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## Funding Culture: An Analysis of Historic Site Preservation Policy

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## Funding Culture: An Analysis of Historic Site Preservation Policy

### Abstract

This paper examines the way in which public funding and tax policies are applied to federally recognized historic preservation sites and how that application influences the a variety of stakeholder communities including tax payers, historical organizations, historic property owners, and municipalities.

### Keywords

historic preservation, historic site tax policy, public history, Historic Preservation Fund

### Disciplines

Policy History, Theory, and Methods | Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration

### Comments

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**Funding Culture: An Analysis of Historic Site Preservation Policy**

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Professor Anne Douds

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Across the country, thousands of historic sites exist to preserve the condition of historic materials of a given time and place and to use those remains to accurately educate the public about historic events. These sites range in their form from battlefields and parks, to memorials, museums, historic houses, and repurposed historic buildings. Pennsylvania specifically is home to many historic sites from the Civil War battlefields in Gettysburg, to the historic homes of Daniel Boone and former president James Buchanan. James Buchanan's home, known as the Wheatland Estate, is located in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. LancasterHistory Organization works to maintain this historic house, providing educational tours about Buchanan's life in the home, and cultivating rotating collections that tell visitors about Lancaster's larger historic heritage.

As an intern with LancasterHistory this past summer, I was afforded the opportunity to tour other historic sites and public museums in Pennsylvania, New York, and Delaware. These experiences, along with the work I conducted in the archives department at LancasterHistory, led me to research regarding the procurement of funding for historic sites, those sites' local impact on their political and economic communities, and those sites' systematic relationship with public offices. Additionally, I researched historic site tax policies, analyzing both the impact that these policies enact on taxpayers, organizations, and communities at large. My research ultimately led me to the conclusion that the accurate measurement of historic sites' economic impact is necessary for the procurement of community support, which is in turn necessary for the continued function of historic sites.

### ***Background: Funding Historic Sites***

Historic sites are identified and registered through the Department of the Interior (DOI). The DOI oversees the operation of the National Parks Services' National Register of Historic Places (National Park Service Cultural Office, 1990). The register was created after

implementation of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. This policy gave historic preservation a broader, more centralized legislation than what was provided previously in the Antiquities Act of 1906 and in the Historic Sites Act of 1935 (National Parks Service, 2019). The 1966 Act established historic preservation offices at the state level and established a reviewal process for projects that could potentially cause harm to sites titled Section 106. In this process, federally funded projects that put historic sites at risk of destruction or harm are reviewed to ensure that minimal harm or overall avoidance of harm is prioritized (National Parks Service, 2019).

Additionally, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 founded the Historic Preservation Fund. This federal fund issues regulations to states' Historic Preservation Offices and manages the distribution of state level grants and grants provided by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (Department of the Interior, 2019). The Historic Preservation Fund also maintains the National Register for Historic Places. The fund is authorized to receive \$150 million to allocate each fiscal year through the year 2023. However, the fund is subject to the congressional budget making process, which has traditionally awarded the fund \$54 million to \$100 million annually (Department of the Interior, 2019). Congress also has the authority to grant supplemental funding to the fund in the case of natural disasters and elected to do so after the destruction caused by hurricanes in 2013 and 2018 (Department of the Interior, 2019).

To become a federally recognized historic site, and to therefore to receive funding from the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF), a site must either meet standards set by State Historic Preservation Programs, identify as an Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian group, identify as a National Trust for Historic Preservation, or operate as certified local government that lacks a historic preservation office (Department of the Interior, 2019).

If a site needs more than a grant can offer for a project or if a site is not federally recognized as historic, they often increase their monetary resources by appealing to the local community for donations, reaching out to private investors, partnering with local businesses, and recruiting community members to become patrons that contribute to funding on a regular basis. LancasterHistory Organization partakes in such efforts to secure funding for the maintenance of their collections, archives, and the Wheatland estate. In my short three months with the organization I attended an annual fundraising gala, a fundraising event where proceeds were split with a local restaurant, a fundraising auction in which all proceeds benefitted the organization and attended multiple educational talks in which attendees were asked for donations. These efforts continue year-round and are left to a designated fundraising department to plan and host. While a grant given to the organization by the state funded me and my fellow interns' stipends and covered the cost of field trips, the staff at LancasterHistory made it clear that facility maintenance costs were funded on a project-to-project basis by fundraising events and benefits like the ones I attended.

