

A Century of Preservation

| BY JANET SNYDER MATTHEWS |

ANNIVERSARIES TRIGGER REFLECTION, offering a chance to celebrate, to grieve, to reflect on the past while pondering the future. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Antiquities Act and the 40th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act—a time for both rejoicing and assessing. **THESE LEGISLATIVE BENCHMARKS** mandate our efforts to identify, value, and benefit historic places, both public and private. The best known section of the Antiquities Act authorizes the President to proclaim national monuments encompassing historic landmarks, structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest on lands owned or controlled by the federal government. Since 1906, Presidents have designated more than 100 monuments, starting with Wyoming’s Devils Tower. The most recent is the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, just designated. Many are units of the National Park Service. **THE ANTIQUITIES ACT RESONATES WITH THE CLEAR INTENT** of a nation, in the face of great loss, determined to know itself through protection of its irreplaceable cultural heritage. The act provides for penalties for the damage of cultural resources on lands owned or controlled by the United States and permits for investigations of archeological properties. This century-old foundation established the baseline for scientific and educational management still apparent today. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990), Archaeological Resources Protection Act (1979), Sunken Military Craft Act (2005), and current drafts of fossil protection legislation are all rooted in the fertile soil of the Antiquities Act. In 1949, Congress established the National Trust for Historic Preservation. **IN 1966, THE LOSS OF HERITAGE AS A CONSEQUENCE** of postwar development led to the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act, creating the tools that connect all levels of government in identifying and protecting properties significant to the nation’s heritage. It expanded the National Register of Historic Places, established the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and authorized grants and other financial aid to state and local preservation programs. Later amendments articulated the participation of local and tribal governments. Related legislation addressed tax incentives, archeological resources, shipwrecks, battlefields, and Native

American cultural items. States implemented programs promoting official recognition, grants, tax incentives, and protections; local ordinances also provided for site designation, preservation design review, and economic development. In the private sector, a network of nonprofits emerged to advocate and educate. Private firms provided contract services for surveys, nominations, and development projects. **THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CONTINUES TO PLAY A KEY ROLE** in the use and evolution of the federal tools for preservation. Federal standards and criteria appear in statutes, ordinances, and corporate charters. New technologies and “on the ground” experience bring the information revolution to bear on documenting our shared heritage—such as the 80,000 properties listed in the National Register, incorporating 1.4 million resources that contribute to those properties—while making the data accessi-

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ble online. The National Park Service relies upon partners at all levels of government and the private sector to administer the tools and address the challenges. That is the essence of partnership—close cooperation between parties having joint rights and responsibilities. Today, the preservation pioneers of the 1960s are both amazed and gratified at the progress over the last 40 years. An impressive and ever-growing body of knowledge illuminates our diverse history. The rehabilitation and reuse of historic places have become powerful engines for economic revitalization and livable environments. **THESE ANNIVERSARIES GIVE US** an opportunity to celebrate the successes and identify the goals to take us forward into the 21st century. Together, we address the challenges and embrace the scholarship to understand our nation and its empowering shared heritage. Together, we work to bequeath to future generations a legacy of vision, conviction, and achievement.

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