

TO DEFEND THE UNITED STATES

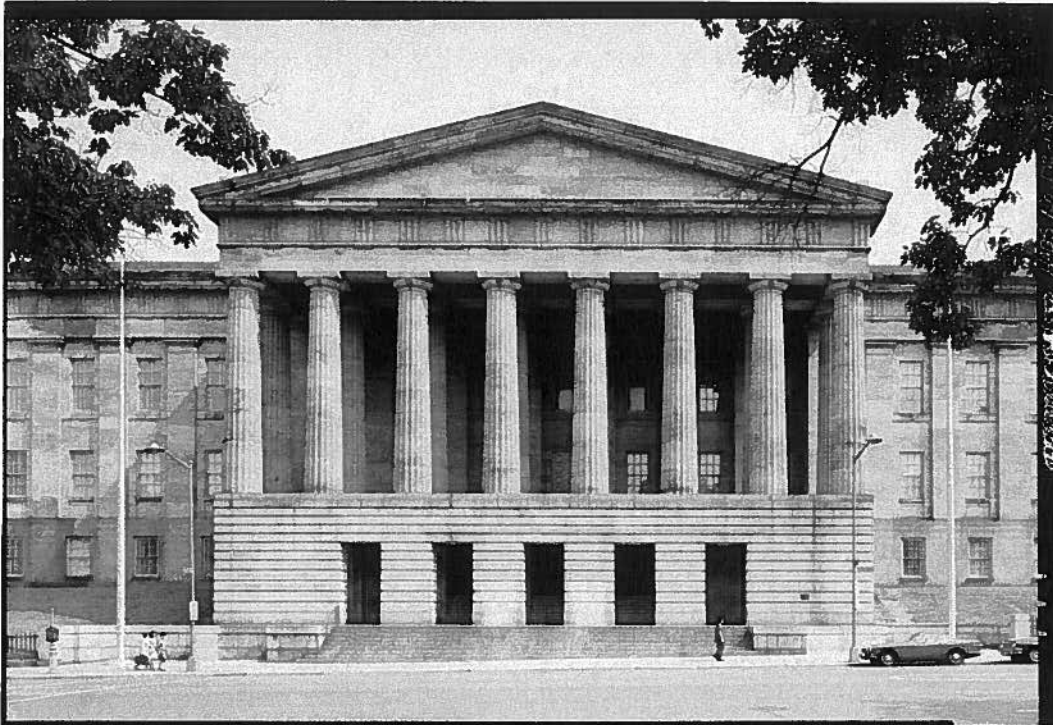
By James A. Glass

Indianapolis Literary Club

February 21, 2012

In 1953 bills were introduced in Congress to facilitate construction of a parking garage on the site of the former U.S. Patent Office Building in Washington, D.C. The marble structure, a Greek Revival monument designed by master architect Robert Mills, stood at the center of a square bounded by some of Washington's leading department stores. The store owners wanted to offer their suburban patrons more parking. They wished for the federal government to vacate the building, declare it surplus, and convey it to private parties, who would construct the garage. The American Institute of Architects, the capital city's Fine Arts Commission, and a new non-profit chartered by Congress, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, all opposed the bills and urged preservation of the landmark. They noted that it was occupied by the federal government, contained 200,000 square feet, and was in good condition. In addition, Washington had a shortage of federal office space. It took four years of patient advocacy, but finally, David Finley, Chairman of the National Trust, persuaded President Dwight Eisenhower that the building should be preserved. In 1958 a new bill was passed by Congress providing for the transfer of the building to the Smithsonian Institution for use as a National Portrait Gallery and home for the National Collection of Fine Arts.¹

¹Helen Duprey Bullock, "Auto-Intoxification," *Historic Preservation, Quarterly of the National Trust for Historic Preservation*, Vol. VI., No. 1 (Spring, 1954), p. 4; Louis A. Simon, "The Threat to the Old Patent Office," *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, Vol. 21 (April, 1954), pp. 160-63; Nona Brown, "The Fight for to Save the Nation's Landmarks," *New York Times*, September 28, 1958; "Old Patent Office Saved," *Historic Preservation*, Vol.

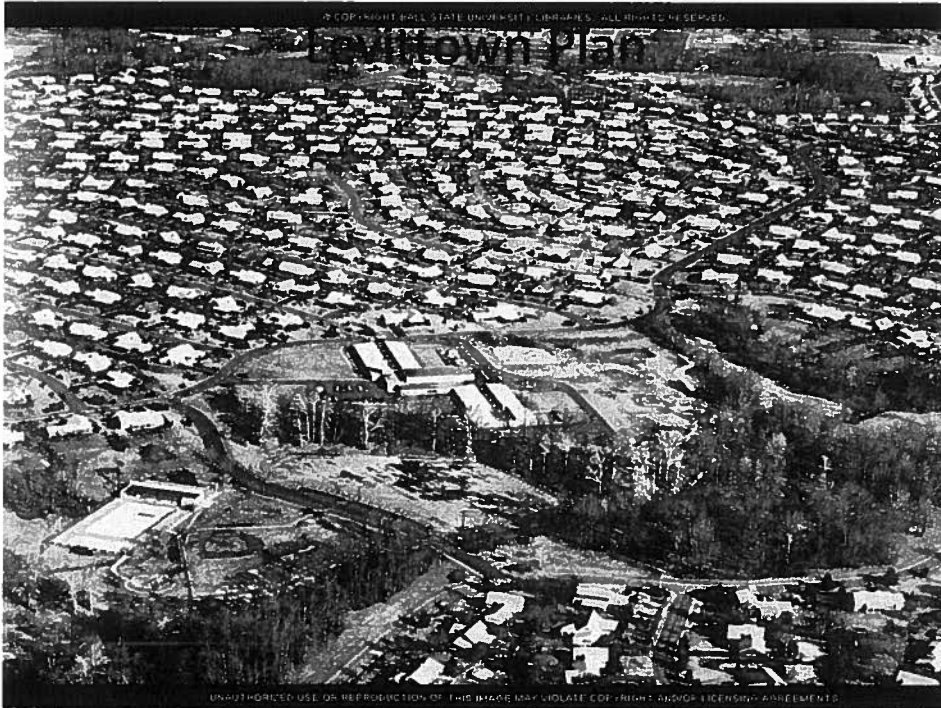


Former U.S. Patent Office, Washington, D.C., May, 1968
Source: Photo by Jack E. Boucher, Historic American Buildings Survey Collection,
Library of Congress

The story of the Patent Office illustrates the upheavals transforming American cities after World War II and the role of the automobile as a catalyst. The United States emerged from the war as the top economy in the world, and the country swiftly began an economic boom that dwarfed any previous upturns. American products were sold across the globe, manufacturing plants were working multiple shifts, and the American worker found well-paying factory and white collar jobs that offered the good life for millions of families. The 16 million American veterans who returned from World War II found that unlike many of their parents, they could aspire to a home of their own in thousands of new suburbs. The federal government, through the Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Administration guaranteed low-cost mortgages