***Background: Identifying Historic Sites***

Aside from attaining direct funding from the Historic Preservation Fund, historic sites can receive preservation "benefits and incentives" by registering with the National Register of Historic Places (National Park Service Cultural Office, 1990). Included in those benefits are tax credits and the ability to qualify for programs facilitated by National Park Services (National Park Service Cultural Office, 1990). Properties must be nominated for application into the register and the Historic Preservation Fund Manual explains that states are required to assist both private and public sectors in nominating historic properties to the register (*Historic Preservation Fund Grant Manual*, 2007). Many of these nominations result from state conducted surveys, as the Historic Preservation Fund Manual also stipulates that a "reasonable percentage" of

nominations originate in state-operated surveys that examine both historic buildings and historic plots of land (*Historic Preservation Fund Grant Manual*, 2007).

To determine which cites do not qualify, the Historic Preservation Fund manual cites activities that render a location or project ineligible for grant assistance. Listed in Section E of the manual, these activities include those spearheaded by federal agencies, mitigation activities that are serving to help a location obtain a federal license, permit or funding, activity that takes place on Church or Church owned property, and activities whose cost are already cited as unallowable or unapproved by the National Park Service (*Historic Preservation Fund Grant Manual*, 2007).

### ***Policy Oversight: Controlling the Historic Preservation Fund***

The Historic Preservation Fund is managed by the National Park Service, who is responsible for matching grants funded by the Historic Preservation Fund to applicants all over the country (Department of the Interior, 2019). The National Park Service reports to the Department of the Interior. The Department of the Interior, through the Office of Natural Resources Revenue, allocates a portion of the revenue generated from companies that extract energy resources from federally leased land to the Historic Preservation Fund. Other portions of the revenue are disbursed to agencies and local governments (Department of the Interior, 2019).

Any extractions that generate revenue on Native American lands are disbursed back to Native American tribes or individuals (Department of the Interior, 2019). This distinction is crucial to the flow of power in preservation policy, as it grants power back to Native American groups themselves to identify and erect their own historic sites. Control over these sites allows Native Americans to control the narrative of their history as it is explained to the public, which in

turn allows them to determine the tone of their legacy without intervention from non-Native historians.

### ***Municipal Tax Policy and Historic Preservation***

While taxpayers do not directly fund historic site management, they are liable to cover the cost of taxes not paid by historic sites that receive benefits, credits, and exemptions. Once a property is identified as historic, it's owners, whether public or private entities, qualify for tax credits exempting them from most local taxes (Kohtz, 2011). Concerns from taxpayers arise when there is no perceived public benefit from private owners of historic properties. This lack of benefit calls into question the legitimacy of the justifications for these tax exemptions, as many perceive the exemption as a “subsidy for wealthy homeowners provided at taxpayer expense” (Kohtz, 2011). Attorney David J. Kohtz outlines the necessary steps to reverse this perception in his article “Improving Tax Incentives for Historic Preservation,” published in 2011 in the *Texas Law Review*, proposing alteration to current policy by implementing public access requirements on historic sites.

Kohtz argues that, for the tax exemption to be justified, the public should be granted access to any publicly or privately owned historic site either physically by visiting the site in person, virtually by finding information about the site on the internet, or visually by freely viewing the site (Kohtz 2011). These three points of access form the public benefits of historic sites, and therefore justify sites' tax exemption by characterizing historic sites as public goods.

Historic sites often receive tax benefits in the form of abatements or freezes, or deductions and credits on income tax (Kohtz, 2011). Freezes serve to “exclude the value of rehabilitative work from tax assessments for a period of time,” while abatements “reduce a property's assessed value by a set percentage” (Kohtz, 2011). On the other hand, income tax

credits repay a portion of renovative expenses to taxpayers, and deductions restricts the amount of taxable income (Kohtz, 2011). These tax benefits are in effect under many municipalities across the country and are upheld under the condition that historic sites comply with the Department of Interior's rehabilitative regulations and with public access regulations (Kohtz, 2011).

