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5 *Cultural heritage and disaster management in Tucson, Arizona*

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There is a great diversity of cultural resources in America, in general, to say nothing of the sites which are important to local communities. One of the most important sites in Tucson, Arizona is 'El Tiradito', the Wishing Shrine. A fabled site in the Barrio Libre National Register Historic District, the shrine commemorates the demise of a man who died while in the commission of a mortal sin and was buried in unconsecrated soil. Legend has it that if one lights a candle at the shrine and makes a wish, the wish will come true if the candle is still burning in the morning. Over the years, El Tiradito has witnessed small seas of candles extending out into the street during some of the various crises of this century. In the 1970s, the listing of El Tiradito on the Register was a key factor in stopping a freeway plan that would have displaced both the shrine and three adjacent historic districts.

Another site of limited architectural value, but enormous historic significance, is today referred to as 'Slab City'. In 1942, Japanese citizens were relocated to an isolated site on the Gila Indian Reservation. Hundreds of Quonset huts and other structures were built to accommodate the internees. The buildings have long since disappeared; today only the concrete slabs and pillars testify to the existence of the camp. Much of the camp site has been destroyed or converted over to agricultural use. The Gila River Pima Indians are today taking necessary measures to protect and administer the remaining resources.

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Figure 5.1. Located on the west side of the South Main Avenue at the edge of Barrio Viejo and Barrio El Hoyo, El Teradito ('The Wishing Shrine') is one of the most important religious sites in Tucson, Arizona. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. (Photo: Alex Kimmelman 1997).

Locations of multiple copies and accessibility of surveys and inventories at the local level

During the last century, historic preservation efforts have resulted in the production of vast quantities of documentation on buildings, structures and sites. The 1992 Amendment to the National Historic Preservation Act further expanded the range of documentation by requiring eligibility determinations on non-registered properties. In just nine months in Tucson, preparation of the reports used in the Section 106 process have resulted in the survey and inventory of over 1,200 properties in nine working class barrios. The Section 106 documentation includes both detailed architectural assessment and a historic significance report.

Whichever type of documentation is created, the information is valuable to both the residents of historic areas and the community at large. To ensure maximum access to these records (which generally reside only in government repositories), local institutions should be provided with copies whenever possible. In the aftermath of a disaster, local availability of historic records can be expected to speed the process of stabilization and restoration. Even without a disaster, historic records can be a boon to educational institutions. Accordingly, programs should be established to provide a link between preservation

organizations and local schools. Churches, neighborhood centers, health clinics and other local institutions may benefit from sharing historic information and also provide a point of public accessibility.



Figure 5.2. Butte Camp, Japanese Relocation Facility, Sacaton, Arizona, ca. 1943. (Photo courtesy Casa Grande Historical Society, Pima Gila River Indian Reservation).

Disaster assessment (both potential and post-disaster)

The most important aspect of planning is planning - the act of identifying potentialities and establishing procedures to meet the need. While both the act and the product of planning are imperative, especially in recovering from a natural disaster, the need for adaptability and innovation in the field is no less vital. Some equate planning for disasters as somewhat akin to planning for war. In the latter, technology usually renders the experience of the previous war as unsuitable for fighting the current; in disasters, mother nature's chaos dictates the need for flexibility.

Differences in institutional culture cannot be understated when examining the various roles government agencies play in disaster recovery and cultural preservation. Institutional attitudes that consider natural disasters as nature's way of clearing away the accumulated refuse or 'unfit' constructs of man fall in well with the proponents of urban or community renewal without regard for the preservation of cultural resources.

