
The presence of the past

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Throughout the world, but particularly in the economically advanced countries, fragments of an obsolete physical environment are lovingly preserved, or restored so that they may be preserved, as relics of time gone by. Such preservation is costly not only because it involves direct outlays of money and time but also because piecemeal retention causes endless difficulties for new development. In building a new library, for example, the Harvard Graduate School of Education recently paid \$500,000 to move two rather small, old houses a few hundred feet.

Fierce political battles are fought over whether a building or set of buildings should be saved, since different groups place widely varying values on the remains. Because of the fixed and bulky nature of the objects and the strong personal attachments they arouse, their preservation is a far more strident affair than the preservation of movable objects, records, or customs. Nevertheless the resistance to the loss of historical environment is today becoming more determined as affluence increases and physical change itself is more rapid. And no wonder, since the past is known, familiar, a possession in which we may feel secure.

Preservation's past

Environmental preservation, at least as a widespread and coherent doctrine, is fairly new. Medieval masons razed an old building without a qualm, even though old, "historic" structures were then much rarer than now. In Tudor inventories, chattels called "old" were put at the foot of the list, implying they had little value. In Western Europe, at least, the idea of preservation first appeared about 1500, in the form of an

esoteric attraction to relict buildings, even to the point of the construction of sham ruins. By the eighteenth century an affection for the structures of the past was a widespread upper-class fashion, and by the nineteenth century it became part of the intellectual baggage of all middle-class travelers. In the same century, first in the United States and slightly later in Europe, organized movements sprang up to preserve historic landmarks for the public.

In the United States the first efforts were directed at saving particular buildings, especially the houses associated with patriotic figures.¹ Reinforcing national solidarity and pride was the chief reason for preservation. Specific motives ranged from attempts to prevent disunity before the Civil War and to reestablish it afterward, through the concern for "Americanizing" the immigrant, to the moves to magnify patriotic feelings during the twentieth-century wars. Relying on history to maintain coherence and common purpose in moments of stress and disunity is a familiar human tendency. The militant interest in black history is its most recent manifestation in America.

Later this patriotic emphasis merged with the enthusiasm for ruins of the romantic tradition, and architectural restoration became a basic principle of the movement. Connection with an established historic event and the quality of a building remain even today the chief criteria for preservation. The scientific motives of archaeology and the economic ones of tourist promotion appeared somewhat later. Perhaps most recently of all, in the United States at least, large segments of the population have come to feel that preservation is moral in itself and that environments rich in such features are more pleasant places in which to live. Patriotism and literary glamour have defined certain classic periods whose traces are most worth