The degree to which public access is granted on these properties is a point of contention between historic property owners and taxpayers. Kohtz explains that "public access requirements have tended to be watered down or eliminated entirely" in recent practice (Kohtz, 2011). The elimination of these requirements, which has occurred in New Mexico, Arizona, Oregon, and California, is due unrest among site owners, who have pushed back on state legislatures' "onerous" requirements for physical access to properties (Kohtz, 2011).

### ***Historic Sites and Federal Tax Policy***

The federal government provides a test that can be used to identify requirements for physical public access on historic properties. The federal government assesses public access in terms of conservation easements, which are agreements in which historic property owners donate a portion of their site to a qualified organization for conservation purposes (Kohtz, 2011). These easements are the only tax incentives that are available to private homeowners and allows those homeowners to subtract the value of the property granted to an organization by the easement from their property taxes (Kohtz, 2011).

These deductions are upheld when conditions of public access are satisfied by the easement. This means that the easement is assessed to determine the level of deduction based on the following criteria: historic significance, nature of the property's features, the remoteness of the property, potential physical hazards on the property, the extent to which property intrusion is

possible, and if opportunity exists for the public to view the site without physically visiting it (Kohtz, 2011). The variation between these points of assessments has resulted in a wide-ranging definition for public access, and has therefore, varied the level of public access provided by historic properties.

While physical access requirements are not rigid or uniform, visual access requirements are typically a condition of tax incentive programs (Kohtz, 2011). Often these visual access requirements take the form of informative plaques or signs, or clear visibility of the exterior of the historic site. Because emphasis is placed on the visibility of the exterior of buildings, interior rehabilitation projects do not qualify a property for tax incentive programs (Kohtz, 2011).

Less common to historic site tax incentive programs are requirements for virtual public access to historic sites (Kohtz, 2011). These requirements would grant access to public databases of historic properties to those who are not capable of viewing or physically visiting a site (Kohtz, 2011). In some states, virtual access via a state-run database is required of registered historic sites. Pennsylvania has linked its visual access and virtual access programs by providing online access codes at historic plaques that lead visitors to informational websites about the site (Kohtz, 2011). This was evident at LancasterHistory's campus, where most outdoors signage was hyperlinked via a barcode to the organization's website, which gave more information on the sign's content

### ***Stakeholder Analysis: Public Access and Privacy***

While public access is one of the tangible justifications for tax incentives for historic property owners, it is contested by property owners who have concern about infringement of their privacy (Kohtz, 2011). To combat this issue, some state legislatures have implemented policies that divide historic houses into private and public spheres, categorizing individual rooms

to limit public access and protect the privacy of homeowners (Kohtz, 2011). In practice, Kohtz reports that these measures have proved “arbitrary” and nearly “impossible to enforce” (Kohtz, 2011). Ultimately the cost of “administrative oversight” needed to organize public flow of traffic through a private home has begun to approach the value of the public benefit of the property. While the conservation easement policy is in place to diffuse this problem by putting the responsibility on a third-party organization, who often have greater incentive than private homeowners to provide efficient public access, there is public concern that homeowners and third party conservationists minimize public access for their own benefit (Kohtz, 2011).

Additionally, dividing sites into public and private zone offers the opportunity for public access plans to be determined on an individual basis. Determining individual access plans, however, makes it difficult for administrative bodies to keep a pulse on taxpayers’ abidance to the plans, and for municipalities to measure taxpayer satisfaction with access (Kohtz, 2011).

Though providing visual access via informational plaques may seem relatively unengaging to the public, plaques can stimulate local economy by inciting tourist attraction and local business engagement. Tourists often visit informational plaques, and the presence of tourists provides opportunity for local businesses to be patronized, stimulating local economies. Additionally, businesses are often given the opportunity to sponsor plaques in their community. This sponsorship helps to spread public information and to aid local businesses in advertisement efforts, encouraging the breadth of their popularity (Kohtz, 2011).

