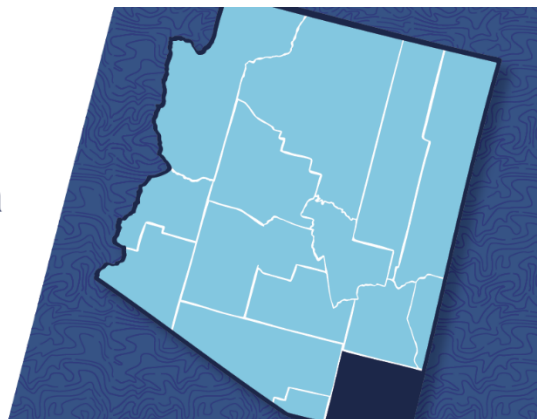




Cooperative Extension  
Cochise County



# HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN AMERICA AND HOW IT CAN IMPACT COMMUNITIES

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## HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Historic preservation is a generic term for the process of preserving, conserving, and protecting buildings, objects, landscapes, or other artifacts of historical significance. (U.S. Department of Interior, accessed 2023) Some methods of historic preservation include preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction.

### EARLY HISTORY OF AMERICAN HISTORIC PRESERVATION

In the early decades of American history, the idea of historic preservation was a debate between those trying to pursue a profit and those who desired to do the best for the public good. But some defined historic preservation as tearing down the old building and constructing a new building that was a replica of the old one. There were also battles about who should pay the cost of renovations, rebuilding and/or maintenance and support in the future.

Did Americans always value the practice of historic preservation? By the 1780s, many settlers were moving westward discovering indigenous antiquities previously unseen by those in the east. Many historic sites were plundered to take “souvenirs” back to the east and even to Europe. During the early nineteenth century, the nation was still in its infancy. Most buildings were still relatively young and were not in danger of being demolished by owners. Historic preservation was not something that was considered necessary at that time.

However, in the 1850s, the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, the oldest national historic preservation organization in the United States, was founded with the intended purpose to save George Washington’s estate at Mount Vernon, Virginia. Roughly 175 years later, Mount Vernon is still owned and maintained by the Mount Vernon Ladies Association through gifts, grants, and legacy donations. The Mount Vernon Ladies Association, a nonprofit organization, was a pioneer

in the field of historic preservation and to this day has served as a model for historic preservation organizations.

After an illustrious start, the restoration of Mount Vernon was halted by the Civil War as were many other preservation projects. Economic booms and busts often determined whether historic sites at the end of their useful lives were preserved or demolished, and furthermore who would pay for it. As there was little government or nonprofit ownership, many historic properties were owned by corporations. Preservation projects were often entered into by property owners using the measure of a profit or loss as the impetus of saving an historic site. (Wulf, 2020)

In 1906, the Federal Antiquities Act was passed in part out of concern about the plundering of Native American sites in the southwest United States. This act was applied to federal lands and prohibited the excavation, destruction, or appropriation of antiquities without a permit. Throughout the following decades, many larger cities created historic districts and committed to preserving whole neighborhoods of historic houses.

In 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act was passed by Congress with the purpose of protecting *“the historical and cultural foundations of the Nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people; ...the preservation of this irreplaceable heritage is in the public interest so that its vital legacy of cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, economic, and energy benefits will be maintained and enriched for future generations of Americans.”* (U.S. Department of Interior, accessed 2023)

### WHAT MAKES HISTORIC PRESERVATION SO COMPELLING?

Though some contributions to the local community provided by historic preservation are hard to measure with data-driven results, there are several non-tangible reasons to support historic

preservation. Historic preservation helps maintain a sense of identity and cultural heritage by preserving buildings and sites that tell the story of the community's past. Preserving significant landmarks can create a sense of pride and belonging within a community, enhancing its overall identity. Historic buildings and sites represent a community's unique story, traditions, and values, helping to define its character and differentiate it from other places. Historic buildings and sites allow people to connect with their heritage and understand where they came from. Well-preserved, historic architecture can enhance the visual quality and character of a community.

