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## The Vermont Legislative Research Shop

### **Using Vermont's Rural Culture and Heritage in the State's Best Interest**

According to the Heritage Tourism Program of The National Trust of Historic Preservation, helping rural areas make the most of their historic and cultural heritage has economic benefits. In 2000, travel and tourism contributed \$584.3 billion to the U.S. economy. Travel and tourism supported more than 7.8 million jobs and indirectly supported another 11.5 million jobs, creating a total of 19 million jobs (Heritage Tourism Program).

#### **National Trust for Historic Preservation**

The National Trust for Historic Preservation [NTHP] is a non-profit organization that provides states and local organizations with the assistance needed to convert historic land and structures into an economic and environmentally sustainable tourism project. The NTHP is an organization that participates in both educating on and advocating for the historic preservation of maritime, cultural, and architectural heritage (United States Department of Agriculture, 2005). Individuals, corporations and foundations fund NTHP (National Trust Heritage Tourism Program).

The Rural Heritage Program of the NTHP offers a website that addresses efforts of rural communities across the country to both preserve and live with their heritage. This particular website contains a five step process recommended by NTHP: “collaborate, find the fit between a community and tourism, make sites come to life, focus on authenticity and quality of experience, and preserve and protect resource” (National Trust Heritage Tourism Program).

The NTHP provides one of the largest sources on heritage preservation information through their library located at the University of Maryland in College Park. The group also acts as “curator” to a number of historic American homes, offers grants and loans, technical and consultation services, and an arena for publication (United States Department of Agriculture, 2005).

The NTHP offers development, management, and marketing consultation for a fee (National Trust Heritage Tourism Program).

The main office for the National Trust for Historic Preservation is Heritage Tourism Program c/o Mountains/Plains Office  
535 16th Street, Suite 750  
Denver, CO 80202  
303-623-1504

Amy Jordan Webb, the Heritage Program Tourism Director, can be reached at amy\_webb@nthp.org.

### **Examples of National Trust Rural Heritage Tourism Sites**

The NTHP has helped many communities succeed in the rural heritage tourism market. In Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, a community well known for its scenic farmland as well as the culture and history of its Amish residents, the Rural Heritage Program provided guidance in the field of keeping the culture authentic. Proof of the NTHP's success in guarding this authenticity may be found in a study done by the rural research center at Nova Scotia Agricultural College (Beesley, *et al*, 2000). Lancaster County was successful in converting their farmland into an efficient tourism site with economic benefits.

### **Kansas Sampler Foundation**

The Kansas Sampler Foundation is a public non-profit 501(C)(3) organization that operates an extensive website. Its primary objective focuses on rural projects within the state of Kansas, but it also provides a bullet point list of the eight ways to assess local rural culture (Kansas Sampler Foundation, 2000). By developing a full assessment, the towns will discover their story and create new ideas and energy. The assessment includes:

Architecture: Gather all of the background information on residential homes, downtown buildings, churches, barns, the courthouse, post office, library, bridges, mills and other structures of interest. Some examples of how towns have used their architecture to promote tourism is through: building preservation, historic places, theatre restoration and church tours.

Art: Gather all of the information on local art whether it be live performances or statues on the common. Towns have created art tours, focused on local artists and created specialized art museums tailored to the town.

Commerce: Discover the past and present of business within the town. Work with local businesses to create tours, develop shopping, specialty products and museums.

Cuisine: What range of cuisine is in each town? Is the town famous for certain foods? Are there ethnic specialty restaurants? Focus on ethnic cuisine, special cuisine events and community cafes and small eateries.

Customs: Uncover the customs of the town, from what people do on a day to day basis to annual events, quirkiness of the town and language. Local customs can develop into special attractions and festivals or can be seen day to day in local cafes.

Geography: What are the natural aspects of the town that make it unique? Focus on famous landmarks, lakes and rivers, scenic drives, wildlife and outdoor recreation. Many

towns surrounding a lake or river have formed alliances in order to cultivate heritage and open it to greater visitation.

History: Outline the history to the town and look for significant details that are intriguing. Historical interpretation can be created through placement of signs and promotion of walking tours, museums and historic celebrations and events.

People: Who are the historically significant people of the town? How has the population changed over the course of history and what ethnicities have influenced the town? Museums, festivals, ethnic celebrations, historical markers and statues can emphasize the story of a town's people.

After assessing the town, determine goals and develop a mission statement. Do you want to educate local citizens, bring visitors to the town or develop the economy and community?

Next, plan on how to promote the story of the town. Develop group itineraries, brochures, websites and walking tours. Erect plaques to explain important sites. Educate local citizens on their town through newspaper articles, slide shows and other displays. Stimulate community projects and ideas. Collaborate with other tourism groups. Visit other towns to see what they have developed. Create more tourism alliances. Continue promoting through the newspaper and statewide websites.

## **Historic Preservation Resources**

The "Historic Preservation Resources" website, published by the National Agricultural Library of the USDA offers a wealth of information on historic and cultural preservation. The website highlights both the economic and social benefits of historic preservation. They suggest that such programs create jobs, "revitalize downtown areas," and provide stimulation for local businesses. Historic preservation is also linked with possibilities for funding, tax incentives, and provides members of the community with motivation to become more involved. In short, "[h]istoric preservation enables communities to become economically viable and livable" (National Agricultural Library, 2005).

"Historic Preservation Resources" is a great starting off point for anyone interested in information on any aspect of historical and cultural preservation, from the general to the technical for the most specific preservation projects. Beyond these "how to" links, "Historic Preservation Resources" also provides a list of organizations that provide not only information on historic preservation, but also funding and protection for preserved sites and communities. Among these organizations is the National Park Service's Heritage Preservation Services (HPS), an organization that protects a variety of categories of preserved sites, sets the standards for every stage of the preservation effort, manages both the Preservation Tax Incentive program and the Historic Preservation Fund grants-in-aid program, and monitors the status of National Historic Landmarks (National Agricultural Library, 2005).

## Resources

Beesley, K.B. McKay, D.J.(2000). "rural concerns of the Mid-Atlantic States: a review of recent literature research paper #42. Retrieved Feb. 06, 2005, from Rural Research Centre: Nova Scotia Agricultural College Web site: <http://www.nsac.ns.ca/bss/rrc/midat.htm>.

Kansas Sampler Foundation, (2000). Using the rural culture elements to assess your town. Retrieved Feb. 08, 2005, from Kansas Sampler Foundation Web site: <http://kansassampler.org/wekan/elements.html>.

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United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Library Rural Information Center, (n.d.). Historic preservation resources. Retrieved Feb. 06, 2005, from National Agricultural Library Rural Information Center Web site: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/preserve.html>.

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Jenkins, S. and C. Weber (1999) "Small wonders" *Builder* 22 (6): 196-206

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### **Disclaimer**

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