PRESERVATION AS A MATTER OF HEALTH



At the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown in late March of 2020, Landmarks Illinois launched the #mysacredground social media campaign where followers were asked to post photos of special places that brought them comfort. This collage captured the variety of submitted places that provided a healthful mental and physical respite during this challenging time. Older places can have a restorative, healing effect. The campaign was named in honor of Timuel D. Black, Jr., educator, Civil Rights activist, public historian and author of the book, "Sacred Ground: The Chicago Streets of Timuel Black," that Landmarks Illinois had just honored on March 5, 2020.

SEPTEMBER 17, 2022

BY BONNIE MCDONALD, PRESIDENT & CEO, LANDMARKS ILLINOIS

Health and well-being have been at the forefront of our lives with COVID-19's appearance and repeated surges. For many of us, there were interruptions and alterations to our daily patterns, including where, when and how we gathered. The importance of places became clear when we could no longer access them. Places are where we make a living, receive vital services, learn, practice our faith, recreate and, perhaps most importantly, where we connect with others. Substantially altering access to these vital things has taken its toll, with up to 80% of people in the United States experiencing depression, anxiety, grief and/or isolation.¹

¹ Nealon, Michele. "The Pandemic Accelerant: How COVID-19 Advanced Our Mental Health Priorities." The United Nations UN Chronicle, October 9, 2021. Accessed on September 2, 2022. https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/pandemic-accelerant-how-covid-19-advanced-our-mental-health-priorities

The Relevancy Project began in 2019 before COVID-19's arrival. Over half of the project's 130 interviews took place after the spring 2020 lockdowns. After March 2020, I noticed that people were more eager to talk about the physiological relationship between place and sense of community. Preservationists are comfortable with economic and aesthetic talking points and we are beginning to use sustainability language with some regularity, but preservation's connection to health is largely unexplored. Interviewees acknowledged that we need data, examples and tested messaging to start communicating the idea that our work preserves and improves health.

"We need language that isn't so squishy. People need tangible evidence. Can we tie [preservation] to other facts and data, like social determinants of health and resilience?" Di Gao
Senior Director of Research & Development
National Trust for Historic Preservation

March 27, 2020 New York City, New York (via Zoom)

Again, the Relevancy Project's purpose is to be additive, not duplicative. I recommend referencing Tom Mayes' and Raina Regan's thoughtful work connecting preservation and health as a good start for this topic. Mayes, the National Trust for Historic Preservation's (NTHP) vice president and senior counsel, <u>published several works</u> exploring the relationship between old places and mental and physical health.² In her <u>Uplifting Preservation</u> blog, Regan, program analyst and National Park Service liaison for grants programs at the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, writes extensively about our field's mental health challenges.³

WHAT IS HEALTH?

The concept of health has evolved with our greater understanding of human physiology and psychology. The World Health Organization defines "health" as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."⁴

We are part of an ecosystem where we relate to other living things, and to our physical surroundings. The planet's living organisms need a healthy ecosystem to survive. We can measure our ecosystem's health at an individual, community and ecological level. <u>Blog Post #7</u> explored how preservation can achieve environmental health by fighting climate change. How

Mayes, Tom. "PastForward Reading List: Introduction to Health and Historic Preservation." National Trust for Historic Preservation, August 8, 2017. Accessed September 2, 2022. https://forum.savingplaces.org/blogs/tom-mayes/2017/08/08/pastforward-reading-list-introduction-to-health-and-historic-preservation

² Mayes, Thompson. "Why Do Old Places Matter?" National Trust for Historic Preservation, January 9, 2017. Accessed September 5, 2022. https://savingplaces.org/stories/why-do-old-places-matter#.yxZ0s3bMJPY Mayes, Thompson. "Why Old Places Matter." Rowman & Littlefield, 2013.

³ Uplifting Preservation by Raina Regan: https://rainaregan.com/uplifting-preservation/ and https://tinyletter.com/uplifting-preservation/archive

⁴ "Constitution," World Health Organization, undated. Accessed September 3, 2022. https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution

can preservation promote community health? By integrating preservation into public health practices.

Public health works to protect and improve the health and well-being of individuals and their communities, from the neighborhood to the global level. California's public health consortium included opportunities to engage with culture as one of its 20 community health indicators. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index, the nation's metric for success, also includes culture. The index includes questions about psychological wellbeing, health, time use, community vitality and cultural diversity and resilience, all of which have a relationship to preservation. Encouraging local public health professionals to adopt culture as a health indicator is a first step, which we can follow by engaging with public health agencies to identify where else preservation integrates with their plans.