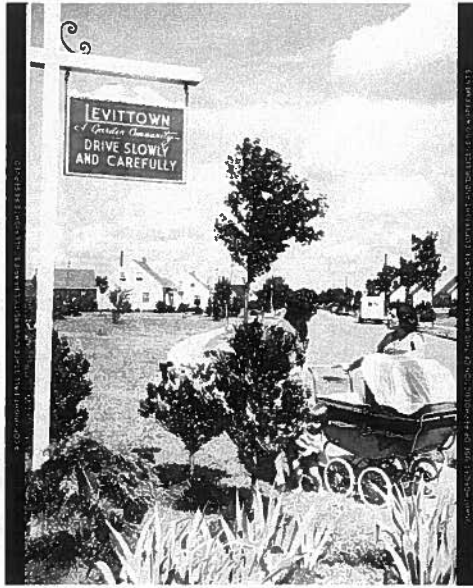
10, No. 2 (1958), p. 45; taped interview conducted with Robert R. Garvey, Jr. by Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., August 9, 1981, National Trust Library Collection, University of Maryland.

for veterans. Young couples left cities and small towns and moved to the suburbs. Well-paying jobs and easy credit meant that the bread-winner could also afford to buy a car to commute from his suburban tract house to an office, store, or manufacturing plant in the city.²



Levittown, prototype suburban development of the late 1940s
Source: Ball State University Libraries

² See William H. Whyte, Jr., "Introduction," *The Exploding Metropolis* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1958), pp. 9-10; Henry S. Churchill, "Urban Renewal's Failure," *Architectural Forum*, Vol. 104 (June, 1956), pp. 84, 90.



Levittown scene with two mothers and two Cape Cod tract houses
Source: Ball State University Libraries

Streets in the cities, laid out in a horse-drawn age, filled with vehicles, and rush-hour traffic jams became the rule. State highway departments responded by building controlled access expressways into the cities, cutting through old neighborhoods to relieve the congestion. Downtown, parking seemed to be never adequate. Many property owners in central business districts responded by demolishing 19th century structures and creating parking lots. In the sections with high rise office buildings, parking garages were constructed.³

Most of the new suburban dwellers had previously lived in single family homes or apartment buildings in cities from the 19th or early 20th centuries. When they left, a vacuum in the city housing market was created. At the same time, rapidly expanding factories in Northern and Eastern cities attracted thousands of African American families from the rural South and

³ Bullock, "Auto-Intoxification."

white families from Appalachia looking for a better way of life. In coastal cities, foreign immigrants sought jobs. Property owners in older neighborhoods divided up houses into multiple apartments. In New York City, some landlords squeezed as many newcomers as possible into single rooms. With little money put into maintenance, the housing stock of many urban neighborhoods deteriorated. The older neighborhoods, many of which exemplified the history of their city and contained some of its most interesting architecture, became “slums” in the eyes of business leaders, mayors, city council members, urban reformers, and planners.⁴



“Slums” in Cincinnati, c. 1960s, 19th century row houses downtown
Source: Ball State University Libraries

Urbanologists of the 1930s and 1940s had studied previous instances of slums and concluded that cities were like living organisms, and deteriorated, over-populated neighborhoods

⁴ Daniel Seligman, “The Enduring Slums,” *The Exploding Metropolis*, pp. 114-20.

were like attacks of “blight” on a tree. The solution was to excise the “blighted” areas of the city, much as one would cut off a blighted branch from a tree, and like a tree, the city would heal itself and thrive.⁵ Out of this analogy developed the Urban Renewal program, authorized by Congress in the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954. Local redevelopment authorities were to be created by cities and prepare urban renewal plans for blighted areas. The plans would call for purchase of “slum” properties and clearance of most of the buildings in a renewal area. The vacant tract would then be offered to a private developer at a substantially discounted price. Federal money would pay for up to 2/3 the cost of the purchase. Some tracts were expected to become sites for high rise public housing projects; others for high-rise upper income apartment buildings or office structures.⁶

Public housing projects were constructed by local housing authorities across the country, but private developers were slow to pursue construction of market rate apartments or offices in cities, especially when Federal Housing Administration funds were so plentiful for developing suburban housing tracts. Undeterred, local redevelopment authorities acquired blighted neighborhoods, cleared them, and waited for the developers to come. Unfortunately, in many cities, the cleared areas remained vacant.⁷

President Eisenhower’s principal domestic interest was to build a National Defense Highway System, which he believed would enable the Armed Forces to move troops and

⁵ See for example, Edith Elmer Wood, *Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1935).

⁶ Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 464-65; 498-501; Whyte, p. 11; William H. Whyte, Jr., “Are Cities Un-American?” *The Exploding Metropolis*, p. 41

⁷ Whyte, “Introduction,” *The Exploding Metropolis*, p. 12; “The Halting Progress of Urban Renewal,” *Architectural Forum*, Vol. 107 (October, 1957), pp. 124-25, 238-44.

weapons swiftly from one section of the country to another in case of an attack in the Cold War. In the Federal Highway Aid Act of 1956, Congress authorized construction of a 41,000 mile Interstate Defense Highway System, to connect all of the principal cities of the United States and to be built over a 13-year period at a cost of \$31 billion [1956 dollars]. Funds for construction were to come from a new highway tax. As part of the system, the administration proposed construction of some 5500 miles of expressways into 90% of all cities with more than 50,000 people. These expressways, to be built across city neighborhoods and downtowns, were to serve both motorists passing through and commuters traveling to and from work.⁸

Helen Duprey Bullock, editor of the National Trust quarterly, *Historic Preservation*, sounded a warning to Trust members in 1957 that the Interstate highway program would consume as much as 2 million acres of land and destroy scenic areas, parks, and parkways. It would cut through major cities and along historic roadways. By the end of the 1950s, Bullock was regularly receiving complaints from local historic preservation advocates about the destruction entailed by highway plans through towns and cities. For example, in Cincinnati, the Lytle Park area, an early suburb, was threatened in 1958 by the proposed Northeast Expressway. In Smyth County, Virginia, a state highway aided by federal funds threatened to destroy the historic Wilderness Road and surround a noted pioneer inn with a concrete cloverleaf.⁹

⁸ See "13-Year Highway Program," *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, XII (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly News Features, 1956), pp. 398-400; Helen Duprey Bullock, "41,000 Miles to ...?," *Historic Preservation*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1957), pp. 30-31; Francis Bello, "The City and the Car," *The Exploding Metropolis*, pp. 54-55.

⁹ Bullock, "41,000 Miles to ...?"; "In Danger," *Historic Preservation*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1959), pp. 32-33.



Interstate highway cloverleaf constructed about ½ blocks from historic Connecticut State House, downtown Hartford, c. late 1960s

Source: National Register Branch, Washington Office, National Park Service

Despite the Trust's success in saving the Old Patent Office, other federally-owned landmarks in Washington were soon threatened with demolition and replacement. In 1957, President Eisenhower's Advisory Commission on Presidential Office Space recommended construction of two new Executive office buildings near the White House, and the President gave his approval. The project would entail abandoning and demolishing the monumental Old State, War, and Navy Building next to the White House, a landmark of the French Second Empire architectural style, and clearing most of the block northwest of the White House, fronting on historic Lafayette Park. Lining the park were early 19th century brick row houses formerly

occupied by prominent cabinet secretaries and others with associations to important historical events.¹⁰

The Old State, War, and Navy Building would cost \$6 million to demolish, and no action was taken to proceed with its removal. Negative public reaction to the part of the proposal to raze the block northwest of the White House was immediate. Several bills were introduced in Congress to preserve the row houses fronting Lafayette Park, including the historic structure on Jackson Place in which the National Trust had its offices. Despite the Congressional interest, the General Services Administration (GSA), manager of federally-owned properties across the country, proceeded with plans to construct an immense new Executive Office Building facing the park.¹¹

¹⁰ "Lafayette Square," *Historic Preservation*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1957), pp. 28-29.

