

RECENT AND CURRENT SURVEYS

Actually, New York State had a year earlier instituted an architectural program in its New York State Council on the Arts which should help offset this charge—and, hopefully, encourage similar action by other states. Soon after the council came into existence, it received letters and calls about the threatened and often imminent destruction of buildings considered worthy of preservation. "The Council's response," reports William Hull, its Assistant Director, "was one of agreement and encouragement which, in several instances, helped to deter razings until a thorough study could be made by the local communities in question."

A technical assistance program was developed to deal with the insistent problem, and the category of architectural conservation and survey was added to its services. Threatened buildings brought to the council's attention are now referred to an architectural or state historian, who is asked to appraise the structure in question. The report of this specialist is placed in the hands of the local group concerned.

The council's first programmed architectural survey was undertaken by the Syracuse University School of Architecture. It was asked to provide a study of "Architecture Worth Saving" in Onondaga County, to anticipate the problem of the razing of significant buildings in a typical city-dominated upstate county. Graduate students documented and compiled a list of the buildings from which approximately sixty examples of structures with merit were finally chosen.

With a continuing emphasis on urban renewal throughout the state, the Council on the Arts instituted a second "Architecture Worth Saving" study in Albany and Rensselaer Counties, by the School of Architecture at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. The council hopes that guidelines will emerge from the two different approaches to the problems of architectural conservation. Although the council is considered a strong and well-financed organization, it reports that no statewide architectural survey is practicable within the limitations of its time

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and budget. But it will undertake studies in areas facing particular problems in conserving their architectural heritages.

The program of the council and these surveys are sound, and they are typical of many throughout the country. But they are only part of what is needed: a very large and thorough survey to locate, identify and study all historic buildings in the United States essential in formulating a successful, nationwide preservation program. Studies in such a survey would provide data needed to evaluate buildings and to plan intelligent historic preservation before the wrecking ball swings.

Architectural surveys were begun systematically in the United States by the federal government as a Works Progress Administration project during the depression, but few have been completed. Of these, most are not current. The National Park Service, in addition to dealing with its vast preserve of lands and historic sites, conducts the Historic American Buildings Survey, a long-range program for assembling a national archive of historic American architecture. Today it is one of the world's largest collections of its kind—with more than 27,000 measured drawings, 37,000 photographs and 6,000 pages of architectural and historical data for approximately 10,000 historic buildings throughout the United States.

Another National Park Service program concurrent with the HABS, authorized under the same Historic Sites Act of 1935 which authorized it, is the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings. Under this survey the entire field of American history and prehistory is studied by themes, making possible a comparative evaluation of sites. The criteria relate the importance of the sites in history and analyze their integrity or present conditions. A product of the same national survey, cosponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, is the Registry of National Historic Landmarks. Through the registry the federal government recognizes significant historic sites; their preservation by private, state and local agencies is encouraged.

The Historic American Buildings Survey has had a seesaw type of career during its thirty