

## California's Cultural Heritage Resources Summit: A Call for Action

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Californians today are vitally interested in their cultural heritage and in those cultural heritage resources that give them identity, visibility, and a sense of belonging. These cultural heritage resources are our historic sites, structures, and monuments; our art, artifacts, and museum collections; our libraries and archives; our cultural landscapes and archeological preserves; our folklore and folk life traditions; and our literature and oral traditions. For the purposes of this paper these treasured cultural heritage resources collectively form a unique legacy of who we were, and are, as Californians.

There is little argument among professionals that cultural heritage resources bind our peoples together. In their very existence is a spirit of renewal. In their preservation, there is hope. In the advocacy for their preservation are bonds among a diverse group of organizations to protect a valuable past and evolving present because of the cultural value placed on these resources. In fact, we contemporary Californians will perhaps be judged as a people who cared and endured, or a people who squandered their heritage by letting their cultural heritage resources lie unprotected or under-interpreted. However, cooperation and coordination for the statewide management of cultural heritage resources is admittedly difficult and complex. Those resources, often fragile, difficult to protect, and costly to restore and maintain, are not renewable and their very diversity and breadth increase the complexity of the management challenge. "Our cooperation with one another is really difficult because our media are so different," states Professor I. Michael Heyman.<sup>1</sup>

Visiting museums and historic sites is also increasingly popular as a family recreation activity, as evidenced in the 1997 study "Public Opinions and Attitudes on Outdoor Recreation in California."<sup>2</sup> The survey showed that nearly 75% of all Californians participated in visiting museums or historic sites during the year. Respondents visiting museums and historic sites averaged 10 activity-days, for an estimated 61.8 million household-participation-days per year. Also gleaned from the survey was that there is a high, unmet demand for

cultural resource-related activities, as well as a willingness to pay for such services. These facts allude to the tremendous opportunities that exist for education, public outreach, and economic development in the management, interpretation, and effective use of California's cultural heritage resources.

It was with this background that the California Cultural Heritage Resources Summit, a forum for discussion of the issues surrounding cultural heritage resources, was organized. The summit was a colloquium planned and organized by the California Department of Parks and Recreation (also known as California State Parks) and the California Office of Historic Preservation. The purpose and goal of the summit was to begin the development of a statewide common agenda among the diverse groups who have some responsibility for California's cultural heritage resources. The term "common agenda," as used for the purposes of the summit, was defined as a collaborative effort between those present that results in unity of purpose to protect and preserve California's cultural heritage resources while educating and enlightening our citizenry about the wonders of the state's cultural landscape. Museums, historic parks, buildings and monuments, the arts, academia, historical societies, cultural awareness advocates, archival resources, and historic preservation groups were all part of that agenda.

The California Cultural Heritage Resources Summit was an unprecedented gathering in that it brought together individu-

als who normally do not come together. These individuals, while considered leaders in their fields or within their representative organizations, usually associated only with peers at professional gatherings or within their own professional organizations. These organizations and individuals had not had the opportunity to communicate at a cross-professional colloquium with a single focus on cultural heritage resources. The invitation-only event included stewards, spokespersons, and scholars for significant portions of this larger cultural legacy.

The summit was held in November 2002 at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. The gathering had support from the Friends of Hearst Castle, the Hearst Castle Preservation Foundation and the J. Paul Getty Trust, and co-sponsorship from the following groups: California Association of Museums, California Council for the Promotion of History, California Historical Society, California Preservation Foundation, California State Archives, California State Library, Los Angeles Conservancy, National Park Service, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and Society for California Archaeology.

The summit was originally conceived of in 2000. Concern over the management and organization of cultural heritage resources—specifically those in the care of California State Parks—was expressed by professionals and the public at a series of public workshops that were held to gain input for State Parks strategic plan development. California State Parks holds in public trust cultural heritage resources of astonishing breadth and diversity. Within California State Parks are approximately 13,000 historic and archaeological sites including 47 state historic parks, and 3,000 historic structures containing 4.5 million artifacts. Internally, California Parks' cultural resource management staff echoed the need for increased visibility of these resources, the organizational focus of which should equal the intensity and commitment made to our natural heritage treasures. State Parks executive staff agreed.