¹¹ *Ibid*; "Reprieve for the President's Front Yard," *Preservation News*, Vol. II, No. 9 (September, 1962), p. 1.



Old State, War, and Navy Building, Washington, D.C., 1969

Source: Photo by Ronald Comedy, Historic American Buildings Survey Collection, Library of Congress

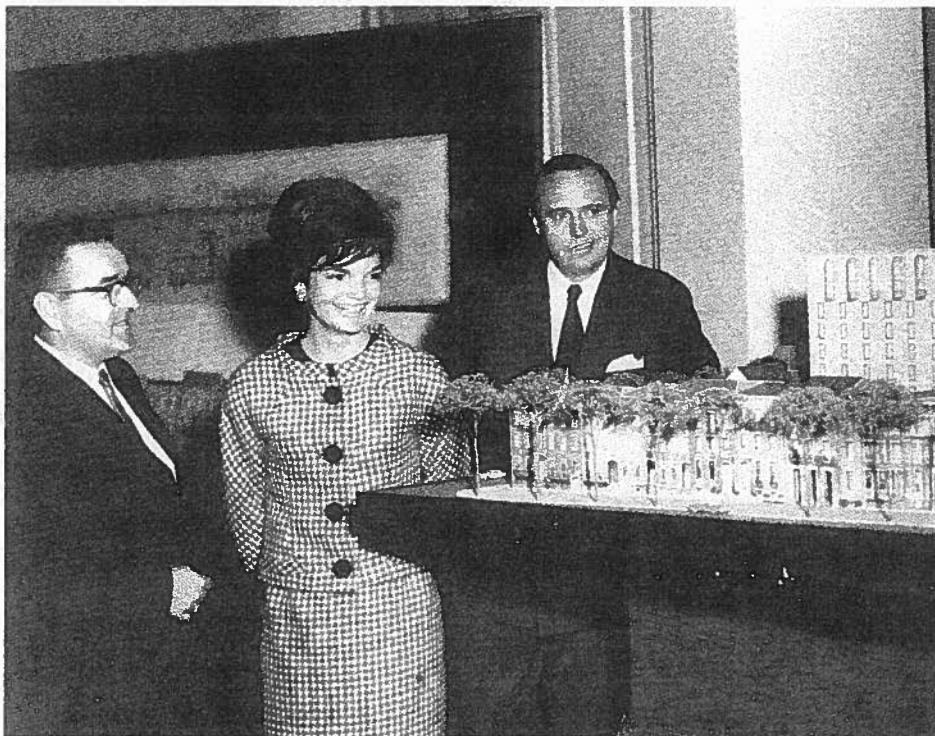
The Kennedy Administration brought a change in attitude regarding the impact of federal actions on the cultural heritage of the nation. Within a week of taking office in 1961, President John F. Kennedy rang the doorbell of Decatur House, a historic house museum on Lafayette Park owned by the National Trust, and took a tour given by the daughter of the resident caretaker. Jacqueline Kennedy also took an interest in the park and in the row houses that formed part of its character and charm. Possibly both Kennedys were influenced by their familiarity with the similar Beacon Hill neighborhood in Boston, where they had lived. Mrs. Kennedy heard of the

GSA's plans to remove most of the block and told Chairman David Finley of the National Trust that the proposed structures were "out of line with the other structures on the Square." In March, 1962 the First Lady wrote a letter to the Administrator of the GSA telling him that she and President were concerned about the demolitions and the scale of the new Executive Office Building and requested that the project architects develop another design "more in keeping with the 19th century architecture of the Square." She further said that she believed that the White House should set an example in preserving the nation's past. The administrator conveyed her concerns to his staff and the architects, and soon John Kennedy himself intervened, recruiting a new architect, John Carl Warnecke of San Francisco. The President and First Lady both worked with Warnecke on a new design that preserved "the best of the old" and created the new "in the context of historic surroundings."¹²

The result, unveiled in October, 1962, retained most of the historic brick row houses on Lafayette Park and placed the nine-story new Executive Office Building at the rear of the houses, in the center of the block. It was a very visible illustration of how historic buildings could be retained in a compatible combination with a new urban structure.¹³

¹² Kathleen P. Galop, "The Historic Preservation Legacy of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis," *Forum Journal, the Journal of the National Trust for Historic Preservation*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Spring, 2006), pp. 35-41;

¹³ "Plans for a New Federal Office Building," *Preservation News*, Vol. II, No.11 (November, 1962), pp. 3-4.



First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy with Administrator Bernard Boutin of the General Services Administration (l.) and architect John Carl Warnecke, viewing the model of historic row houses retained in front of Lafayette Park, 1962.

Source: Photo by Abbie Rowe, White House, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, found in Kathleen P. Galop, "The Historic Preservation Legacy of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis," *Forum Journal: The Journal of the National Trust for Historic Preservation* (Spring, 2006), Vol. 20, No. 3, p. 40.



19th century row houses restored in front of New Executive Office Building designed by Warnecke, c. late 1960s

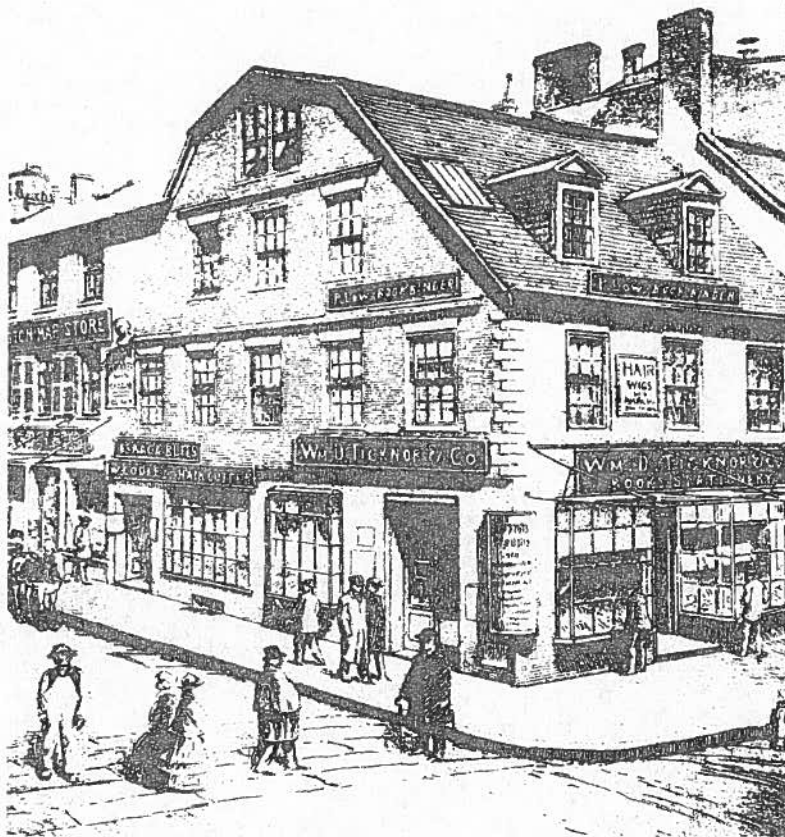
Source: Photo by John J-G. Blumenson in Elizabeth D. Mulloy, *National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1963-1973* (Washington: National Trust, 1976), p. 52.

