



NATIONAL REGISTER BULLETIN

RESEARCHING A HISTORIC PROPERTY

[Previous](#)[Table of Contents](#)[Next](#)

U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE GUIDES AND DICTIONARIES

These standard architectural guides may indicate if the property you are researching is an example of a recognizable architectural style.

Blumenson, John J.G. *Identifying American Architecture: A Pictorial Guide for Styles and Terms, 1600-1945*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981.

Fleming, John, et al. *The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture*. Great Britain: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1966.

Foley, Mary Mix. *The American House*. New York: Harper & Row, 1980.

Gottfried, Herbert and Jan Jennings. *American Vernacular Design, 1870-1940*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1985.

Gowans, Alan. *Styles and Types of North American Architecture: Social Education and Cultural Expression*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

Harris, Cyril M. *Dictionary of Architecture and Construction*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975.

_____, ed. *Historic Architecture Sourcebook*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977.

McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.

Pevsner, Nicholas et al. *A Dictionary of Architecture*. New York: Overlook Press, 1976.

Phillips, Steven J. *Old House Dictionary*. Lakewood, CO: American Source Books, 1989.

Poppeliers, John C.S., et al. *What Style Is It? A Guide to American Architecture*. Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1983.

Saylor, H.H. *Dictionary of Architecture*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1952.

Whiffen, Marcus. *American Architecture: A Guide to Styles*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1969.



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[Previous](#)[Table of Contents](#)[Next](#)

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RESEARCH AND THE NATIONAL REGISTER FORM

Researching a historic property for National Register nomination differs from researching a property for other purposes. Information collected must be directed at determining the property's **historical significance**. When evaluating a property against National Register criteria, significance is defined as the importance of a property to the history, architecture, archeology, engineering, or culture of a community, a State, or the nation. Significance may be based on association with historical events (Criterion A); association with a significant person (Criterion B); distinctive physical characteristics of design, construction, or form (Criterion C); and potential to yield important information (Criterion D).

Every National Register nomination must place a property in its **historic context** to support that property's significance. Historic context means information about the period, the place, and the events that created, influenced, or formed the backdrop to the historic resources. The discussion of historic context should describe the history of the community where the property is located as it relates to the history of the property.

Two other considerations affect evaluation of significance: **association** and **period of significance**. **Association** refers to the direct connection between the property and the area of significance for which it is nominated. For a property to be significant under historic events (Criterion A), the physical structure must have been there to "witness" the event or series of events; they must have actually occurred on the nominated property. For a property to be significant for an association with an individual (Criterion B), the individual should have lived, worked, or been on the premises during the period in which the person accomplished the activities for which the individual is considered significant. **Period of significance** refers to the span of time during which significant events and activities occurred. Events and associations with historic properties are finite; most properties have a clearly definable period of significance.

Lastly, a property is evaluated for its **integrity**: the authenticity of physical characteristics from which properties obtain their significance. When properties retain historic material and form, they are able to convey their association with events, people, and designs from the past. All buildings change over time. Changes do not necessarily mean that a building is not eligible; but, if it has radical changes, it may no longer retain enough historic fabric, and may not be eligible for the National Register. Historic integrity is the composite of seven qualities: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

The National Register nomination form records the property at the time of its listing and justifies how the property qualifies for National Register listing. In addition, the form contains other data elements that should be reviewed before research is initiated. They include the location, size, and boundaries of the property; category and numbers of contributing resources; historic and current functions; architectural classification and materials; area and period of significance; and bibliography.

One of the most challenging tasks of research is knowing when you have gathered enough material. You are ready to complete the National Register nomination form when the following questions can be answered:

- What was the property called at the time it was associated with the important events or persons, or took on its important physical character that gave it importance?
- How many buildings, structures, and other resources make up the property?
- When was the property constructed and when did it attain its current form?
- What are the property's historic characteristics?
- What changes have been made over time and when? How have these affected its historic integrity?
- What is the current condition of the property, including the exterior, grounds, setting, and interior?
- How was the property used during its period of significance and how is it used today?
- Who occupied or used the property historically? Did they individually make any important contributions to history? Who is its current owner?
- Was it associated with important events, activities, or persons?
- Which National Register criteria apply to the property? In what areas of history is the property significant?
- How does the property relate to the history of the community where it is located?
- How does the property illustrate any themes or trends important to the history of its community, State, or nation?
- How large is the property, where is it located, or what are its boundaries?
- Would this property more appropriately be nominated as part of a historic district?

[Previous](#)

[Next](#)

[National Register Home](#) | [Publications Home](#) | [Previous Page](#) | [Next Page](#)

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