The World Health Organization includes "social well-being" in its definition of health. Beyond public health, we can consider how historic places strengthen social connections. In "Why Old Places Matter," Tom Mayes explores how old places provide a sense of continuity, belonging, memory and identity. These connections are at both the individual and group level. An entire group's health can suffer after losing a special place. Demolition erodes, and even destroys, communities by removing the spaces where people interact with each other. The emphasis in the United States on protection of property rights means that people often have little choice about what stays or goes in their communities. Dr. Mindy Thomson Fullilove explored the collective loss resulting from Urban Renewal, a program that displaced 1 million people and destroyed 2,500 neighborhoods nationwide between 1949 and 1973. Root shock is the traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one's emotional ecosystem. It Displaced residents suffered physical and mental distress, including post-traumatic stress disorder, and adjustment disorders.

<u>Solastalgia</u> is another term describing place-based trauma. A recently coined term, solastalgia "refers to the pain or distress caused by the loss of a comforting place; the sense of desolation

⁵ "What is Public Health?" Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Foundation, undated. Accessed September 3, 2022. https://www.cdcfoundation.org/what-public-health

⁶ "California Health in All Policies Task Force: 2010 Healthy Communities Framework (HCF)." California Health in All Policies Task Force, undated. Accessed September 3, 2022.

 $[\]frac{\text{https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/OHE/CDPH\%20Document\%20Library/Healthy\%20Communities\%20Framewor}{k.pdf}$

⁷ "Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index." Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, University of Oxford, undated. Accessed September 3, 2022. https://ophi.org.uk/policy/gross-national-happiness-index/
⁸ "Constitution."

⁹ Mayes, Thompson.

¹⁰ Fullilove, MD, Mindy Thompson. "Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It." New Village Press, 2004. 9, 4.

¹¹ Fullilove, 11.

¹² Fullilove, 3.

people feel, consciously or unconsciously, when their home or land is lost."¹³ Preservationists know this feeling when watching the demolition of places that we have worked tirelessly to save. Grief and disruption to a person's sense of orientation accompany the loss of one's special place.

PLACE AS MEDICINE

How can place help heal these deep wounds? Urban researcher Michael Mehaffy and architectural theorist Nikos Salingaros authored a 2019 blog for the National Trust for Historic Preservation studying the link between historic places and resilient human environments, or environments that heal quickly from damage. ¹⁴ In the blog, they explored how natural forms emulated in architecture, such as acanthus leaves on a column capital, mimic nature's healing properties. Exposure to nature has medicinal qualities, including reducing stress and pain levels, and boosting the immune system. ¹⁵ Perhaps because of its healing properties, humans have a predilection for natural forms that scientists call "biophilia." ¹⁶ Research shows that people have a similar, positive physiological and psychological response when exposed to architecture that incorporates natural forms. ¹⁷ In this way, historic places within natural environments or featuring natural elements could be seen as a form of healing medicine.

"During COVID, people's mental health has suffered and the National Trust [UK] has served the communities well. People have enjoyed one [of our sites.] We were in Day 1 of lockdown in U.K. and decided that the National Trust sites can remain open. That decision was especially about people's mental health."

Siân Phillips Hydro Technical Specialist National Trust [UK] November 6, 2020 Shrewsbury, England (via Zoom)

Older places' healing properties go beyond their design. They can also be forums for discussion, learning and healing around the generational impacts of genocide, displacement and enslavement. The #LandBack Movement is a First Nations' and Indigenous people-led

¹³ "Solastalgia." Climate Psychology Alliance, 2016-2021. Accessed September 4, 2022. https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/handbook/484-what-is-solastalgia

¹⁴ Mehaffy, Michael W. and Nikos A. Salingaros. "Building Tomorrow's Heritage: Lessons from Psychology and Health Sciences." National Trust for Historic Preservation, April 25, 2019. Accessed September 2, 2022. https://forum.savingplaces.org/blogs/special-contributor/2019/04/25/lessons-from-psychology-and-health-sciences

¹⁵ Franklin, Deborah. "How Hospital Gardens Help Patients Heal." Scientific American, March 1, 2012. Accessed on September 4, 2022. <a href="https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/nature-that-nurtures/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CSpending%20time%20interacting%20with%20nature,treatments%20to%20help%20you%20heal.%E2%80%9D
you%20heal.%E2%80%9D

¹⁶ Mehaffy and Salingaros.

¹⁷ Weir, Kirsten. "Nurtured by Nature." Monitor on Psychology, American Psychological Association, Vol. 51, No. 3, April 1, 2020. Accessed on September 4, 2022. https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/nurtured-nature

movement to reclaim ancestral lands enabling their return as nature's sovereign caretakers.