Meanwhile, public concern over the effects of rapidly increasing federal expenditures on highways and on Urban Renewal projects continued to mount. In 1958, the town of Hillcrest in Broome County, N.Y. fought for ten months to deflect a proposal by the New York State Highway Department and the federal Bureau of Public Roads to build a six-lane highway with four access roads and four traffic circles through the center of the community. With the volunteer help of industrial engineers, the town developed an alternative proposal that was finally accepted. Preservation organizations complained to the National Trust that highway

proposals were devised without reference to what was on the ground, finalized without public hearings, and pursued all too often without acknowledging grassroots objections.¹⁴

In Boston, property owners in Newspaper Row, at the heart of the original part of the city, filed suit in 1959 against the Boston Redevelopment Authority to block demolition of the row of buildings, which included the Old Corner Bookstore, a 1712 Early Georgian structure. The bookstore and its neighbors were to be cleared with the assistance of the federal Urban Renewal Administration to make way for a projected new Modern civic center.¹⁵

The old Corner Bookstore as it appeared in 1850 when it was the William D. Ticknor Company.



¹⁴Helen Duprey Bullock, "That Sober Second Look," *Historic Preservation*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1959), pp. 58-59.

¹⁵ "Old Corner Book Store," *Historic Preservation*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (1959), pp. 92-93.

Drawing of the Old Corner Bookstore, c. 1850

Source: "Old Corner Book Store," *Historic Preservation*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (1959), p. 92.

The sudden death of John Kennedy in 1963 did not interrupt the increased emphasis on historic preservation within the federal government that the deceased president and his wife had initiated. New President Lyndon Johnson endorsed a broad environmental agenda, and his wife, Lady Bird, adopted the preservation of natural beauty as one of her principal themes. Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall, a leading advocate for conserving the natural environment, continued to stress the Interior Department's commitment to preserving both the natural and cultural heritage of the nation.¹⁶



¹⁶ See James A. Glass, *The Beginnings of a New National Historic Preservation Program, 1957 to 1969* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1990), pp. 6-8.

Lady Bird Johnson presenting a National Historic Landmark certificate to Gordon Gray, Chairman of the National Trust, 1964.

Source: National Trust annual report, 1964-65; see also James A. Glass, *The Beginnings of a New National Historic Preservation Program, 1957 to 1969* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1990), p. 7.

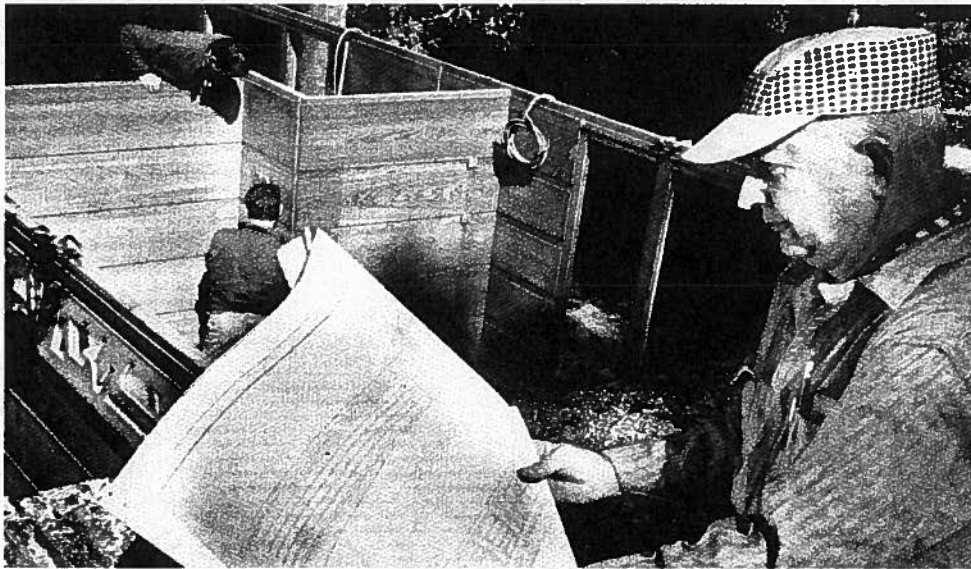


Secretary of Interior Stewart L. Udall speaking in 1966

Source: Photo by Jack E. Boucher, National Park Service Photographic Collection, Springfield, Virginia.

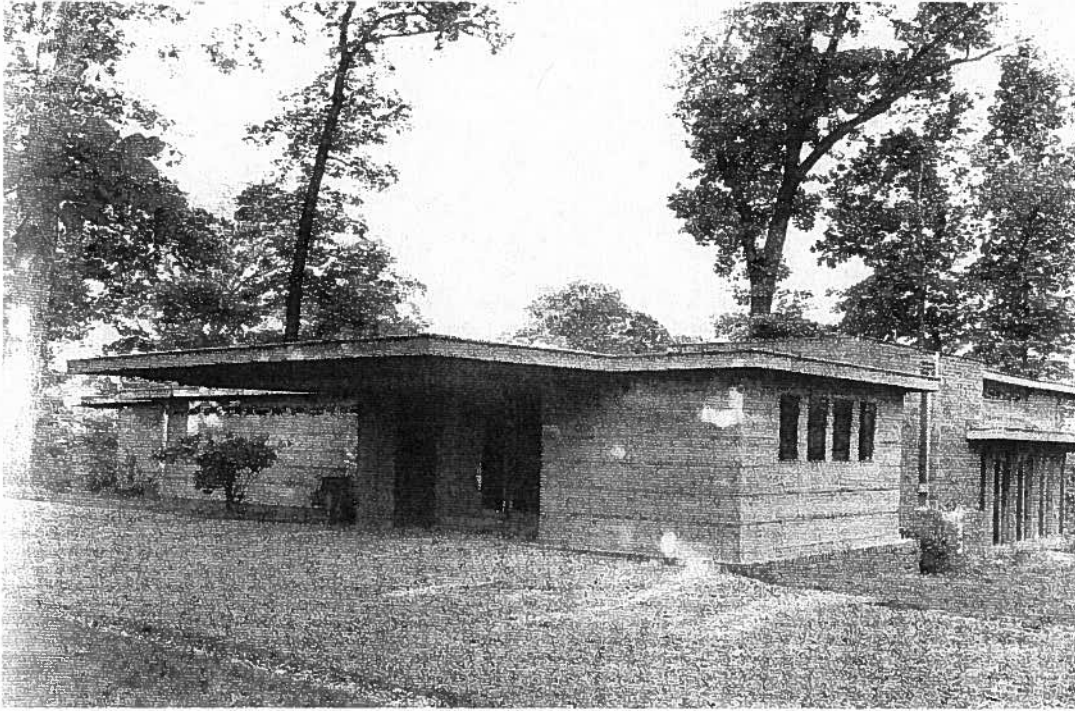
In 1964, a federally-financed interstate highway in Fairfax County, Virginia brought Udall into the debate over the effect of federal projects on historic properties and architecture. The construction of Interstate 66 would require the demolition of the Pope-Leighey House, designed by famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright in 1940 as an affordable house for a newspaper employee. Hearing of the threat, Secretary Udall himself intervened and at the 11th hour held a

news conference in the living room of the Pope-Leighey House. There he negotiated a compromise with Federal and State Highway officials to pay for moving the house to a new site. Ultimately the National Trust provided a new location on the grounds of its Woodlawn Plantation property near Mount Vernon. The episode dramatized for both Udall and Gordon Gray, the new Chairman of the National Trust, the inadequacy of crisis intervention to save historic structures endangered by federal projects.¹⁷



