

## **Lecture 5: “Charleston’s Preservation Movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century” Teacher Script**

Use the following information as a guide for teaching the “Charleston’s Preservation Movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century” MS PowerPoint presentation.

### Slide 1: Charleston’s Preservation Movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

- A. The preservation movement that took place in Charleston in the 20<sup>th</sup> century shaped the architectural and cultural landscape of the city in numerous ways.
- B. This lesson will show how important the events of this movement were to creating Charleston’s famous tradition of preservation for the purpose of protecting significant historic resources and boosting the city’s economy through its tourism industry.

### Slide 2: Early Preservation Efforts

- A. In the wake of other notable preservation initiatives like the purchase of George Washington’s Mt. Vernon in Virginia, Charleston focused on its own colonial past.
- B. In 1902, the National Society of Colonial Dames in the State of South Carolina purchased the Powder Magazine (ca. 1713) to save it from being demolished.
- C. The Powder Magazine was seen as being very important to Charleston’s colonial history. It was built along the original fortifications when Charleston was a walled city.
- D. The Colonial Dames restored the structure and used it as the statewide chapter headquarters.
- E. In the 1990s, Historic Charleston Foundation acquired the Powder Magazine under a long-term lease with the Colonial Dames, restored the building and reopened it as a museum in 1997. Today, it is run by the Colonial Dames.
- F. Similarly, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) worked to preserve the Old Exchange Building (built during the mid-eighteenth century) from 1899 to 1913.
- G. After Congress transferred ownership of the building to the DAR in 1913, the organization used it for its local headquarters then opened it as a museum.

- H. These early efforts to preserve Charleston's historic resources show an emphasis in protecting colonial sites and using them for educational purposes.<sup>1</sup>

Slide 3: Threats to Charleston's Historic Properties in the 1920s

- A. The 1920s-1940s saw an increase in threats to historic properties throughout the Charleston area. Local residents were greatly distressed that both residential and public buildings were being torn down.
- B. As automobiles gained popularity and use, Charleston experienced an increase in gas stations dotting the landscape. Historic buildings in key locations were often demolished to make way for these new filling stations, and for parking lots.
- C. Standard Oil was an oil company whose construction plans were at odds with local residents and preservationists who did not want to see the city's history torn down in favor of gas stations.<sup>2</sup>
- D. Charleston's historic properties were also in danger of being dismantled for their architectural elements.
- E. Art collectors from across the nation purchased architectural details from residential properties to furnish their own homes or re-create period rooms in galleries and museums.
- F. "For their part, Charlestonians were willing to sell the architectural detailing of their old homes for a variety of reasons: they needed the money to pay taxes, a building was being demolished anyway, their property was in a deteriorated area occupied by African-American tenants, and the prices being offered were simply too tempting to resist."<sup>3</sup>

Slide 4: A Public Campaign for Preservation

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<sup>1</sup> Robert R. Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City, Historic Charleston Foundation 1947-1997* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 3.

- A. In May 1920, the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings (later renamed the Preservation Society of Charleston) purchased the Joseph Manigault House (ca. 1803) to save it from demolition.
- B. Despite noble intentions, the organization had a difficult time maintaining the house.
- C. Unfortunately, it is not plausible to buy up any and all historic properties to save them from demolition without having some kind of financial plan. Historic properties are extremely expensive to maintain, and not all of them can or should be turned into museums.
- D. At this point in time, historic preservation was still a relatively new concept supported primarily by wealthy people. The Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings made numerous attempts at fundraising for several years, but they were still unable to support all the expenses that came with the house.
- E. Interestingly, the society sold the Manigault garden to the Standard Oil company for use as a gas station and rented the interior rooms of the house to African American tenants.<sup>4</sup>
- F. The Manigault House was opened as a museum in 1928, but the money it earned was not enough to stop its foreclosure.
- G. Just as it appeared as though the house would be sold and dismantled, a South Carolina heiress purchased the house in 1933 for three thousand dollars and donated it to the Charleston Museum.
- H. The property is still owned and managed as a house museum by the Charleston Museum today.<sup>5</sup>
- I. The Joseph Manigault House was the first private residence in Charleston to be saved through a public campaign.

Slide 5: Zoning Ordinances, Historic Districts, and the Board of Architectural Review

- A. In 1931, the City of Charleston made history when it adopted the nation's first zoning ordinance with provisions for the protection of historic properties.

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<sup>4</sup> Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 6.

- B. Article X designated part of the city as the Old and Historic Charleston District. In addition, this article established a Board of Architectural Review (BAR) which has the authority to govern architectural alterations and changes made to properties located within the historic district.
- C. “As originally constituted, the BAR was to consist of five members drawn from organizations that offered useful institutional expertise for the new municipal body: the City Planning and Zoning Commission, the local chapters of the American Institute of Architects and the American Society of Civil Engineers, the Charleston Real Estate Exchange, and the Carolina Art Association, a long-established fine arts society that managed the local art gallery. Part-time staff support was provided by the city engineer.”<sup>6</sup>
- D. During its early years, the BAR acted in an advisory capacity when dealing with exterior architectural changes so as not to impose on property owners’ privacy and rights.
- E. One of the most progressive features of the zoning ordinance is that it sought to target entire neighborhoods for preservation rather than specific buildings. This tactic would “define the modern preservation movement.”<sup>7</sup>
- F. Today, the BAR, the Board of Zoning Appeals, and the City Planning and Zoning Commission have bi-weekly meetings in which residents and business owners bring forward requests for architectural alterations (with the BAR) and changes in zoning variances (City Board of Zoning Appeals and Planning and Zoning Commission).
- G. For example, (for those whose property is located within the historic district) a homeowner might desire to change the color of his historic property or build an addition onto the back of the property. Or a business owner might want to change the design of his storefront’s window. Before they can go forward with the work, the owner must bring plans before the BAR for their approval. Depending on how well his submission adheres to historical accuracy, and the preferences of the BAR

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<sup>6</sup> Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 18.