Chef Sean Sherman, an Ogalala Lakota Sioux tribal member, is regenerating ancestral knowledge about Indigenous food culture as medicine. In a 2021 interview with Illinois State University, Chef Sherman remarked on the prevalence of medicine in our landscapes: "I think that the more closely connected you are to the environment... then you start to see nothing but food and medicine basically everywhere you look... There's a deep benefit to understanding how Indigenous peoples connect to their environment. It is more than physical, it is spiritual."

Chef Sherman calls out the land as a sacred source of ancestral knowledge, nourishment and healing. Can historic places also provide similar medicine? Historic places can be spaces where we acknowledge traumatic, unjust and challenging histories and share knowledge of our nation's full history. They can also be healing places through a reconciliation and reparations process, such as that begun at Montpelier (see Blog Post #5). Preliminary indicators that historic places connect to, and improve, a person's and a community's health and healing warrants greater research to talk about this preservation benefit.

"Heritage communities are healthy communities. Shell donated 72 hectares to create an organic preserve [where] the traditional medicines grow themselves. The Guam Preservation Trust has a grant writing workshop to help people put them together. People who want to put their medicinal recipes in a booklet, the staff writes the grant for them."

Joe Quinata Chief Program Officer Guam Preservation Trust August 28, 2020 Hagatna, Quam (via Zoom)

THE RIGHT TO PLACE

The World Health Organization names health as a fundamental human right.²⁰ If connecting with place is pivotal to our health, should people have the right to access and protect places that they do not own?

Arguably, the right to one's history is a protected human right. Human rights are those we possess simply because we exist, not because we are a citizen of a political state.²¹ The right to health, education and culture are designated human rights protected under the <u>United Nation's</u>

¹⁸ Bearfoot, Cheyenne. "Land Back: The Indigenous Fight to Reclaim Stolen Land." KQED, April 21, 2022. Accessed September 4, 2022. https://www.kqed.org/education/535779/land-back-the-indigenous-fight-to-reclaim-stolen-lands

and LANDBACK website: https://landback.org/

¹⁹ Illinois State faculty and staff. "Chef Sean Sherman shares insights on rebirth of Indigenous foods." Illinois State University, April 6, 2021. https://news.illinoisstate.edu/2021/04/chef-sean-sherman-shares-insights-on-rebirth-of-indigenous-foods/. Also see Chef Sherman's TED Talk, "Why aren't there more Native American restaurants?" at https://www.ted.com/talks/sean_sherman_why_aren_t_there_more_native_american_restaurants?language=en. ²⁰ "Constitution."

²¹ "A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States." Howard University, 2018. Accessed September 3, 2022. https://library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory#:~:text=Civil%20Rights%20versus%20Human%20Rights,of%20a%20certain%20political%20state.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). ²² Article 12 affords us the human right to enjoy "the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health." ²³ Article 13 provides the right to access and participate in education to "the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity...education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups...for the maintenance of peace." Article 15 recognizes the right to participate in cultural life and to take necessary steps to conserve, develop and diffuse culture. Unfortunately, U.S. preservationists are disadvantaged from using human rights law to protect historic places. President Jimmy Carter signed the ICESCR treaty in 1977, but Congress has not ratified the agreement ²⁴ The U.S. is still obligated as a signatory to refrain from defeating the treaty's purpose, but U.S. courts are unlikely to enforce it until ratification. ²⁵

Preservation attorneys have been exploring the idea of enshrining preservation as a civil right, which is a right guaranteed to citizens and, in certain cases, non-citizens, by the Constitution and federal law. The NTHP included Dallas' Tenth Street Historic District on its 2019 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list. ²⁶ Tenth Street is one of the few surviving Freedman's Towns, which were self-governing communities established by African Americans during the Jim Crow era. Demolition increased in the district after Dallas' 2010 ordinance expedited removal of "dilapidated" housing that was under 3,000 square feet – the majority of the district's homes. The Tenth Street Residential Association (TSRA) filed suit against the City of Dallas claiming the ordinance violated the residents' civil rights under the federal Fair Housing Act. ²⁷ In August 2020, the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the lower court's ruling that the TSRA did not have standing to bring the case. Let us continue exploring this interesting legal argument.