Dismantling the Pope-Leighey House at its original site in the right-of-way for Interstate 66, Fairfax County, Virginia, 1964.
Source: Photo by Jim McNamara, *Washington Post*, found in Mulloy, *National Trust for Historic Preservation*, p. 56.

¹⁷ "Wright Living Room Diplomacy Practiced by Udall to Save House," *Preservation News*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (April, 1964), p. 1; Gordon Gray, "Proposed Federal Historic Preservation Legislation," *Preservation News*, Vol. VI, No. 5 (May, 1966), p. 1; Terry Brust Morton, "Pope-Leighey House in Preservation History," *Preservation News* (March, 1968), p. 4.



Pope-Leighey House, after reconstruction and restoration at new site, Woodlawn Plantation, a property of the National Trust near Mount Vernon, Virginia, c. late 1960s.
Source: Photo by William Edmund Barrett, found in Mulloy, p. 57.

The Urban Renewal Administration, under the drum beat of negative publicity over destruction of historic properties in local renewal areas and aware of the interest of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations in historic preservation, moved to engage the National Trust and local preservationists in key cities. In 1963, the agency published a booklet, *Historic Preservation Through Urban Renewal*, in which it described urban redevelopment projects in fourteen cities where local renewal authorities had negotiated with preservation organizations and used federal funds to acquire some areas in which historic structures were rehabilitated. The pilot project, involving the College Hill neighborhood in Providence, Rhode Island, had begun in 1957 and featured a novel alliance between the redevelopment authority and the Providence Preservation Society. A planning firm, Blair and Associates, evaluated the rehabilitation potential of each structure. The College Hill Plan, published in 1959, identified

buildings that were both significant and capable of rehabilitation and illustrated how new structures of compatible scale and materials could be worked into the renewal area. The Providence Preservation Society acted as a developer for rehabilitating some of the buildings in College Hill.¹⁸



Benefit Street Row—Before

(Laurence E. Tilley photo)



Benefit Street Row—After

(Brown Photo Lab photo)

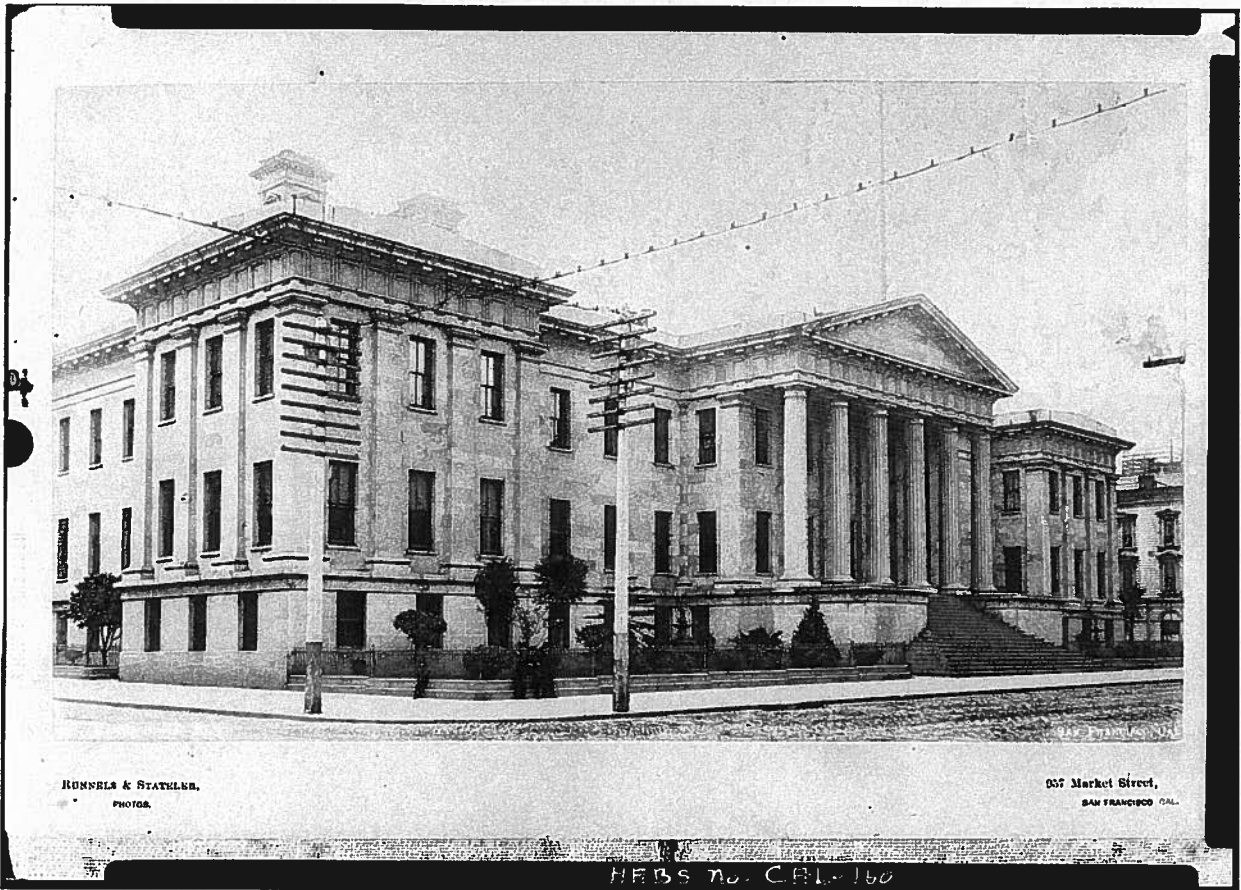
Before and after photos of early 19th century houses restored on Benefit Street in College Hill neighborhood of Providence, R.I., as part of College Hill Redevelopment Project, c. early 1960s

¹⁸ "Legislative Activity," *Historic Preservation*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1959), p. 55; "Annual Meeting Speakers," *Preservation News*, Vol. II, No. 8 (August, 1962), p. 1[William L. Slayton, the Commissioner of the federal Urban Renewal Administration, spoke to the National Trust membership on the topic, "Urban Renewal Need Not Be Urban Removal."]; Margaret Carroll, *Historic Preservation through Urban Renewal* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Renewal Administration, Housing and Home Finance Agency, 1963), pp. 1-26; Elizabeth Slater Allen, "Coexistence: Solid Meeting Ground in Providence," *Antiques*, Vol. LXXXIV, No. 4 (October, 1963), pp. 443-45.