- members, the homeowner and business owner may or may not have their changes approved.
- H. Similarly, the City Board of Zoning Appeals deals with people requesting changes in the zoning of a particular area. For example, if an architectural firm wants to place its office in a neighborhood that is zoned for residential use only, they will have to bring their request for a variance that would allow their commercial use to be allowed in the neighborhood.

#### Slide 6: Important Faces in Charleston's Preservation Movement

- A. Susan Pringle Frost was the founder and first president of the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings. Frost worked tirelessly to protect Charleston's historic properties as a real estate agent, buying and selling properties to those who had the means to preserve them. She was also a supporter of women's rights and suffrage during her lifetime.<sup>8</sup>
- B. Albert Simons was a famous Charleston architect and author who was one of the most vocal opponents of the exportation of Charleston's architectural heritage.<sup>9</sup> Simons worked on many different historic properties in Charleston as one of the city's leading preservation architects into the 1970s.<sup>10</sup>
- C. Laura M. Bragg was the director of the Charleston Museum from 1920 to 1931. With a background in museums (establishing museums across the south) Bragg founded the Charleston Free Library and opened the Charleston Museum to blacks in 1921. She also created the nation's first traveling exhibits which helped encourage other museums to place a stronger emphasis on their role as education facilities.<sup>11</sup>
- D. Frances R. Edmunds was Historic Charleston Foundation's first employee in 1948. She served as the executive director of the organization until her retirement in 1985. Her influence guiding preservation initiatives helped shape Historic Charleston

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<sup>8</sup> Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> South Carolina State Museum, "20<sup>th</sup> Century Leaders: Laura Bragg," A Woman's Light: Making History in South Carolina, A Virtual Exhibit, <http://www.southcarolinastatemuseum.org/women/Bragg.html> (accessed March 7, 2010).

Foundation as an organization which had a subsequent impact on the standards by which Charleston's historic properties are preserved.<sup>12</sup>

Slide 7: Preservation Society of Charleston

- A. The Preservation Society of Charleston was originally named the Society for the Preservation Of Old Dwellings. It was renamed in 1957 because the society wanted to advocate the preservation of all historic properties, not just dwellings.
- B. The organization was founded in 1920 by Miss Susan Pringle Frost.
- C. The Preservation Society achieves its preservation goals in several ways.
  - a. One way is through the Carolopolis Award Program, established in 1956, which awards honorary plaques to homeowners who practice exemplary preservation efforts on their homes.
  - b. Another way is through protective exterior and interior easements which are legal contracts that place restrictions on any alterations to historic homes.
- D. The Preservation Society is a volunteer organization governed by a volunteer board and eight paid staff members.<sup>13</sup>

Slide 8: Historic Charleston Foundation

- A. Historic Charleston Foundation (HCF) was established as a non-profit organization in 1947. A non-profit organization uses its surplus wealth for furthering its goals rather than redistributing it to employees and shareholders.
- B. The Foundation specializes in protecting Charleston's resources that are inherent to its history and heritage.
- C. Preservation and advocacy programs, such as protective covenants and easements, allow the Foundation to help advise historic property owners in which preservation methods are best.

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<sup>12</sup> Historic Charleston Foundation, "About Us: Our History," <http://www.historiccharleston.org/about/history.html> (accessed March 7, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> The Preservation Society of Charleston, "Who We Are; Founding & Preservation Society History," [http://www.preservationsociety.org/who\\_history.asp](http://www.preservationsociety.org/who_history.asp) (accessed March 7, 2010).

- D. HCF runs two museums sites (Aiken-Rhett House (ca. 1818), Nathaniel Russell House (ca. 1808), the Annual Festival of Houses and Gardens, the Charleston International Antiques Show, and three retail shops.
- E. The Foundation is governed by a Board of Trustees and has a full-time staff which takes care of the organization's Administration, Communications and Public Programs, Finance, Preservation and Museums, and Retail.<sup>14</sup>

#### Slide 9: Living in Historic Charleston Today

- A. For business owners and homeowners alike, living in a city like Charleston that places such importance on its historic structures can often be a challenge.
- B. Even though the restrictions placed on the historic buildings by zoning laws and the BAR are meant to uphold the architectural integrity and historic significance of the property, some people can see the restrictions as a threat to their private property rights.
  - a. Not everyone enjoys being told they can't build a new addition onto their home or design their storefront however they wish.
- C. However, those who purchase property in historic districts usually understand what they are getting into.
- D. The restrictions and guidelines enforced by zoning laws and the BAR are put in place to protect the character defining features that make historic properties architecturally and culturally significant.
- E. Undoubtedly, one of the most remarkable features of Charleston is its retention of so many significant historic properties.
  - a. The city would not have the same character without its architecture.
  - b. Charleston's historic buildings are a major part of the city's successful tourism industry which brings millions of dollars into the economy every year.

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<sup>14</sup> Historic Charleston Foundation, "About Us: Who we are," <http://www.historiccharleston.org/about/who.html>.

- c. In addition, the history of the buildings is closely intertwined with the history of the people who live in the Charleston area.
  - d. Therefore, the preservation of these historic buildings is both economically and culturally important.
- F. The success of Charleston's preservation movement has acted as a model for many other cities across the nation.
- G. The biggest challenge for any city with a historic district is to determine how to simultaneously preserve the historic buildings while integrating modern buildings into the landscape.
- H. Buildings are meant to be used, so it is imperative that functional uses be applied to historic buildings so they won't sit vacant.
- I. Now, leave this slide up while you follow the next step in the lesson plan.