The first requirement for local disaster planning is to identify the most likely types of disaster which might occur. In Tucson, Arizona, we are blessed with an environment which historically has not witnessed major disasters on the scale of the California earthquakes or

Mississippi Valley floods. Damage in Tucson is most likely to be caused by wind or fire, and with regard to historic structures, the damage usually involves catastrophic loss of roofs. Because of the recognition of the principal damage, the City preservation office has taken steps to assist property owners after a disaster. Development Standards for the historic districts identify appropriate replacement materials to be used in restoration. Cooperation with local trade groups and organizations, such as Construction Specifications Institute, facilitates rapid access to product data and suppliers. Interaction with the local 'Who's Who in Contracting' directory allows for rapid access to a broad range of construction trades. Preservation, particularly when adobe is involved, often requires specialists; and separate lists of these individuals and companies have also been compiled. Sources of financial aid - grants, low-interest loans, tax credits - should likewise be compiled and made available to the public.



Figure 5.3. 'Slab City', Japanese Relocation Facility, Sacaton, Arizona. Concrete pillars mark the location of the Butte Camp and the buildings constructed here. (Photo: Alex Kimmelman 1995).

In the post-disaster environment, it is vital to document the condition of historic and cultural resources as soon as possible. This documentation should continue through various stages of the restoration. Procedures should be established to provide immediate approval for permits necessary to stabilize and protect property after a disaster. Fencing, shoring up, partial demolition to remove elements which may imperil public safety or adjacent properties should not be subject to extended review processes. Review boards need to be convened at the earliest time to provide assistance and/or clear restoration plans for permitting when appropriate. Property owners should be permitted to restore a structure to an identical

condition as that which existed before the disaster. In this regard, local preservation agencies should develop programs to assist property owners make historic upgrades when they are not economically able to do so otherwise. In all cases, property owners' rights to existing conditions must be respected.



Figure 5.4. Rollings Sonoran Rowhouse, South Convent Avenue in El Libre National Register Historic District, Tucson, Arizona. Appearance of the building prior to wind damage and restoration. (Photo: Kelley Rollings 1980).

Stabilization, protection and repair of damaged historic sites

Restoration of historic properties following a natural disaster can illicit a wide array of preservation and building code issues. Such was the case following severe wind conditions in January 1993 which damaged historic buildings in El Libre National Register Historic District in Tucson, Arizona. Barrio Libre is a working class district, and thus has changed over time in a manner consistent of neighborhoods with similar economic and social conditions. Roof systems especially have been subject to major alterations over the years. Originally, all building in the district (some dating from the mid-1860s) had flat roofs with parapet walls. Between 1910 and 1930, with large quantities of building materials available, most property owners transformed their Sonoran rowhouses with the addition of sloped roofs. Secretary of Interior Standard for Rehabilitation, Number 4, states that additions and alterations over time may become historic in their own right and, if so, should be preserved.

Consequently, local buildings may have traditionally had a flat/parapet configuration. But what if the - more recent - hipped roof is destroyed in a storm?

Such was the case for a property owned by Kelley Rollings, a long-time property owner and early preservationist in the Barrio. With the hipped roof lifted off the building and deposited in the middle of the street, the property owner was left with the reasonable option of restoring the roof to either historic configuration. Of course, before the new roof was installed, the building was brought up to code with the addition of a bond beam to tie the entire structure together. This type of situation is not unusual. More roofs are lost to fire than wind, but the situation remains essentially the same: namely, release permits to protect the remaining resources and facilitate an emergency review to deal with any changes sought in the restoration.



Figure 5.5. Rollings Sonoran Rowhouse, South Convent Avenue in El Libre National Register Historic District, Tucson, Arizona. Appearance of the fully restored building following the 1993 wind damage. (Photo: Alex Kimmelman 1997).

The Historic Preservation Office and building safety officials need to continually update the photographic documentation of each listed property. Experience in Tucson suggests that when roofs are being installed, inappropriate and non-historic elements such as skylights, modern venting systems and mechanical equipment mysteriously appear where none had existed before. Notation on plans regarding these elements are the first line of defense in promoting a true restoration of the historic building. However, only regular site inspections

during construction will insure against intrusive elements being added in a conspicuous locations on a historic building.

A beneficial aspect may exist for education if preservation coordinators and property owners work quickly. While wall and roof systems lie exposed, it may be possible to provide training programs to those involved in local preservation activities: historic review boards, construction programs in public schools and community colleges and university architectural departments.

