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The Early Years: Founding the National Council for Preservation Education

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Much of contemporary American preservation took form during the ferment of the late 1970s, when, in the afterglow of the Bicentennial and the passage of tax-reform legislation, the newly elected President Jimmy Carter appointed Chris Delaporte the head of what became known as the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, with the intent of combining the functions of the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation with those of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. Not long after, a new program of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the urban development action grant (UDAG), was termed the “new urban renewal.”

The National Trust for Historic Preservation was also being transformed. In 1975, the Trust established a Preservation Education Fund that began making grants to university programs (Haupt 1975). This initiative had the support of Russell V. Keune, then Senior Vice-President for Preservation Services; Richard W. Haupt, then Assistant Vice-President for Preservation Services; and Antoinette J. Lee, then Coordinator for Education Programs. Faced with a growing demand for financial support and asked to assess the needs and future of the field, they contracted architectural historian Paul Sprague to conduct a survey of the thirteen programs then in existence. Going further, Sprague also interviewed representatives of private firms, public agencies, and non-profit organizations for their experiences with graduates and their ideas about the needs of the field (Sprague 1978).

The study raised more questions than it answered and led a number of educators to convene a Higher Education Study Group in February 1978, hosted by the Trust at the Smithsonian Institution’s Belmont Conference Center in Elkridge, Maryland. Twenty-five

preservation leaders, representing higher education, government, the private sector, and the National Trust, heard Sprague present his study. It received a mixed reaction but nonetheless spurred the representatives of university preservation education programs to develop a new organization to assist individuals and existing organizations in preservation education and advise others in the development of new educational programs (Higher Education Study Group 1978).

Later that year, the National Council for Preservation Education was formed in a meeting at George Washington University. Several of those Sprague interviewed for his study were present, including Howard Gillette (George Washington University), James Marston Fitch (Director Emeritus, Graduate Program in Historic Preservation at Columbia University), Stephen W. Jacobs (Cornell University), Chester Liebs (University of Vermont), George Dennison (Colorado State University), Margaret Supplee Smith (Boston University), Peter McCleary (University of Pennsylvania), Dora Wiebenson (University of Virginia), and Robert Stipe (North Carolina State University). Professor James K. Huhta, director of the historic preservation program at Middle Tennessee State University, was elected the first chair.

Huhta led several committees, creating the bylaws with Don Fowler (University of Nevada) and George Dennison (Colorado State University), and the articles of incorporation, with the assistance of the National Trust staff and John Pearce (George Washington University). James Marston Fitch applied for grant support from the L.A. Wallace Foundation to hold a special National Council meeting in early 1980 at Shakertown at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky. There, the Council devised a preliminary committee structure to deal with the establishment of

a national preservation faculty, an internship clearing house, review procedures for academic program proposals, and a publications program, including a *Journal of Preservation Education* (Shakertown Meeting 1980).

Other significant objectives for the new organization came from the National Trust's Williamsburg Conference on preservation as an "ethic for the eighties," held in March 1979. These included reinforcing historic preservation education among students in primary, secondary, and vocational schools; developing craft-training programs; increasing educational opportunities for the lay public; and creating professional development programs for the practicing professional. Some of these ideas were briefly addressed in subsequent National Council initiatives, such as the committee on heritage education. Still other significant objectives arose from the nascent membership, such as the need to examine promotion and tenure policies (Crimmins and Tomlan 1984; Hatch 1987).

James Huhta also devoted considerable time in 1980 in support of an improved national heritage policy, representing the National Council at the first national historic preservation forum sponsored by the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers and presenting testimony before House and Senate subcommittees that held hearings on the proposed new heritage legislation (Huhta 1980).

Hence, by the fall of 1980, the idea of the National Council for Preservation Education had become a reality. It had defined its mission, created an organizational structure, and launched several projects that came to characterize the organization. Remarkably enough, the official documents of the National Council for Preservation Education remain unchanged today, still focused on encouraging and assisting the development and improvement of preservation education programs by coordinating efforts related to preservation education with public and private organizations and interested individuals, facilitating the collection and dissemination of information concerning preservation education, and raising public awareness. From the original thirteen programs surveyed in 1977, the number of NCPE member institutions has grown to more than sixty, stretching from Massachusetts to Hawaii. As might be

expected, the first alumni are retiring, and a new wave of younger preservationists are reevaluating the needs and options.

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