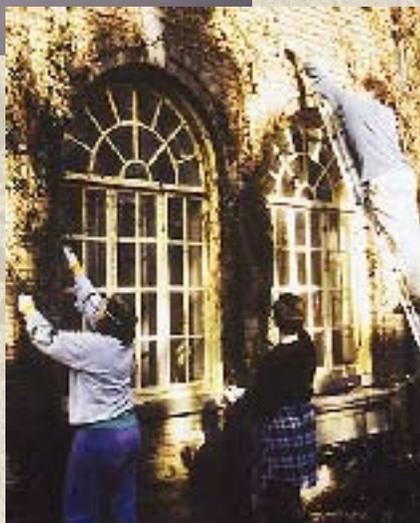
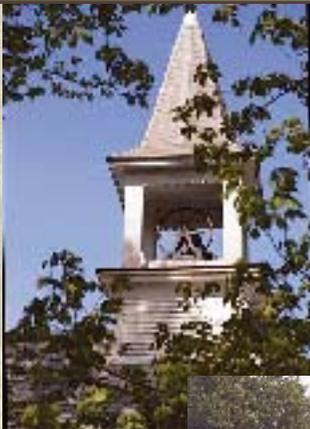


Cover Story



History in the making Historic preservation in Michigan townships

From lighthouses in the Upper Peninsula to restored barns in the Michigan countryside, historic preservation is sweeping the state. Not only does historic preservation underscore the importance of our shared heritage, but many townships in Michigan are finding that historic preservation can have financial and cultural benefits as well.

WHY PRESERVE?

Historic preservation—saving and reusing historic places—is beneficial in a number of ways for all kinds of communities, from large to small and from urban to rural. Our historic places tell the story of our communities, and provide a unique sense of place and identity. Rehabilitating a historic building provides a sense of continuity and a tangible link to the past. In rehabilitation, high-quality materials (such as old-growth wood windows and floors, plaster, and stained glass), along with the craftsmanship that shaped these materials, are preserved for future generations to enjoy and are saved from going to landfills.

Reinvesting in existing buildings helps to curb sprawl, save green spaces and agricultural lands, and conserve energy and building materials. Historic preservation can help save community character—and help communities retain residents, and attract visitors, new residents and new investment.

Historic buildings also fit into the current concern for green or sustainable buildings. Many say that the “greenest” building is one that has already been built. Matthew Bronski, senior staff engineer at Simpson Gumertz & Heger, Inc., Boston, observed in the January 2007 issue of *Environmental Building*

News, that older buildings are a laboratory for how to do things sustainably. “They tend to be simpler, more long-lasting and durable,” he said.

This is expanded by Michael Jackson, FAIA, and chief architect for preservation services at the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (the Illinois State Historic Preservation Office) who calls the inherent green quality of buildings “embodied energy.” Embodied energy refers to the life-cycle savings in a new building compared with that of renovating an old building. Studies illustrate that the time frame to realize savings is longer for new buildings than older buildings. In fact, one study shows that the embodied energy associated with upgrading or replacing an old building would take three decades or more to recoup.

The economic value of an older building extends beyond its green or sustainable features. As a matter of fact, according to Donovan Rypkema, a nationally renowned expert on historic preservation and economics, dollar for dollar, historic preservation is one of the highest job-generating economic development options available, and the strategy works in urban, suburban and rural communities.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION IS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

According to a 2002 Michigan Historic Preservation Network study, entitled *Investing in Michigan’s Future: The Economic Benefits of Historic Preservation*, for every \$1 million invested in a rehabilitation project, 25 new jobs were created. In terms of job creation, rehabilitation outperformed many other industries, including computer and data processing, trucking, and manufacturing auto parts, farm machinery and equipment, and chemicals. Between 1971 and 2001, building rehabilitation activities in Michigan directly created 9,394 jobs and indirectly created an additional 10,858 jobs, for a total of 20,252 jobs.

Further, when building rehabilitation is compared to new construction, rehabilitation has a greater positive impact on the local economy. Because rehabilitation projects are more labor intensive than new construction, and because labor tends to be hired locally, the money generated by the rehab work continues to spin through the local economy at restaurants, stores and shops at a higher rate. In addition, materials for rehabilitation are often available locally, whereas materials for new construction tend to be purchased elsewhere.