Source: Photos by Laurence E. Tilley (top) and Brown Photo Lab (bottom), in Providence City Plan Commission, *College Hill: A Demonstration Study of Historic Area Renewal* (second ed., Providence: City Plan Commission, 1967), p. 227.

Despite the example set by the New Executive Office Building project in Washington, the General Services Administration continued to pursue destruction of key federally-owned historic buildings. In 1958, the National Trust had expressed concern over plans of the GSA to surplus the historic San Francisco Mint, a Greek Revival landmark of 1873, for private redevelopment of the site. Although public protests stopped the transfer, the GSA continued to resist considering rehabilitation of the building for a new use. In 1962, the Trust membership dramatized the Mint's importance and its peril by visiting the structure at their annual meeting and adopting a resolution calling on the federal government to preserve in perpetuity the landmark that had survived the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake. The Trust called for either an appropriate federal use or disposition to other parties who would adapt it for a new purpose. The GSA took no action, and the Mint languished through the 1960s.¹⁹

¹⁹ "San Francisco Mint," *Historic Preservation*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1959), pp. 138-39; "A Resolution Supporting Preservation of the San Francisco Mint...," *Preservation News*, Vol. II, No. 11 (November, 1962), p. 2.



San Francisco Mint, c. 1882-85

Source: Photo by Runnels and Stateler, San Francisco, originally in Senator Edward F. Burton Collection, now in Historic American Buildings Survey Collection, Library of Congress



Trust membership standing on steps of Former San Francisco Mint at National Trust annual meeting, October, 1962

Source: Photo by Barney Peterson, *San Francisco Chronicle*, National Trust for Historic Preservation Collection

Also in 1958, the GSA announced plans to demolish the palatial Old Post Office in downtown St. Louis and build a new federal building on its site. The 1873 landmark had been designed by A.B. Mullet, a master of the Second Empire architectural style fashionable in Paris during the 1850s and 1860s. Preservationists organized the Landmarks Association of St.

Louis, which lobbied against demolition and urged adaptive uses for private functions. The GSA held off on a decision to demolish, but funds were sought from Congress to design the replacement federal building on the site.²⁰



Old St. Louis Post Office in 1965

Source: Photo by Paul Piaget, Historic American Buildings Survey Collection, Library of Congress

²⁰ Buford Pickens, "Progress, Preservation, and St. Louis' Old Palais," *Historic Preservation*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1960), pp. 60-63; "Landmarks Association of St. Louis...", *Preservation News*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (April, 1964), p. 4; "The Fight to Save the Old St. Louis Post Office...", *Preservation News*, Vol. 4, No. 10 (Sept., 1964), p. 3

In 1964, signs of change in federal policy on historic preservation began to emerge. President Johnson appointed a task force to report on the preservation of natural beauty. The panel, which includes critics of federal urban programs, as well as advocates for natural beauty, recommended that a joint federal-state program be established in historic preservation. In February, 1965 the President sent to Congress a "Message on Natural Beauty," in which he observed that an increasing amount of historic preservation was taking place in the United States and that preservationists were objecting to the loss of historic structures. In May, 1965, Lady Bird Johnson opened a White House Conference on Natural Beauty. One of the panels at the conference discussed the historic preservation aspects of environmental conservation, and Gordon Gray of the National Trust urged that a mechanism be devised to veto federal expenditures causing destruction of historic landmarks.²¹

Soon after, a blue ribbon committee took center stage, composed of members of Congress; the Secretaries of the Interior, Housing and Urban Development, and Commerce, the Administrator of the General Services Administration; the Chairman of the National Trust; the governor of Vermont; and the former mayor of St. Louis. The Rains Committee, after its chairman, former Alabama Congressman Albert Rains, was the brainchild of a housing lobbyist, Laurance Henderson, and a preservation and planning consultant, Carl Feiss. The two men knew of the increased public interest in preservation and believed that a good way to put a spotlight on the issues and produce legislation would be to organize a panel of those involved at

²¹ Glass, pp. 7-8; "President Asks Congressional Action to Preserve Natural Beauty in Cities and Countryside," *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, Vol. 21 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Service, 1965), pp. 1380, 1382.

the national level and take a fact-finding trip to Europe. There, where the national governments had done much since World War II to restore the historic centers of destroyed cities, the committee could learn lessons that could be applied to the United States. The U.S Conference of Mayors agreed to sponsor the committee, and the Ford Foundation provided a grant for expenses. In October, 1965, the Rains Committee set sail for Europe and visited eight nations, including several Communist countries.²²



The Rains Committee delegation visits the restoration of the Hotel de Sully in Paris, October, 1965. Senator Edmund Muskie, member of the committee, is second from right.
Source: Photo by Robert R. Garvey, Jr. Lent by photographer, 1989

When they returned, they prepared recommendations for a new national historic preservation program for the United States. In January, 1966 the committee published a coffee-table book, *With Heritage So Rich*, featuring a series of essays on the meaning and importance of

²² Glass, p. 10.

historic places and evocative photos showing the broad nature and appeal of historic structures in American life. Lady Bird Johnson wrote a foreword, and Laurance Henderson made sure that every member of Congress received a copy.²³



Cover of *With Heritage So Rich*, January, 1966

With the Rains Committee members, National Trust Chairman Gordon Gray, and Park Service Director George Hartzog all lobbying Congress in 1966, two bills became law. The National Historic Preservation Act, the bill with the largest long term impact, created a National

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-17.

Register of Historic Places and authorized a matching grants program to the States to carry out a national survey of historic sites and to acquire and preserve significant historic places. It also established an Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to advise the President and Congress on historic preservation matters in the nation and to comment on the effects of federally financed or licensed projects on places listed in the National Register. Like the Rains Committee itself, the Council was to be made up of the heads of Cabinet departments and federal agencies with the capacity to affect historic places. It also was to include 10 citizens “significantly interested and experienced” in historic preservation, plus the chairman of the National Trust. Section 106 of the new law required federal agencies to take into account the effect of their projects on properties listed in the National Register and to afford a “reasonable opportunity” for the Council to comment on the undertaking. It was not a veto of projects, as initially envisioned by Gordon Gray; that would have slowed projects down substantially and made some difficult to accomplish. The concept of a panel composed of federal agencies and citizens considering the effects of agency projects and using the Council’s prestige to persuade agencies to modify adverse effects was something new in American government and rare elsewhere.²⁴

²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 17-20; Transcript of taped interview with Robert R. Garvey, Jr. by James A. Glass, June 30, 1986, p. 24.



Public Law 89-665
89th Congress, S. 3035
October 15, 1966

An Act

80 STAT. 915

To establish a program for the preservation of additional historic properties throughout the Nation, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

The Congress finds and declares—

(a) that the spirit and direction of the Nation are founded upon and reflected in its historic past;

(b) that the historical and cultural foundations of the Nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people;

(c) that, in the face of ever-increasing extensions of urban centers, highways, and residential, commercial, and industrial developments, the present governmental and nongovernmental historic preservation programs and activities are inadequate to insure future generations a genuine opportunity to appreciate and enjoy the rich heritage of our Nation; and

(d) that, although the major burdens of historic preservation have been borne and major efforts initiated by private agencies and individuals, and both should continue to play a vital role, it is nevertheless necessary and appropriate for the Federal Government to accelerate its historic preservation programs and activities, to give maximum encouragement to agencies and individuals undertaking preservation by private means, and to assist State and local governments and the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States to expand and accelerate their historic preservation programs and activities.