To begin that commitment, a cultural her-

itage division was formed that unified and heightened the internal awareness of State Parks holdings and responsibility, and promoted a stronger working relationship with the Office of Historic Preservation, administratively already an office within the California Department of Parks and Recreation but whose mission differs from that of State Parks. Concurrently, plans for a cultural heritage summit were developed whereby ideas from the diverse array of cultural heritage stakeholders could be both shared and gleaned for the benefit of not only State Parks, but those stakeholders as well. No one agency—public or private—in California could, or should, take on the daunting quest of ensuring that all Californians see themselves represented in culturally sensitive ways in the state's cultural heritage resources. But a collective summit goal was to ensure that Californians saw themselves *somewhere* in those resources when they were taken collectively. How that very significant goal would be met, however, was a pressing question that needed exploration through dialogue with a broad array of individuals, agencies and organizations, both public and private.

The assistance of Tom Frye, chief curator emeritus of history for the Oakland Museum, was enlisted as cultural resources advisor to the director. Frye developed several departmental strategies in the cultural resource management arena and played a key role in the planning of the summit, which began in earnest in early 2001 with the appointment of a steering team<sup>3</sup> to work on summit details. The J. Paul Getty Trust and Museum was approached by Frye, and key State Parks executive staff, to assess its receptivity of hosting and co-sponsoring the event. The knowledge, experience, and reputation of the Getty Museum within the cultural heritage field, as well as its spectacular setting and location within Los Angeles, made it an ideal partner for this premier gathering. The staff of the Getty Trust agreed to host and provide significant support for the event, but wished to remain in a secondary role to State Parks in the planning and implementation of the summit. State Parks solicited and received co-

sponsorship and support from other organizations considered critical to the success of the summit. By early 2002 the summit steering team had secured full grant funding for the event, enabling the 90 invited participants to attend at no cost, which assisted in ensuring their attendance.

Concurrently with summit planning, two other events occurred that added an additional degree of complexity to that effort. While California's quality of life can be significantly enhanced by its cultural heritage resources, state and municipal funding and financial incentives for historic preservation had been minimal during the past several decades. However, beginning in 2000 Californians passed Proposition 12, the largest park bond act in the nation's history, which contained a modest amount of seed money, \$12 million, for historic preservation grants to local agencies and \$10 million for state park cultural resource projects. Two years later another bond act, Proposition 40, also passed. This bond contained \$230 million for cultural resource projects—more than had ever been appropriated for such efforts. While the summit planning team purposely kept the focus of the proposed meeting on its original goal, there was no question that suddenly the California Cultural Heritage Resources Summit would take on an added dimension as a multitude of diverse heritage groups vied for a share of these dollars.

When finalized, the summit's outcomes and issues revolved around three basic questions, the answers to which would serve as a basis and framework for the goal of a collective common agenda. Those questions were: "What is the state of California's cultural heritage resources today with regard to the issues of preservation, stewardship, audience, relevancy and diversity, education and interpretation, and funding?"; "Where do we want to be with California's cultural heritage resources in five to ten years and what outcomes do we want to achieve?"; and "What do we do to get there?" In addition, the organizers and sponsors hoped that the summit would inaugurate a continuing dialogue among the diverse perspectives represented at the event.

In order to provide a focus for the discussion that would ensue, several additional objectives were presented, including:

- Exploring and identifying of what is missing from California's cultural heritage resources tableaux, and how filling those gaps might be addressed;
- Exploring and identifying of the nature of the partnerships and collaborations needed in the cultural heritage resources field;
- Determining whether the creation of a high-profile roster of California's Most Endangered Cultural Heritage Resources might contribute to efforts and means to preserve them;
- Forging a vision of promise and possibilities for California's cultural heritage resources, mindful of the challenging realities faced by many organizations, such as the economy, budget deficits, staffing issues, competing priorities, and national and regional crises; and
- Exploring and determining ways by which the visibility and importance of our collective cultural heritage resources may be extended to the broadest range of Californians.

The summit was divided into three sessions, each exploring one of the questions considered fundamental to the development of a common agenda. Each session was preceded by a notable speaker who set the stage for what followed. A panel of representative stakeholders then presented a point of view on the subject, after which audience participants asked questions or presented their own point or counterpoint. Breaks between sessions allowed for interpersonal discussion or debate. Special keynote presentations were made by Professor I. Michael Heyman, Congressman George Radanovich, and John Nau, III, chair of the National Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

So what is the state of the state with regards to its cultural heritage resources here at the early beginnings of the 21st century? First, California has massive holdings with regard to these resources. However, there is little coordination between and among the

various agencies and organizations that possess them. In addition:

- There is no direct nexus between university studies and historic preservation. There are no generally accepted curricula in historic preservation that lead to special studies and research.
- Preservation and stewardship issues revolve around the availability of financial resources. Some museums are well endowed; others, not. For governmental agencies, regardless of jurisdiction, deferred maintenance is a constant issue due to the expense of rehabilitating and maintaining historic structures and other cultural heritage resources such as artifacts and art works.
- California faces a daunting task with regard to relevancy, in the context of the broader view of cultural heritage resources, because of the fact that its citizens form one of the world's most diverse populations. Dozens and dozens of cultural groups look to make the California experience their experience. More than a hundred different languages are spoken in the Los Angeles School District alone.
- There is no current "California History Plan"—the last one was done in 1973—which could address acquisition, development, a statewide sites inventory, and the thematic deficiencies that need representation.