In addition to job creation and boosting the local economy during a rehabilitation project, historic preservation can offer additional significant economic benefits to a community long after the project itself is completed, according to Rypkema.

These benefits include:

- new businesses created
- private investment stimulated
- tourism stimulated
- increased property values



Historic preservation ...

- saves beautiful buildings and landscapes for future generations
- maintains tangible link to the past
- saves high-quality materials and craftsmanship
- helps to curb sprawl
- conserves energy and building materials
- supports the local economy
- enhances quality of life and community pride
- can preserve diversity of options for housing and commercial spaces

- enhanced quality of life, sense of neighborhood, and community pride
- new jobs created
- compatible land-use patterns
- increased property and sales taxes
- pockets of deterioration and poverty diluted

Many townships have completed historic preservation projects in recent years and are experiencing many of these benefits.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN TOWNSHIPS AROUND THE STATE

The Felt Estate in **Laketown Township** (Allegan Co.) is one example of a rehabilitation that turned an albatross into an asset for the rural township located between Holland and Saugatuck, along picturesque Lake Michigan. The Felt Mansion, boarded up in the early 1990s after the closing of the Saugatuck Dunes Correctional Facility, came back to life after a group of determined volunteers—Friends of the Felt Estate—pooled talents and resources to bring the historic home back to life.

Today, public and private rental use of the mansion generates \$80,000 that pays for maintenance and staffing. “While the

mansion will never be a cash cow for the township, bringing in money wasn't the goal," said **Al Meshkin**, Laketown Township manager. "Our objective was to save a local treasure, and provide a beautiful and educational cultural experience for our residents and the residents of West Michigan. But—realistically—we couldn't make it a drain on our finances either. Renting it out makes saving it feasible for our small township."

Other examples of Michigan townships engaged in historic preservation abound. The residents of **Green Oak Charter Township** (Livingston Co.) benefit from a great relationship between the Green Oak Township Historical Society and the township board. Working together, they are restoring the Green Oak Township Hall, built in 1856. The township hall will find new life as a meeting place for residents.

Through its Web site, **Tompkins Township** (Jackson Co.) supports its historical society by providing information about events and fund-raisers. The Tompkins Township Historical Society is currently reprinting a third edition of the township's history *All Around the Town*.

The original **Almena Township** (Van Buren Co.) hall—built in 1893 for just \$508.03—was moved and restored, the culmination of a four-year effort spearheaded by residents upon learning the township board was considering tearing down the historical building. The hall was moved in 1998, with a dedication in 2000 after interior restoration was



This restored farmhouse received the "Historic Preservation of the Year" award from the Ray Township (Macomb Co.) Historical Society, an active group of historians who research and honor preservation efforts within the township.

Photo courtesy of the Ray Township Historical Society.

completed. While moving a structure is not ideal, sometimes it is the only option for saving a building. The restored hall is now located near the township's new hall, and is used for community gatherings in the summer months.

Diane Triquet, who currently serves as Almena Township treasurer, was part of the 15-person committee that undertook the restoration efforts. "Residents and township officials put a great deal of time and effort into the restoration of the township hall," she said. "We are very proud of our project. It took the whole township to come together to make it happen."

While some municipalities undertake projects themselves, many townships and historical societies support preservation in other ways. Diligent historians in **Ray Township** (Macomb Co.) researched the township, collecting and preserving its history. Each year, the historians of the Ray Township Historical Society present owners of historic properties with the "Historic Preservation of the Year" award. This year's award was presented to the owners of a restored home for their commitment to preserving a local historic treasure. Ray Township also includes the township's rich history on its Web site, www.raytpw.org. Often these written records inspire others to continue preservation, passing it along to the next generation.

In 1995, **Presque Isle Township** (Presque Isle Co.) acquired its historic range light, built in 1870, and returned the light to near its original site. Much of the lower structure was rebuilt according to the original plans. Anne Garraty, one of the few female light keepers, maintained this light from 1903 to 1926. The historic site received a Michigan Historical Marker in 2006, and the preservation of the range light is now one of the case studies for the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office.

