

Why Hire Historic Preservation Professionals

Courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission

Historic preservation laws DO NOT require that preservation professionals be used to prepare National Register nominations. However, these professionals are available to assist applicants unfamiliar with the registration process.

State and federal historic preservation laws DO require that qualified professionals be employed on many other types of historic preservation projects. For example, property owners and project sponsors have legal responsibilities when:

- A project involves federal funds, licenses, permits or approval
- Project land is owned or controlled by a state agency or a political subdivision of the state
- A historical designation or covenant requires review of proposed work

The National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to consult with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) to avoid or minimize damage to important historic and prehistoric properties whenever projects involve federal funds, licenses, permits or approval. In Louisiana, the Assistant Secretary in the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, Office of Cultural Development serves as SHPO. Projects reviewed under the National Historic Preservation Act must be conducted by professionals who meet the qualification standards listed in the federal publication *Archeology and Historic Preservation: Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines* (copy available online at http://www.nps.gov/history/local-law/arch_stnds_9.htm).

The following discussion, provided courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission, will assist you in deciding whether or not to hire a preservation professional and in choosing the appropriate professional for your project.

Why Should I Hire Historic Preservation Professionals?

Hiring an appropriate historic preservation professional will improve the quality of your project, save you time and money, and help to protect your historic property. There are professional archaeologists, historians, architectural historians and preservation architects who have the education and experience to guide your preservation project. These various professionals often work as a team with you to help guide your preservation project. This document is designed to help you find and hire preservation professionals best suited to your project.

What Services Do Historic Preservation Professionals Provide?

Historic preservation professionals can assist your preservation project in different ways. Archaeologists find and evaluate the remains of past cultures buried in the ground. Their work often includes a visual survey of the land to locate sites and careful excavation to find information for analysis.

Architectural historians and other historians study our built environment. They consider the historical and architectural importance of buildings constructed more than 50 years ago, and provide historical research, consultation and documentation. Groups of buildings in districts, structures such as bridges and objects such as ships may also be considered important for their design or history.

Preservation architects prepare plans for appropriate work on historic buildings, and direct the work to preserve important features and avoid damage. This work can include restoring a building to its original appearance or rehabilitating it to serve a new use while keeping its historic look. Preservation architects also help plan the efficient use of building space, and can make drawings of a historic building to use in rehabilitation or as a record of a building that will be torn down.

Although this discussion describes three types of preservation professionals generally employed on preservation projects, there are other types of professionals who are sometimes involved. You should consider if a preservation planner, landscape architect, engineer or other preservation professional is appropriate for your project.

Who Is A Qualified Professional?

Preservation professionals must have both a good education and the right work experience to be qualified to work on historic preservation projects. Qualification standards listed in the federal publication *Archeology and Historic Preservation: Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines* establish levels of education and work experience appropriate for each profession. This publication is available online at http://www.nps.gov/history/local-law/arch_stnds_0.htm.

How Do I Select Professionals Best Suited To My Project?

The Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation does not regulate, license or recommend historic preservation professionals. However, the following general suggestions may help you find the professional best suited to help with your project.

1. Identify preservation professionals - Develop a list of at least three preservation professionals or firms to consider for selection.

2. Examine qualifications - Contact the firms on your list and describe the project. Ask if the firm is available and has relevant experience in historic preservation. Invite each firm you contact to send information concerning their experience, qualifications, and personnel.
3. Interview the best prospects - Select three to five firms to interview. Some preservation professionals charge for interviews; ask if there is a fee. Remember that a preservation professional cannot afford to spend much time talking about a project before being hired. However, any preservation professional who is interested in working with you will spend some time presenting their qualifications and discussing your project.

To allow you to compare the different firms you interview, try to provide each firm with a clear idea about the work you want to do, a general budget, scheduling and other issues that will affect the work you propose. Allow at least one hour for the interview. Ask to see samples of work similar to your project. Ask how busy the firm is, and who would handle your project. Be sure to meet the person who would directly manage your project. This person should be a qualified preservation professional.

Ask for references on similar projects and check them. Ask those referenced if they were completely satisfied with the work, and if the project was done in a timely manner.

4. Hiring a Preservation Professional - Tell each firm you interview what you plan to do next and when you plan to make your decision. Notify the selected firm as soon as possible. Base your decision on your confidence in the firm, comments from references, the firm's preservation knowledge, technical competence and professional services. Develop and sign a contract that clearly defines the scope of work, necessary services and applicable fees before starting any work.

General guidance for selecting a preservation professional:

1. Talk directly with the professional about your project
2. Check for professional experience with projects similar to yours
3. Review examples of completed work
4. Check references very carefully; ask questions about the acceptability and timeliness of the work performed.

Architectural Historians, Historians And Related Professionals

Qualified architectural historians, historians and professionals from closely related fields such as folklore, cultural geography, museum studies or planning may specialize in historic resources surveys or research projects. These preservation professionals can help with historic preservation projects and applications for historical designation, the formal recognition of a historic property's importance, and preservation planning. You should be aware, however, that some professionals who have considerable experience may not have direct experience with your type of project. In addition to considering consultants listed on the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation's consultant list, contact other sources of information (local preservation commissions, academic institutions and professional organizations) for recommendations.

To select the architectural historian, historian or related professional most suited to your project:

1. Contact property owners or communities with successful projects similar to yours
2. Obtain resumes and additional references from the professionals involved in those projects
3. Get bids
4. Check references
5. Review examples of completed work
6. Check for honors and commendations

Preservation Architects

Historic buildings often have unique designs, materials and construction methods that may not be familiar to an architect who does not specialize in historic preservation. Preservation architects have training and experience working on historic buildings, and are often able to work more efficiently, cost effectively and produce better projects. To find a qualified preservation architect, contact your local American Institute of Architects (AIA) chapter for referrals (national: 800-AIA-3837 or 202-626-7300; Louisiana: 225-387-5579). Also seek referrals from property owners in your area with projects similar to yours. Other preservation professionals, such as preservation planners, landscape architects and engineers may also be important to include on your project team, depending on the type of work needed. The architect you select will help to assemble appropriate professionals and qualified contractors for your project.

During the interview process, ask to meet at the architect's office so you can see where the work will be done. Discuss possible services, scheduling requirements and the philosophy with which the architect would approach your project. Base your final decision on your confidence in the firm, comments from references, the firm's preservation design ability, technical competence and professional services. If a team approach will be used with other professionals, such as engineers and landscape architects, you should also examine samples of their past work. Once you select a firm you should have more detailed discussions about the project scope of work, budget and range of fees the architect anticipates. Fees can be stated in several different ways including lump sum, a percentage of the construction cost, the project cost plus a fixed fee or some combination of these. Sign a contract before starting any work. The AIA has standard contract forms that are often used.

To select the best preservation architect for the job:

1. Contact the national or Louisiana chapters of the AIA to ask for referrals
2. Contact property owners or communities with successful projects similar to yours
3. Obtain resumes and other information on firms
4. Interview firms and review examples of completed work
5. Check references
6. Check for honors and commendations in preservation

Archaeologists

Many environmental and engineering firms, private consulting firms and university programs have archaeologists on staff who specialize in doing work that meets state and federal regulations. However, before taking any action, contact the Louisiana Division of Archaeology (225-342-8170) to discuss the best way to accomplish your project goals.