Historic properties,
Preservation program established.

TITLE I

Sec. 101. (a) The Secretary of the Interior is authorized—

(1) to expand and maintain a national register of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, and culture, hereinafter referred to as the National Register, and to grant funds to States for the purpose of preparing comprehensive statewide historic surveys and plans, in accordance with criteria established by the Secretary, for the preservation, acquisition, and development of such properties:

Buildings and objects, etc.
Expansion and maintenance of National Register.

Part of first page of Public Law 89-665, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966
Source: Files, History Division, Washington Office, National Park Service



Advisory Council on Historic Preservation being sworn in, July, 1967
Source: Department of the Interior photo, National Park Service Photographic Archives,
Springfield, Virginia

The new Advisory Council found itself immediately faced with federal projects requiring its comments. One of the first involved the old Spanish-Mexican town of Las Trampas, New Mexico, which was a designated National Historic Landmark district. There the New Mexico Highway Department with federal funds was planning to build a highway through the community and build a concrete bridge over a stream at its edge. Indianapolis native Nathaniel Owings, partner in the nationally known architectural firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, lived near Las Trampas and called Director George Hartzog of the Park Service to ask if the new National Historic Preservation Act could be invoked to stop the project. Hartzog called his counterpart in the federal Bureau of Public Roads, who agreed to halt funds until the state had

allowed the Advisory Council to comment on the undertaking. The Council recommended that the route be altered to avoid some of the old buildings in town, that the pavement width be reduced, and that a wooden span be built that fit in more with the context. The changes were made, and the project proceeded.²⁵

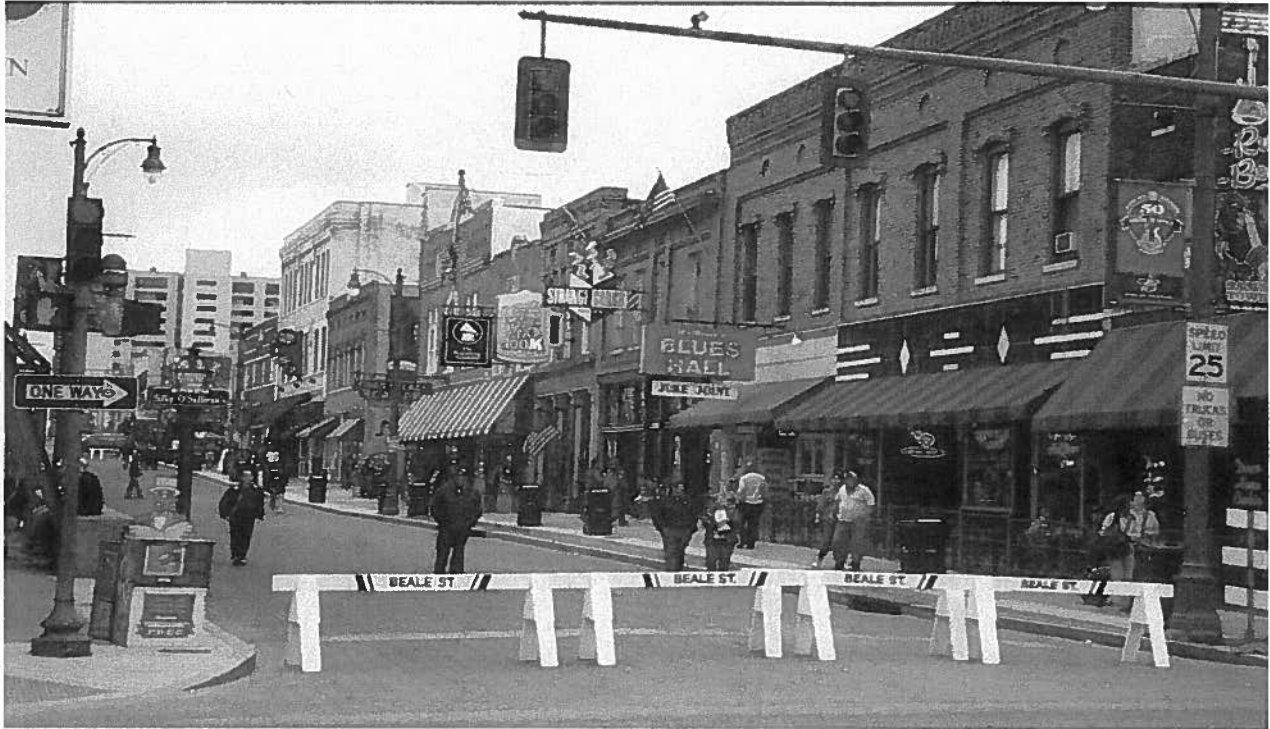


Approach to Las Trampas, New Mexico, 1967. Compromise wooden span is at center of photo. Source: Photo by Fred Mang, Santa Fe Regional Office, National Park Service. Courtesy, History Division, Washington Office, National Park Service

A year later, the Council provided advice to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on an Urban Renewal project. The City of Memphis was planning on a redevelopment plan for the Beale Street area that would demolish most of the buildings associated with the development of the Blues in American music. The Council recommended

²⁵Glass, *The Beginnings of a New National Historic Preservation Program*, pp. 42-43.

that a rehabilitation scheme be adopted that would preserve the exteriors of the historic structures, and HUD and the City accepted the advice.²⁶

