

Surroundings



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An Introduction to Cultural Landscapes

Barbara Copp is an architectural historian with over eight years of experience in cultural resource management. She has extensive experience in the preparation of historic resources surveys, historic contexts, assessment of effect documents, and HABS/HAER recordations. Ms. Copp has worked throughout the Mid-Atlantic region surveying a wide variety of properties including architectural, agricultural, industrial, and engineering resources. She is particularly knowledgeable of the qualifications necessary for both National Historic Landmark and National Register listings. Ms. Copp meets the Department of the Interior's professional requirements as specified in 36 CFR Part 61.



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Architectural Historian

Over the past 25 years, there has been a growing interest in how people have affected the entire landscape, not just the built environment. Any landscape that has been altered by human activity can be termed a cultural landscape. Cultural landscapes include natural elements such as topography, vegetation, soil, and water. Objects, such as fences, walls, bridges, dams, and signage, are also part of the cultural landscape. Finally, buildings and their arrangement and distribution in the landscape are important features of the cultural landscape.

Cultural landscapes are identified in terms of the intentions of the people that have shaped them. Three general types of cultural landscapes, which are not mutually exclusive, are discussed below. Future issues of Surroundings will address these landscape types.

Designed landscapes are usually created with a certain aesthetic purpose in mind. Gardens, campuses, parks, cemeteries, parkways, and planned cities are types of designed cultural landscapes. When conducting National Register eligibility evaluations, designed landscapes may be associated with a significant person, trend, or event in landscape architecture.

Vernacular landscapes are not planned and have evolved over time with multiple layers of physical, biological, and cultural activity. Function plays a significant role in the development of these types of landscapes. The most recognized type of land-use associated with vernacular landscapes is agriculture. However, vernacular landscapes are present in a number of settings, including urban, commercial, recreational, industrial, and suburban. Vernacular landscapes can vary in size from an individual farm to a rural historic district of farms located along a river valley.

Ethnographic landscapes reflect the beliefs, values, and world-views shared by a group of people which thinks of itself as having a common identity. That identity can be ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, religion, or something else. Examples of ethnographic landscapes include sacred sites and contemporary communities.

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When documenting and evaluating cultural landscapes, it is important to understand how the landscape has evolved over time. This begins with the documentation of existing conditions, which provides the foundation for many future steps, from field work to evaluations. A. D. Marble & Company utilizes GIS to record existing conditions data. GIS is also used early on in the documentation process to determine how natural landscape variables, such as soil productivity and flood plains, have influenced human activity on the landscape.



A. D. Marble and Company is currently working on a project in Lancaster County that has identified a large vernacular landscape which will be documented and evaluated according to National Register criteria. This complex rural landscape is associated with early settlement patterns; the farming practices of the Amish; and trends in agriculture and development that have occurred over a 250-year period of time.

Using historic research and field visits, an accurate understanding of the appearance of the landscape at points in time can be reached. Historic aeri- als, maps, photographs, engravings, and contemporary written accounts are especially useful research tools. Through on-site examinations of the landscape it is also possible to "read" landscape features, such as a row of trees along a property boundary, to determine how the property may have appeared in the past.

To critically analyze changes to the landscape over time, layers showing the appearance of the landscape at various dates are added over the GIS mapping of existing conditions. Viewing the landscape in this manner shows the persistence or discontinuation of patterns on the landscape. On a smaller scale, this process allows historians to determine approximate dates of the construction or removal of

individual landscape features. This information is also used to determine if the landscape retains sufficient integrity for the period of time for which it is historically significant.

Further guidance on the documentation and evaluation of cultural landscapes is available on the web: <http://www2.cr.nps.gov/hli/>.



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