While virtual access is the least tangible of the three forms of public access, it raises the most concern for site owner privacy. Online databases provide a vast educational benefit, but the bounty of information provided could be used for the wrong reasons (Kohtz, 2011). Site location, virtual tours of building interiors, and owner information could be used to inform plans to

trespass, intrude, and even burglarize historic sites (Kohtz, 2011). This risk most importantly endangers private homeowners and organizations, but it also puts historical artifacts in the way of potential harm by exposing their location to potential burglars and looters. Ultimately, this risk must be weighed against the immense public benefit granted by virtual databases, which have the capacity to inform and educate all persons.

### ***Stakeholder Analysis: Historic Organizations and Communities***

Though many historic sites preserve events that happened centuries ago, preservation sites impact a variety of people in the present. Particularly, historic societies or nonprofit organizations who manage sites and patrons or investors who donate to specific historic sites are most affected by policy regarding site preservation. Historic societies and organizations are responsible for ensuring that their site complies with guidelines established by the Department of the Interior and are responsible for applying to grants to receiving public funding from the Historic Preservation Fund. Changes in current policy would influence the scope of this responsibility and would therefore alter the daily work of those employed by these organizations. Additionally, a change in funding as a result of a change in the policy held by the Historic Preservation Fund would likely increase fundraising efforts initiated by historic sites, in turn increasing the donation level from local investors and patrons.

The communities surrounding these sites also bear the brunt of the externalities initiated by historic site preservation. Local communities withstand the logistic inconvenience of renovations often taken to maintain sites and are impacted by the flow of local and non-local visitors to the site. Additionally, renovative projects on land in historic districts is also often subject to the review of the regional historic commissions, which serve to determine whether or not development projects will obstruct historic properties. The commission's ruling weighs

heavily in the decision to approve new developmental projects, and therefore, greatly restricting the scope of local entrepreneurs. As an intern at LancasterHistory, I attended meetings at which the county historic commission rejected the continuation of some developmental projects that put a historic gas station and park at risk of destruction. The frustration expressed by local entrepreneurs in these instances demonstrates the tension existing between both historical organizations and local citizens as stakeholders in historic site management policy.

### ***Economic Benefit of Historic Sites in Communities***

Research conducted by economist Donovan D. Rypkema suggests that the current level of funding put into historic site preservation provides copious benefits to communities, while recognizing that those benefits are often overlooked. He outlines these benefits in his 2006 article “Economics, Sustainability & Historic Preservation” through examining the interrelatedness of sustainable development and heritage conservation in urban areas (Rypkema, 2006). He explains that these two frameworks encompass “economic competitiveness, job creation, housing, private-public partnerships,” and “social cohesion,” forming the character of a community (Rypkema, 2006).

Rypkema defines sustainability broadly, placing its impact far beyond environmental concerns. According to Rypkema, the notion of sustainability concerns economic and cultural stability as well. He explains that preservation projects can be sustainable on economic, cultural, and environmental fronts by engaging with local businesses, preserving the shared history of an area, and using environmentally friendly materials in construction (Rypkema, 2006). His notion of sustainability suggests that historic preservation initiatives not only benefit those fascinated by history, but rather benefit communities cross sectionally, improving the condition of anyone involved. His analysis also suggests that those uninvolved and uninterested still reap

some level of benefit from historic preservation, whether that be the bolster in their community's economy from the engagement with local business, the attraction of non-local people who also stimulate local business and can determine regional reputation, or simply the aesthetic value of preserving communal heritage.

While many argue that the benefit of historic preservation initiatives does not extend beyond the timeline of the project's construction or restoration, Rypkema explains that historic sites are "capital assets," that maintain value when in "productive use" (Rypkema, 2006). While Rypkema's definition of "productive use" remains unclear, the term "productive" suggests that historic sites should be producing something to retain or potentially increase their value. At LancasterHistory, the organization retained that value by producing job opportunities for tour guides, gifts shop employees, administrative, and custodial staffs. Additionally, the organization facilitated many partnership opportunities for local businesses, schools, and nonprofit organizations. These efforts facilitate the formation of dynamic community efforts, serving to benefit a variety of local interests.