Preserving historic sites provides opportunities for learning about the past through firsthand experiences, enriching community understanding of history and diverse perspectives by providing educational opportunities for future generations to learn about their history. Heritage tourism has a positive impact on the travelers as well, including a connection to the past, appreciation of diverse cultures, and protecting heritage sites for future generations.

More tangible reasons to support historic preservation include revitalized historic areas that attract tourists thus boosting local economies. Heritage tourism is a measurable benefit of historic preservation. Every year millions of travelers visit America's historic places. Those that participate in cultural or heritage activities tend to stay longer and spend more money in the community, in turn creating jobs and business opportunities thus improving the quality of life for area residents. (Place Economics, 2020)

Historic preservation is a sustainable activity. Reusing and adapting historic buildings can be more environmentally friendly than building new structures, promoting resource conservation. (Rypkema, et al., 2011)

*"The greenest building is the one already built."*—Carl Elefante

## DRILLING DOWN TO THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF HISTORICAL PRESERVATION

When attempting to determine the economic impact of historic preservation on a community, there are several key factors to include in the calculations. The following metrics should be considered when calculating the economic impact of historical preservation: Jobs, Property Values, and Heritage Tourism linked to the following questions: *What should be measured? How should it be measured? and Where can the information be found?*

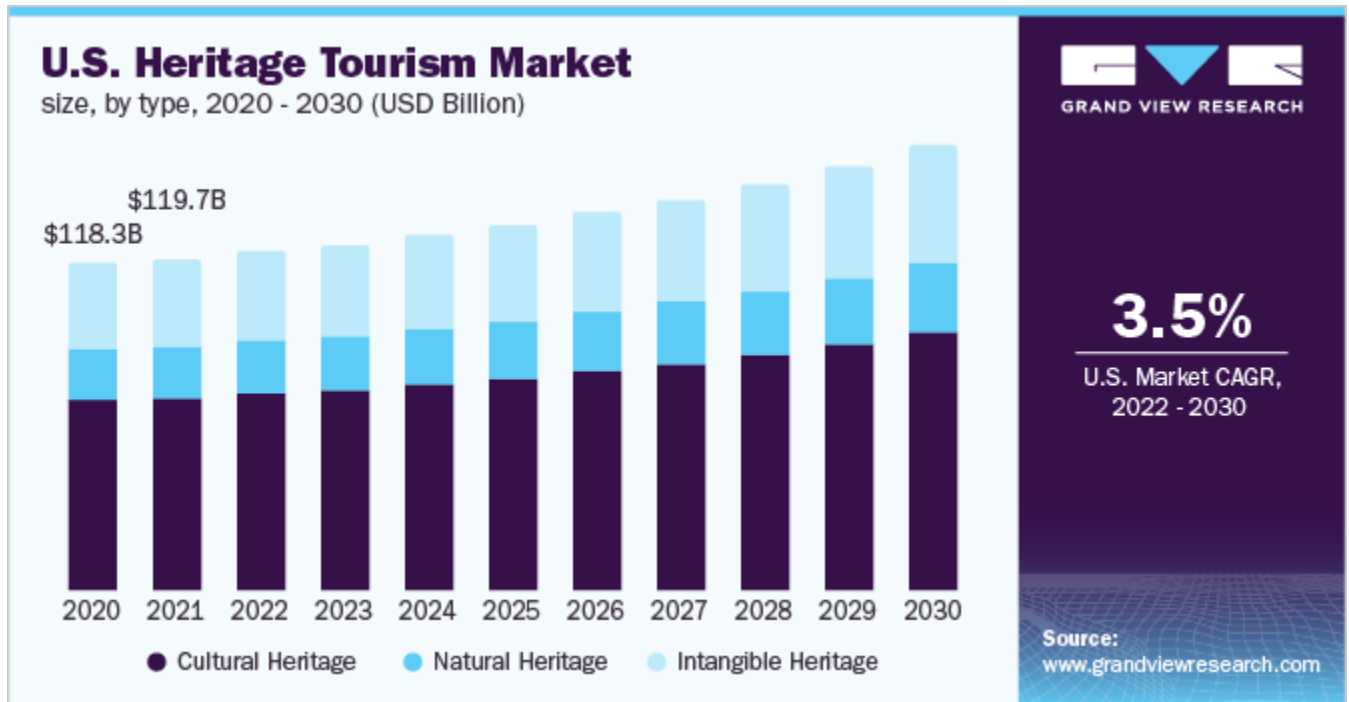
	What should be measured?	How should it be measured?	Where can the information be found?
JOB	Projects receiving the Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit; Projects receiving state tax credits for historic preservation; Federal, state and local government projects that are considered historic preservation; Any other historic preservation activity not included in previous categories	The dollar amounts totaled from the four categories in terms of jobs and household income using an Input-Output methodology	National Park Service data; State historic preservation offices; General Services Administration; Local government's capital expenditures on rehab of history buildings; estimates of activities that would be defined as historic preservation but not captured above
PROPERTY VALUES	Year-to-year change in property valuation for residential property within historic districts compared to valuations before historic district designation	Percentage change in per-square-foot valuation of properties in historic districts	To get a consistent valuation use a national data research firm such as Zillow Real Estate Research
HERITAGE TOURISM	The total number of "heritage tourists" in contrast to total tourists; trip characteristics such as number of annual trips, number of places visited, daily and total expenditures; demographics of heritage tourists	Should be measured through regular, comprehensive, and consistent surveys	There are already large surveys using national data samples; establish a definition of heritage tourist; use two to four questions that will identify attributes and activities as part of a local survey; incorporate local questions into an existing national survey
<b>Economic Impact Calculation Considerations (Rypkema, Cheong &amp; Mason, 2011)</b>			