Another case study is the Hessler Log House in **Peninsula Township** (Grand Traverse Co.). In 1992, the 1856 log home

was threatened with demolition, but citizens rallied to save the structure. The building was moved to its present site, in Lighthouse Park, and restored. The Michigan Historical Marker interprets the history of this site—and also demonstrates that even the most modest structures deserve preservation.

Also in Peninsula Township, a collaboration between several organizations and Peninsula Township has preserved the Dougherty Historic Home Site. The site consists of a house built in 1842, several accessory structures and 15 acres of surrounding land in the village of Old Mission. Peninsula Township acquired the site in 2006 and donated a historic preservation easement (also known as a conservation easement) on the property to the Michigan Historic Preservation Network. This easement limits the use of the site and restricts development on the property, demonstrating the township's commitment to the preservation and maintenance of the land and the historic buildings.

The Peter Dougherty Society administers the site and envisions the site as a historical, cultural and educational center for visitors. As Peninsula Township Planner **Gordon Hayward** explains, "The Dougherty Historic Home Site will be available as a visible reminder of the cultural connections between the European and Native Americans during the middle and late 1800s, and will provide a permanent site for youth and adult

Photo courtesy of the Michigan State
Historic Preservation Office.



Authorizing statutes

The following are among the statutes that authorize township historic preservation efforts:

The Historical Activities and Projects Act, Public Act 212 of 1957, MCL 339.161, gives a township board the authority to raise and appropriate money for the purpose of fostering any activity or project that, in the opinion of the board, tends to advance the historical interests of the township.

The Municipal Historical Commissions Act, Public Act 213 of 1957, MCL 399.171 to 399.172, authorizes a township board to raise and appropriate money for the purpose of fostering any activity or project which the township board determines will advance the historical interests of the township.

The Historic Local Districts Act, Public Act 169 of 1970, MCL 399.201, *et seq.*, authorizes a township to appoint a historic district study committee, and subsequently, a historic district commission to study and control designated historic districts within the township to safeguard the heritage of the township, stabilize property values, foster civic beauty, and strengthen the local economy and the pleasure and welfare of township citizens.

educational opportunities for generations to come.” Supervisor **Rob Manigold** expanded on Hayward’s sentiment, “We have been very fortunate that the community has embraced this project as it has. That support has made the preservation of this important site possible.”

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2004, the Hart Farm (pictured on page 17) in **Tuscola Township** (Tuscola Co.) was established in 1836 and is still in the Hart family’s ownership. The nomination to the register highlights the historic significance of the property and its role in the township’s history. While this property was nominated by a family member, many historic sites are nominated by townships themselves in order to raise awareness of a particular site’s importance, and to communicate the importance of preserving historic sites in general. While listing on the National Register is honorary and does not offer legal protection from demolition, being listed often serves as a call to action, highlighting the need to protect and preserve the historic site.

Collaboration is often key to a successful preservation project. In 2008, the Michigan Barn Preservation Network awarded the “Barn of the Year” award to the Friends of Highland Recreation Area for heroic effort and collaboration on the Edsel Ford Barn restoration. Working with several groups in **Highland Charter Township** (Oakland Co.), the group is repairing and restoring the barn, raising funds through a newly created nonprofit organization. “Collaboration and cooperation are not only beneficial to these projects—in this economy, they are essential,” said Ken Freestone of the West Michigan Strategic Alliance. “We have to pool our resources and avoid wasting money on duplicate services.”

Because many Michigan townships were established in the mid-1800s, these townships are now celebrating their sesqui-centennials. These celebrations often foster renewed interest in township history—and serve as an excellent opportunity to gain momentum and enthusiasm for local preservation projects. **East China Charter Township** (St. Clair Co.), celebrating 150 years this year, funded the restoration of its one-room schoolhouse, the Red Brick School. The reason for undertaking the project was simple: “It is the oldest surviving public building



A collaboration between several organizations and Peninsula Township (Grand Traverse Co.) has preserved the Dougherty Historic Home Site, which consists of a house built in 1842, several accessory structures and 15 acres of surrounding land.