Ultimately, Rypkema's analysis suggests that historic site property and tax policies should employ heuristics that evaluate the diverse, cross-sectional economic impacts of historic sites on local communities. The large breadth of this analysis further pushes the boundary of the measuring economic impact, suggesting that the most effective policy analysis address the interconnectedness between personal, political, and economic interests.

### ***Measuring the Economic Impact of Historic Sites***

To effectively assess local economic impacts of historic sites, specific indicators of economic efficiency must be identified and quantified. A report commissioned by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation compiled by Donavon Rypkema and Caroline Cheong of

*PlaceEconomics*, and Randall Mason of University of Pennsylvania identifies these indicators, which can be “used to regularly, meaningfully, and credibly measure the economic impact of historic preservation over time” (Rypkemma et al., 2011). The report identified the following categories as indicators of economic efficiency: Job/Household Income, Property Values, Heritage Tourism, Environmental Measurements, and Downtown Revitalization (Rypkemma et al., 2011). These variation between these impact levels suggests that historic preservation has a vast impact on communities, influencing job creation, the monetary value of local and surrounding property, the flow of tourism, and the condition of downtown areas. The breadth of this impact implies that historic preservation and local economics are closely intertwined.

Aside from property valuation and job creation impacts, the study also suggests that examining the scope of economic value should not take on a static view, but should rather evaluate the benefit of the process of historic preservation in its ability to increase social capital and communal cohesion (Rypkemma et al., 2011). The study also distinguishes between the economic impact of historic preservation efforts on both private and public markets. While private market values are easy to quantify, public market values require a more qualitative approach to measurement. Thus, deriving economic valuations for private and public markets requires the collaborative employment of quantitative and qualitative metrics (Rypkemma et al., 2011). This requirement reinforces the notion that historic site policy analysis should encompass both the quantitative economic value of historic sites as well as those sites’ qualitative social value.

### ***Suggested Metrics for Measuring Economic Impact of Historic Sites***

The study further suggests combining qualitative and quantitative data when analyzing the areas of interest to economic efficiency, like job/household Income, property values, heritage

tourism, environmental measurements, and downtown revitalization. Specifically, the study provides suggested metrics for each area of focus, breaking down how exactly economic impact of historic sites can be monitored. The study makes the distinction that for most accurate data measurement, these areas should be monitored annually, to provide a baseline pattern for economic trends that correlate to historic site management (Rypkemma et al., 2011).

To properly monitor the influence of historic site management and job/household income, the study suggests that policy analysts should examine projects that receive either federal rehabilitation tax credits or state credits for historic preservation, projects conducted by federal or state governments that are considered historic preservation efforts (Rypkemma et al., 2011). The study also acknowledges that policy analysts should develop an estimate for activities that do not fall under one of these categories, but that still engage with historic preservation activity. Ultimately the study suggests calculating the aggregated dollar amount for these categories and using diagnostic technology and existing statistics on local income levels to convert those dollar amounts into jobs and household incomes (Rypkemma et al., 2011). Current data on the perseveration projects from the National Parks Services and State Historic Preservation Office could provide the numerical foundation needed for this inquiry. Additionally, local and state government expenditures for projects that involve restoration or preservation of historic buildings and districts could be collected to serve as an input value for the conversion from funds to income.

To accurately capture the impact of historic sites on community property value, the study suggests monitoring the annual change of value of residential buildings in historic districts. It is crucial that this value is analyzed relative to the value change in residential buildings that are not in historic districts (Rypkemma et al., 2011). Using this metric also reinforces that these values should be recorded regularly to properly identify trends that reveal the actual impact of historic