Many may not be familiar with the term *heritage tourism*. The National Trust for Historic Preservation defines heritage tourism as “*traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present.*” It can take the form of a variety of experiences and attractions, including historical sites, museums, cultural festivals, archaeological excavations, traditional crafts, and natural landscapes.

There are several economic benefits to local communities from heritage tourism. Oftentimes, there is an entrance fee for the heritage site which contributes to the local economy. Job opportunities are created in the hospitality sector including transportation and lodging. Visitors

also spend money in local businesses such as restaurants, gift shops, and arts and crafts markets. (Dwyer, 2023)

In the United States, the expenditures on heritage tourism in 2021 was at \$119.7 billion with an expected annual growth of 3.5% through the year 2030. (Grand View Research, 2022)



(Grand View Research, 2022)

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Every town or city with any kind of cultural or natural historical asset should consider investigating what it would take to preserve those assets and what kind of economic benefits could be garnered by the community. There are many federal, state, and private grants that could assist with the costs of restorations and there are many agencies that can assist in an advisory capacity. (Franklin, et al., 2011)

Some best practices for establishing heritage tourism in your community include Collaboration; Be Realistic; Set Clear Goals; Use Appropriate Tools; Community Interaction; Be Open to Change. (Franklin, et al., 2011)

**Collaboration.** Collaborate with other organizations that could fill the gaps in your organization's skillset or assets. For example, collaborate with the local chamber of commerce or innkeepers' organization to make sure that visitors to your area will have lodging.

**Be Realistic.** Do not underestimate the complexity of establishing cultural heritage tourism in your community. Be realistic about the scope and difficulty of the project. Do not overpromise a tourist's experience.

**Set Clear Goals.** Have clear goals in mind before embarking on a project. Recognize that "more" is not necessarily "better"—it is better to do a few things well than to do many things poorly.

**Use Appropriate Tools.** Use technology appropriately. There were no computers and virtual reality in colonial Williamsburg, for example. Using this kind of technology in exhibits could detract from visitors' experience and leave inaccurate information with visitors.

**Community Interaction.** Partner and stay in communication with the local community, historical society, or museum. Your community members and organizations may be your biggest supporters in the form of funding or volunteers.

**Be Open to Change.** Be willing to recognize that change may need to happen to provide a better tourist experience. Frequently change the exhibits, the tour, or experiential activities.

Continue researching the information, call in different experts for unique perspectives on historical topics.

The use of these core concepts will help ensure a credible, authentic, and consistently positive experience for the cultural and heritage traveler. Sticking to these best practices will ensure that the local community receives economic benefits and increased interest in their community without negatively impacting the community's natural and cultural resources.



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