Photo courtesy of the Michigan Historic Preservation Network.

in the township, and we just didn’t want to lose it, to lose that piece of history,” said Treasurer **Don Beaudua**, noting that the township purchased the schoolhouse from the school district for \$1 in 1987—and spent \$80,000 in renovations, with assistance and insights from the State of Michigan and Greenfield Village.

The school, built in 1872, continues to be a working schoolhouse, educating today’s youth about the treasures of the past. Area schoolchildren can visit the school and spend a day experiencing what school was like in the 1800s. “The students are dressed in period clothing, they write on slate tablets and bring their lunch in tin pails,” explained Beaudua. “At the end of the day, we give them a recipe for making ink out of walnuts—their parents love that.”

Thanks to the township’s preservation efforts, the Red Brick School remains a living history museum—a wealth of local history underscoring the township’s rich heritage.

ECONOMY CAN IMPACT PRESERVATION PROJECTS

Unfortunately, not all townships have the volunteers, personnel or funds for saving historic structures. Many historic structures

are lost because immediate financial pressures outweigh long-term considerations. Although some officials may argue that historic preservation is not an approved expenditure for public funds, historic preservation has been recognized as a legitimate public purpose both at the state and federal levels. Michigan's Local Historic Districts Act, Public Act 169 of 1970 as amended, states, "Historic preservation is declared to be a public purpose..." The act goes on to describe that the purpose of the ordinance is to safeguard the heritage of the local community, stabilize and improve property values in each district and in the surrounding areas, foster civic beauty, strengthen the local economy, and promote the use of historic districts. *(See sidebar on page 17 for more statutes authorizing historic preservation efforts.)*

Both the federal and state governments encourage the preservation of historic buildings through various programs, including federal and state income tax incentives and programs to support the rehabilitation of historic and older buildings. Townships can also participate in the state Certified Local Government program, which aims to ensure that historic preservation issues are understood and addressed at the local level, and are integrated into the local planning and decision-making process.

To qualify for certification, a township must have adopted a local historic preservation ordinance that complies with ►



Available resources

Michigan Townships Association

www.michigantownships.org/historical.asp

Michigan Historic Preservation Network

www.mhpn.org

State Historic Preservation Office

www.michigan.gov/shpo

National Trust for Historic Preservation

www.preservationnation.org

Michigan Barn Preservation Network

www.mibarn.net

PA 169, and meet specific guidelines. In meeting these standards, townships are eligible to receive financial aid and technical assistance that can enhance and promote historic neighborhoods and commercial districts.

While some officials believe that the only responsibilities of townships are collecting taxes and holding elections, others believe that the township's responsibilities go beyond those basics—particularly in a time when consolidation of services threatens the elimination of local governments altogether. “Historic preservation is an important component in guarding the uniqueness of a community,” said Laketown Township Clerk **Wendy Van Huis**. “It counters homogenization of the landscape and helps give the community a strong sense of identity.”

A LOCAL EFFORT YIELDS LOCAL REWARDS

A familiar saying in preservation circles is that “all preservation is local.” Why? Because no one cares as much about your township's one-room schoolhouse, township hall or historic cemetery as much as local officials and residents do. Local historic treasures are just that: local treasures. The key to saving them is to rally local residents. This is often done through the township's historical society, historic commission or other civic group. Most successful historic preservation projects are championed by someone who is passionate about history, and leads the crusade to save and preserve the township's history.

Happily, the success stories are many—and as varied as the townships from which they originate. As the Michigan Land Use Institute expressed in its 2003 publication, *A Civic Gift*:

“People care about old buildings because they reflect shared memories and a sense of continuity, which are the essence of community. Updating historic buildings for modern applications generates economic activity precisely because of this intangible human response.

“It's this simple and this promising for Michigan in the 21st century: People like to live, work and play where history prospers.” ■

Patricia Hoezee Meyer, Operations Manager, Felt Mansion, Laketown Township (Allegan Co.), and **Ellen Thackery**, Field Representative, Michigan Historic Preservation Network and National Trust for Historic Preservation, Lansing



Meyer can be reached at (616) 896-7860 or patmeyer@patmeyerrestoration.net. Thackery can be reached at (517) 371-8080 or info@mhpn.org.



Contributions by Elaine Robinson, Director of Historic Preservation Planning, Commonwealth Cultural Resources Group, Inc., Jackson