sites on their surrounding communities. This calculation is complicated by the frequent inclusion of “heritage premiums” in the valuation of property in historic districts. These premiums represent “the amount, if any, that the marketplace pays for a property in a historic district after all other variables are accounted for” (Rypkemma et al., 2011). To determine the values of these premiums, a hedonic pricing method is often used, which often uses the value of a surrogate good, or good of equal value and characteristic, to assign value to another good (Rypkemma et al., 2011). Therefore, property values in historic districts ultimately need to be measured in relation to the value of the historic sites in the area. Once that value is established for a given time period, it’s fluctuation can be measured by estimating the percentage change in the value per square foot in properties of both historic and non-historic districts (Rypkemma et al., 2011). While the value of property may differ initially between historic and non-historic districts because of the heritage premium, tracking the percentage changes between the districts will provide estimate of whether property value increases can be correlated to historic preservation projects as opposed to the starting difference in value.

Another metric for measuring the impact of historic site management on the economy is measuring heritage tourism in a given area. Measuring this metric is difficult because it requires converting qualitative data on tourists’ trips to quantitative data that represents the value they contribute to local economies. The study recommends using surveys to determine the total number of heritage tourists relative to regular tourists and requesting information on the number of places the tourist visited, their daily expenditure, and their total trip expenditure (Rypkemma et al., 2011). This survey would serve analysts best if only distributed by historic sites themselves, who can verify that a specific tourist is indeed a heritage tourist, and who can also attest at to the value spent at the site itself. While the survey structure recommended by the study would provide the necessary information for analysts to evaluate the contribution of heritage

tourism to the economy, it does not provide measures to ensure the accuracy of the information provided by the tourists themselves. The study does however suggest attaching these series of questions to existing state or national surveys that measure regular tourism to reach a wide pool of tourists, strengthening the accuracy of the results yielded (Rypkemma et al., 2011).

In addition to measuring the tourism attracted by historic sites, analysts could also measure historic sites' local environmental impact. Evaluating this metric could take on a variety of forms including inquiry into life cycle energy use calculations, the reduction of emissions and landfill usage, and analysis of annual operating costs of historic sites with recently renovated buildings (Rypkemma et al., 2011). Like the other metrics, evaluating the environmental impact of a historic site requires that data be collected on a regular basis to properly identify patterns of change.

Renovation of historic sites not only impacts natural environmental factors of local communities, but also affects the revitalization of downtown areas. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has recently enacted a national program called Main Street that measures historic sites' role in the economic development of downtown areas (Rypkemma et al., 2011). The Main Street program analyzes the number of net new jobs, net new businesses, the amount of investment in the area, and the number of buildings renovated (Rypkemma et al., 2011). Rypkemma et al.'s study suggests that implementing a similar program in areas that do not participate in the Main Street program could be beneficial, especially if measurements are conducted by a third party, and if the above factors are measured not only in historic districts but in non-historic districts so that the actual impact of historic sites on their downtown communities can be measured relative to typical downtown development rates (Rypkemma et al., 2011).

***Conclusion: The Relationship between Historic Site Preservation and Public Policy***

The influence of historic sites on local communities is one that is socially and culturally well understood but has yet to be grasped quantitatively. Using the metrics like job/household income, property value, heritage tourism, environmental measurements, and downtown revitalization offer a platform for determining the holistic quantitative value of historic sites. Ultimately, proving this quantitative value justifies the federal and municipal tax policy that is currently in place. Ensuring the continuation of taxpayer support for publicly funded historic preservation and rehabilitation programming requires that taxpayers are able to see the economic valuation of local historic sites and are able to easily obtain physical, visual, and virtual access to historic sites in their own communities. Similarly, recognizing this economic valuation reinforces to those who work locally for a historic organization or specific site the tangible value of their efforts. On a larger scale, this similarly provides those who serve or organize the National Parks Services or Historic Preservation Fund under the Department of the Interior validation that current policies that inform historic site registration processes and fund allocation are both stable and beneficial. Ultimately, the economic impacts of historic site preservation, incited by current policy practices, bolster the political and social motivations for preserving national heritage. Further development of historic sites is dependent on those sites' influence within their local communities on economic and social levels. My summer at LancasterHistory reinforced that this interaction between fiscal and cultural priorities ultimately determines how historic sites around the country function in their communities, and how public policy can be used to support that function.

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