What if historic properties had their own legal standing in court and could sue to save themselves? This may sound strange. How can an object bring a legal case? Attorneys, advocates and scholars have been working on a newer area of law called environmental personhood, where natural features acquire legal rights to protect themselves from harm,

²² "Protect Human Rights." United Nations, undated. Accessed September 4, 2022. https://www.un.org/en/ourwork/protect-human-rights

²³ "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights." United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, undated. Accessed September 5, 2022. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights

²⁴ Piccard, Ann. "The United States' Failure to Ratify the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Must the Poor Be Always with Us?" The Scholar: St. Mary's Law Review on Minority Issues, Vol. 13, No. 2, Winter 2010. 231. Accessed September 5, 2022. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1794303
²⁵ Shiman, David. "Economic and Social Justice: A Human Rights Perspective." University of Minnesota Human.

²⁵ Shiman, David. "Economic and Social Justice: A Human Rights Perspective." University of Minnesota Human Rights Resource Center, undated. Accessed September 4, 2022.

http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/tb1b/Section1/tb1-3.htm

²⁶ Rocchi, Julia. "Dallas' Tenth Street Historic District Celebrates Temporary Halt on Demolitions." National Trust for Historic Preservation, August 16, 2019. Accessed September 5, 2022. https://savingplaces.org/stories/dallas-tenth-street-historic-district-celebrates-temporary-halt-on-demolitions#.YxZag3bMJPY

²⁷ "Tenth Street Residential Ass'n v. City of Dallas, No. 19-10826 (5th Cir. 2020). Justia, undated. Accessed September 5, 2022. https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/ca5/19-10826/19-10826-2020-08-03.html

Legal Defense Fund (CELDF) has helped dozens of domestic and international governments on Rights of Nature ordinances and ballot measures. ²⁹ They are currently working with Indigenous water keepers in Minnesota to support "Manoomin" (wild rice) v. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to stop a pipeline that is located off the White Earth Reservation that threatens the sacred grass' "right to live and thrive." ³⁰ The case was tried in tribal court, which had already passed a Rights of Nature law. The White Earth Band of Ojibwe Court of Appeals dismissed the case in March 2022 citing a lack of legal precedent. ³¹ Attorneys working on Manoomin's behalf filed in April to have the court reverse its decision. ³² Clearly, more cases like this are needed to establish precedent. Rights of Nature lawsuits help us to consider the benefits and implications of granting historic places personhood. It is certainly an interesting opportunity to expand preservation's legal underpinnings.

"Remind people of the relevance of preservation...[it is] not just non-extant or extant buildings. We are trying to capture the climate of our society, behaviors, milestones and heritage. There are adaptive evolutions during these moments. Preservation can serve a purpose to remember a way of being, a way of thinking."

Cheyanne St. John Tribal Historic Preservation Officer Lower Sioux Indian Community November 6, 2020 Morton, Minnesota (via Zoom)

BURNOUT ENDAGERS PRESERVATIONISTS

If you are tired, having slogged this far through the Relevancy Project's blogs, you are probably in good company. You may also be tired because you, like many preservation professionals, are burned out. Burnout amongst preservationists is a real concern. Up to 50% of the nonprofit

²⁸ Khandelwal, Sanket. "Environmental Personhood: Recent Developments and the Road Ahead." Jurist, April 24, 2020. Accessed September 4, 2022. https://www.jurist.org/commentary/2020/04/sanket-khandelwal-environment-person/

²⁹ "Rights of Nature: Timeline." Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, undated. Accessed September 5, 2022. https://celdf.org/rights-of-nature/timeline/

³⁰ "The Rights of Rice and Future of Nature." 99% Invisible, Episode 496, June 21, 2022. Accessed September 4, 2022. https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/the-rights-of-rice-and-future-of-nature/

³¹ Fletcher, Matthew L.M. "White Earth Ojibwe Appellate Court Dismissed Manoomin Suite against Minnesota DNR." Turtle Talk, March 21, 2022. Accessed September 5, 2022. https://turtletalk.blog/2022/03/21/white-earth-ojibwe-appellate-court-dismissed-manoomin-suit-against-minnesota-dnr/

³² Whalen, Eamon. "The Latest Attempt to Stop Line 3 Hits a Snag in Tribal Court." Mother Jones, April 6, 2022. Accessed September 5, 2022. https://www.motherjones.com/mojo-wire/2022/04/the-latest-attempt-to-stop-line-3-hits-a-snag-in-tribal-court/

workforce reports being at or near the burnout point.³³ Public sector burnout is even higher at 65%.³⁴

Our work centers on serving the public. People count on us. How can we provide good and useful service when our tanks are empty? We have a responsibility to thoughtfully use and care for stories, properties, identities, knowledge and communities that are not our own. Burnout can put this needed thoughtfulness on the back burner, stymie optimism and creativity and prevent the growth of a culture of "yes," rather than "no."

