

Preserving the Recent Past 2

Editors

Deborah Slaton

William G. Foulks

Historic Preservation Education Foundation

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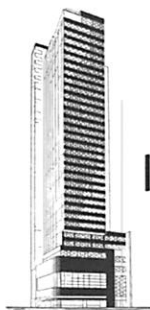
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Introduction: Preserving the Recent Past 2

In March 1995, the publication of *Preserving the Recent Past* examined the evaluation and preservation of twentieth-century resources. This publication, *Preserving the Recent Past 2*, extends the collection initiated in the first publication by the addition of nearly sixty papers on evaluation, planning, and preservation strategies, and technology, conservation, and rehabilitation of twentieth-century structures and materials. Topics range from assessing the historic significance of suburban developments to saving urban high-rises; from the use of plastics in residential construction to considerations in evaluating thin-shell concrete structures; from influences on recent landscape design to the assessment of modern bridges; and from the international development of construction standards to the restoration of highly individualized structures. The range and variety of subjects encompassed by preservation of the recent past seems limitless and almost beyond our grasp.

Now, even more than five years ago, the preservation community is faced with increasingly accelerated development and rapidly changing technologies. Just as the exchange of information in the past few decades has shifted from mail service, to expedited mail service, to facsimile, to e-mail, and to instant messaging, so have design and construction—and demolition—of buildings, structures, and landscapes continued to accelerate. Considerable effort is required merely to keep up with identification of significant structures of the recent past, let alone with documentation and evaluation of these properties, understanding of their aesthetics and technology, and development of methods for their repair and conservation.

The questions raised as we try to understand the recent past are many and varied. How can

something younger than many of us be considered historic? Why should buildings and sites that are so familiar, even commonplace, be considered significant? How can we determine how to repair a material when neither the material nor the repair has attained a measurable history of use? H. Ward Jandl of the U.S. National Park Service wrote in the introduction to *Preserving the Recent Past*:

Over the past several years, preservationists have finally begun to devote serious attention to the immense challenge of documenting, evaluating, and conserving cultural resources from the twentieth century. This attention occurs not a moment too soon: it is clear that these are the issues that preservation professionals will be grappling with for the remainder of century and well into the next millennia.

Now preservation has taken the first step into a new millennium. We are five years further into the future and the number of properties encompassed by the recent past has increased. The properties that had just reached fifty years of age in 1995 are five years further in the past and newer properties loom into view. The variety and complexity of recent past structures and sites continue to expand and in turn to place increasing demands for attention on the preservation community.

The continuum of the recent past surrounds us as we move through time. Among the philosophical and technical issues presented by these newer properties, the greatest challenge for those engaged in preserving the recent past may be keeping up with the present as it appears to speed past us into the future.