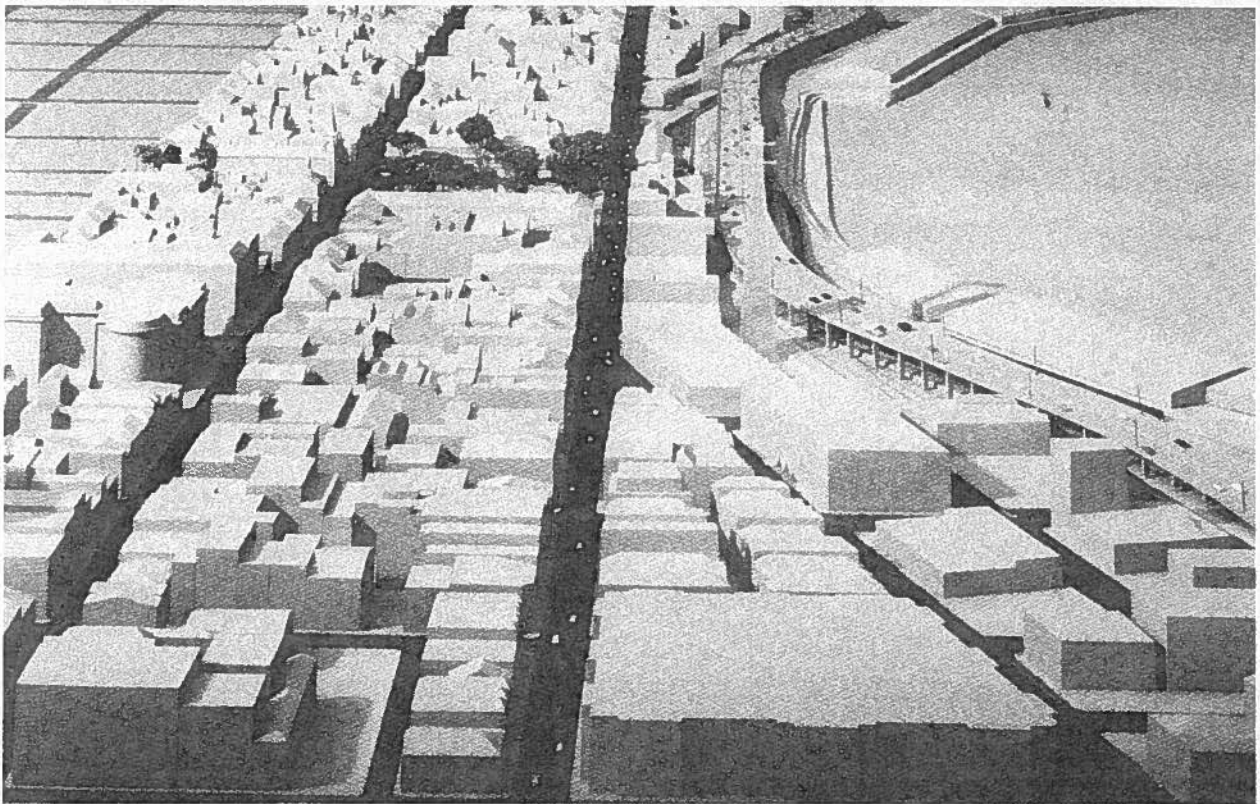


2004 photo of Beale Street, showing restored historic structures, with Blues music still being performed in many of them.
Source: Photo by James Glass

When it took office in 1969, the administration of President Richard Nixon was faced with major preservation controversies inherited from the previous decade. In New Orleans, the State of Louisiana Highway Department and the City had proposed building an elevated expressway along the riverfront of the famed Vieux Carre (French Quarter) historic district, to be constructed largely with federal funds. The National Trust and local preservation organizations requested that new Transportation Secretary John A. Volpe investigate alternatives to the expressway and that the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, of which Volpe was a

²⁶ *ibid*, pp. 46-47.

member, be afforded an opportunity to comment on the project. In March, 1969, the Council met in New Orleans and recommended to Volpe that a new route be found or if that were unfeasible, to depress the expressway below grade through the French Quarter. In an epochal decision, Volpe denied funds for the expressway altogether in July, 1969, because he believed that the “public benefits from the proposed highway would not be enough to warrant damaging the treasured French Quarter.”²⁷



Model of proposed elevated expressway along riverfront at edge of Vieux Carre historic district, New Orleans, c. 1966.

²⁷ “Council Advises Change in New Orleans Highway,” *Preservation News*, Vol. IX, No. 4 (April, 1969), p. 1; “French Quarter Spared: Volpe Bars Federal Funds for New Orleans Expressway,” *Preservation News*, Vol. IX, No. 8 (August, 1969), p. 1. For a thorough study of the controversial expressway proposal, see Richard O. Baumbach, Jr. and William E. Borah, *The Second Battle of New Orleans: A History of the Vieux Carre Riverfront-Expressway Controversy* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press for the Preservation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1981).

Source: Photo by Allen Photographic Service, Washington, D.C. From Baumbach and Borah, *The Second Battle of New Orleans*, p. 119.

At the same time, the Advisory Council found itself reviewing plans for landmarks that the GSA had been attempting to demolish or surplus for years in the face of local opposition, chief among them, the San Francisco Mint and the Old St. Louis Post Office. The GSA had declared the Mint dangerous in 1968 and vacated it. In 1969 the Nixon Administration had transferred the building to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). In September of that year, the Council recommended to HEW Secretary Robert Finch that the Mint should be preserved and offered its assistance in seeking new uses for the structure. Partially due to the Council's advice, a committee appointed by Finch concluded that the Mint should be preserved and several proposals for re-use were explored. Ultimately, during the Ford Administration, the venerable landmark was adapted for a numismatic museum by the U.S. Mint.²⁸

In St. Louis, one of the most intractable debates continued over the future of the Old Post Office. In September, 1970, the Advisory Council again offered its aid to the GSA in preserving the St. Louis building. The federal agency now proposed to transfer the structure to the City of St. Louis, who would sell it to a developer. The developer would then demolish it and develop the site. In October, the GSA said it would follow the Council's advice and keep the building

²⁸ "San Francisco Mint's Future Again in Peril," *Preservation News*, Vol. IX, No. 7 (July, 1969), p. 1; "Council Offers Aid on Old San Francisco Mint," *Preservation News*, Vol. IX, No. 9 (September, 1969), p. 1; "Secretary Finch Names Committee on Old Mint in San Francisco," *Preservation News*, Vol. X, No. 2 (February, 1970), p. 1; "San Francisco Mint Proposed for Use by Three Federal Courts," *Preservation News*, Vol. X, No. 8 (August, 1970), p. 1; "San Francisco Mint," *Preservation News*, Vol. XI, No. 4 (April, 1971), p. 7; Transcript of taped interview with Ernest Allen Connally by James A. Glass, June 9, 1986, pp. 192-93.

until a preservation plan could be prepared. The agency would even partially renovate it so that federal tenants could continue to occupy it. Later in the 1970s, the Old Post Office was finally transferred to the City, who worked out a rehabilitation scheme resulting in its use for commercial functions.²⁹

In January, 1970, President Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act, which required major changes in how federal projects were planned and set forth requirements to consider the impact of federally-funded or licensed projects on the broad human environment. The act was largely the idea of Democratic Senator Henry M. ("Scoop") Jackson of Washington (who also had been a key figure in passage of the National Historic Preservation Act). During the following year, the Nixon Administration sought to develop an ambitious Environmental agenda that the President himself could advocate. In February, 1971, the President sent a message on the nation's environment to Congress, and included in it were three legislative proposals involving historic preservation. At the same time, Russell Train, the Chairman of the new Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and William Reilly, later the first Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, were meeting with representatives of the National Park Service, the Advisory Council, and the National Trust to develop an executive order that the President could issue dealing specifically with preservation.³⁰

²⁹"Advisory Council Offers Aid in Saving St. Louis Post Office," *Preservation News*, Vol. X, No. 9 (September, 1970), p. 1; "Reprieve Awarded Old Post Office in St. Louis, Missouri," *Preservation News*, Vol. X, No. 10 (October, 1970), p. 1; Diane Maddex, "Hearing Held on St. Louis Post Office," *Preservation News*, Vol. XI, No. 2 (February, 1971), p. 1

³⁰ "The Newspaper Known as *Preservation News*," *Preservation News*, Vol. X, No. 2 (February, 1970), p. 4; Transcript of taped interview with George B. Hartzog, Jr. by James A. Glass, July 2, 1986, p. 36; "President Sends Preservation Proposals to Congress," *Preservation News*, Vol. XI, No. 3 (March, 1971), p. 1; Transcript of taped interview with Ernest Allen Connally by Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., July 28, 1981, National Trust Library Collection, University of Maryland, pp. 241-42.