The problem of burnout has to be addressed systematically and programmatically as leaders retire or join in the Great Resignation to move into different fields. Future leaders are leaving the field. In addition to Raina Regan's Uplifting Preservation blog, Vu Le humorously describes the trials of leading a nonprofit, including burnout, in his Nonprofit AF blog.³⁵ Preservation commissioners and board members should read his posts to understand why burnout is so prevalent.

The Relevancy Project is an effort to inspire action to make preservation more relevant. By doing so, I believe that we can move from reactive to proactive, save places in less time, raise more money and improve wages and benefits – all factors that lead to preservationists' feeling burned out. Relevance is one of the key aspects to retaining our talent. Fair wages and competitive (or better) benefits are a start, but we also need to provide:

- Training and accountability in making a welcoming and supportive workplace for all;
- Workload reduction and time to take vacation;
- Professional development, mentoring and sabbaticals;
- Paid-time-off for caregiving;
- Trusted management of one's own programs and projects;
- Ample resources and tools;
- Promotional and leadership opportunities;
- Engaging everyone in an organization in deciding on the future;
- Listening, engaging and acting with the voices calling for change.

A CALL TO HEALTH ACTION

In the lead-up to a 2017 PastForward Conference health session track, Tom Mayes gave a call to action: "The specific health impacts of older places have not yet been explored deeply." That

³³ Jayasinghe, Tiloma. "Avoiding Burnout and Preserving Movement Leadership." Nonprofit Quarterly, July 8, 2021. Accessed September 4, 2022. https://nonprofitquarterly.org/avoiding-burnout-and-preserving-movement-leadership/

³⁴ Edge Hill Consulting. "Burnout Rates Substantially Higher for Government Workforce as Compared to Private Sector According to New Eagle Hill Consulting Research." Cision PR Newswire, April 28, 2022. Accessed September 4, 2022. https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/burnout-rates-substantially-higher-for-government-workforce-as-compared-to-private-sector-according-to-new-eagle-hill-consulting-research-301535365.html

³⁵ Vu Le's "Nonprofit AF" blog: https://nonprofitaf.com/

³⁶ Mayes, Tom.

was five years ago. Little data, case studies or communication has become available since then to help us talk about preservation's health benefits. What is available is largely academic and needs to be broken down into language that is more accessible. This is a call to action to collaborate with social scientists, environmental health researchers and policymakers to backup what we know: that connecting with our history enhances our health.

"How do we make a philosophical shift in the field? Reframe preservation as health. The buildings we live in impact our health."

Nicholas Redding Executive Director Preservation Maryland August 20, 2019 Baltimore, Maryland

YOUR INPUT IS VITAL

Your thoughts on this and forthcoming topics are not only welcomed, they're imperative to ensuring this project is inclusive, with well-considered outcomes. So post away on Landmarks Illinois' Facebook and Twitter feeds and my LinkedIn page (blog comments are not enabled)! I'll collect and consider your comments to inform future blog posts and the project's outcomes published in the forthcoming Relevancy Guidebook to the U.S. Preservation Movement (working title).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you believe that older places help people's health and wellbeing?
- How do older places make you feel? How would you describe this to others?
- Are there anecdotes from people in your community about how they feel around historic places that you can share publicly?
- Are you willing to explore unconventional ideas, such as human rights and environmental personhood, as a means to expand preservation protections?
- Are you connected to university economics, psychology, public health, environmental or social science departments to explore data-driven studies on preservation's health benefits?
- Are you feeling burned out? If so, are you tapping into resources that are helping you cope and recover?
- Would you be willing to ask your colleagues if they are experiencing burnout symptoms? Will you share your resources with them?
- Do you feel overwhelmed when you read these blog posts, or when you think about the scale of needed changes in our field? What are the best ways to make change feel possible for you?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

*NOTE: Landmarks Illinois' website does not recognize italics, which necessitates using quotation marks for titles. We are aware that this format does not follow proper citation format according to the Modern Language Association (MLA).

- "Boosting Public Health by Preserving the Past: Q&A with Bloomberg Fellow Eli Pousson." Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, May 19, 2020. Accessed September 5, 2022. https://americanhealth.jhu.edu/news/boosting-public-health-preserving-past-qa-bloomberg-fellow-eli-pousson
- Fullilove, MD, Mindy Thompson. "Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It." New Village Press, 2004.
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- Regan, Raina. "The Burnout Crisis in Historic Preservation." National Trust for Historic Preservation, September 1, 2021. Accessed September 2, 2022.
 historic-preservation
- Uplifting Preservation by Raina Regan: https://rainaregan.com/uplifting-preservation/
 and https://tinyletter.com/uplifting-preservation/archive

STAY TUNED FOR BLOG POST #9: JOB CREATION THROUGH PRESERVATION