’s definition. Under this broader explanation, buildings, structures, districts, sites and objects can also have integrity.

Of the three Register eligibility requirements, integrity is probably the most complicated and difficult to understand. To simplify things, the National Register staff sometimes tells applicants that integrity means the candidate still has to look historic. However, there are actually seven factors, or “aspects,” that must be evaluated to determine if that historic look survives. These aspects are location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

LOCATION is the easiest element of integrity to understand. For National Register purposes, location is the particular point or position where the historic property was constructed, the significant person made his/her contribution, or the historic event occurred. Sometimes the relationship between a building and its history is lost if that building is moved from its original site. This is why it is harder to list moved properties on the National Register. To qualify moved candidates must be important to a broader region or group than those associated with the original site. The National Park Service consid-

ers original locations so important that it automatically delists (removes from the Register) properties moved to new sites subsequent to their listing.

SETTING refers to the character of the place where the historic resource is located. It includes natural and man-made features and how those features relate to the candidate. Items to consider include buildings, dependencies, roads, paths, fences, vegetation, open space, topographical characteristics and view sheds. The latter include the views from the candidate as well as of the candidate from nearby properties. For a setting to have integrity for National Register purposes, it should appear much as it did historically.



The tower on this Lake Charles Victorian residence is an important part of its design. Were it to be lost, the home’s National Register design integrity would be severely compromised.

DESIGN is broadly defined by the National Register as “the combination of elements that creates the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.” Elements the Register considers when evaluating design integrity include function, structural systems, other technologies, spatial organization, massing, proportion, scale, materials, color, texture and fenestration patterns. Design is not limited to the work of architects. Community planners, engineers and landscape architects have also created designs that might be Register-eligible. If enough of the resource’s original



Here, the setting (tombstones, paths, fences and trees) reinforces an observer’s sense that Grace Episcopal Church in St. Francisville is indeed historic.

design has been lost, the property will not meet this aspect of integrity.

MATERIALS are “the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property.” This definition is complicated because it has to cover archaeological as well as architectural and historical candidates. For the purposes of nominating buildings, materials should be defined as the original wood, nails, shingles, tiles, glass, and/or other substances the builders used to create the historic resource. To have integrity, a property must retain its character-defining exterior materials. Sometimes interior integrity of material is needed as well.

WORKMANSHIP “is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory,” according to the Register. A craft is an occupation requiring special skill, and workmanship refers to the quality of the craftsman’s product. Extraordinary workmanship might be evident in tooling, carving, painting, graining, turning or joinery. It can be found in vernacular as well as high style resources and can include the product of one or multiple craftsmen. Finally, it can apply to an entire resource or any of its parts.

FEELING is a “property’s expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a

particular period of time.” To have the aspect of feeling, a candidate must have surviving physical features that express its historic character and help the visitor experience an awareness of its history and importance.

ASSOCIATION is defined by the National Register as “the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property.” Association relies upon two factors. First, the site must be the actual place where something happened. Second, that relationship must be evident when a visitor observes the site. This connection can occur only if the property’s historic physical features, or character, survive.

Only when one understands the seven aspects of integrity can one determine if a candidate has enough integrity to qualify for Register listing. However, evaluating these factors is more complicated than their definitions might suggest. Next month’s article will discuss applying the aspects to conduct an integrity evaluation.

Much of this article is based upon the National Register Bulletin titled “How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation,” which is available online at <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/pdfs/nrb15.pdf>.



This stained glass window is proof of the skill and talent of the craftsman who designed, assembled and installed it in Lake Charles’s Temple Sinai c. 1903. Since it is unaltered, it retains its integrity of workmanship.



The Ascension Parish home of 20th-century literary figure Robert Penn Warren has integrity of association because he lived there during what scholars regard as a critical period in his life and career.