However, the state of this state's heritage resources also possesses positive footnotes. California's broad cultural heritage resources community is poised and committed to work together to meet the demands of relevancy and audience, stewardship and preservation, education and interpretation. The summit proved this. The diversity of California's population is not a weakness, but a strength. By addressing the issues and difficult challenges surrounding relevancy, tremendous opportunities exist for cross-cultural communication. A California history plan based on a new, modern, thematic framework, rather than a chronological one, is in the testing stages. The success of ballot Propositions 12 and 40

demonstrates that tremendous public and political support exists for efforts that promote California's cultural heritage resources. Grassroots historic preservation efforts are taking place throughout the state. All of this is occurring during a period of economic crisis. However, I am certainly not alone in recognizing that there is little innovation in government unless there is a crisis. Little dramatic change takes place without one.

The California Cultural Heritage Resources Summit generally exceeded the expectations of planners, sponsors, and participants alike. The first steps toward the goal of a common agenda were made with the fostering of a more complete understanding of the mission of represented organizations and agencies, and their connection to heritage resources. Perhaps the major revelation, by no means an assumed one, was that the myriad of organizations, organizational representatives, and spokespersons for those resources had much more in common with each other and collectively than they had differences separating them. Other outcomes from the conference included:

- Overwhelming support for continuing the dialogue begun at the summit.
- Support for future formal meetings, including the potential for another summit with a structured format.
- Agreement that a collective advocacy had the potential to achieve results within the competitive funding environment that exists within California today. Within the current budgetary crisis, this advocacy at a minimum could achieve acknowledgment that California's cultural heritage resources are a critical element in defining who we were and are as Californians and as such are non-renewable treasures.
- Agreement that accessibility and inclusion was critically important to creating a vibrant collective cultural heritage resources program to which all Californians could relate.
- Agreement that more ties were needed with the academic community specifically and in general among the interests vested in some portion of California's cultural

heritage.

- And for California State Parks, a heightened awareness of the context of its cultural heritage resource holdings within the broader heritage resources community.

Post-summit communication and evaluation echoed the success of the conference as a defining event within California. Many of the organizations not individually represented at the gathering expressed their interest in future dialogue as a common agenda is beginning to be shaped and structured.

My opinion of what must occur next if this agenda is to be successful can be summarized with four thoughts. First, the momentum of the summit must be used to gain further understanding of each other's media as they contribute to the greater collective whole of California's cultural heritage resources. Second, as stakeholders continue to meet, a collective advocacy must be designed, publicly and politically, for the preservation, interpretation, development, and acquisition of those resources as a part of the agenda. Similar to the environmental movement of the late 1960s and the 1970s, we must use the strength of what these groups have in common and not what divides them. A common agenda certainly need not be a passive one! Third, a California history plan, to include an inventory of the state's cultural resources with thematic deficiencies identified, must be completed. And finally, a strategic plan with goals, time frames, and performance measures for

achieving a common agenda should be developed. This would detail the strategy, and the devil is in these details. Without facing that devil, only rhetoric will continue.<sup>4</sup>

### Endnotes

1. Quote from Heyman's keynote address, November 17, 2002. Heyman is secretary emeritus of the Smithsonian Institution and chancellor emeritus of the University of California, Berkeley.
2. "Public Opinions and Attitudes" was prepared by CIC Research, Inc., of San Diego for California State Parks.
3. The steering team consisted of the following State Parks staff: Steade Craigo, FAIA, chief, Cultural Resources Division; Hoyt Fields, chief curator, Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument; L. Thomas Frye, cultural resources advisor to the director and chief curator emeritus of history, the Oakland Museum of California; Knox Mellon, state historic preservation officer; Steve Mikesell, deputy state historic preservation officer; Erin Saberi, assistant director, California State Parks; Catherine Taylor, museum director, California State Railroad Museum; and Denzil Verardo (summit chair), chief deputy director for administration, California State Parks.
4. A full summit *Proceedings* is available by contacting California State Parks.

