

This year's National Trust for Historic Preservation conference in Austin, Texas, marked my first trip to a professional conference. It was a bit daunting to be attending so large an event without any previous experiences to give me an idea of how many people would be there or how the different sessions would be run. I had decided that since this is my senior year, it was about time to get out there and see what was waiting in the professional world. I was a tiny fish in a big pond, and it was time to swim.

After the morning's general session, people could break off and go to as many or as few sessions as they pleased. Most of the ninety-minute sessions had a similar set-up. A speaker or panel of speakers would present on a topic, followed by a period of questions and answers with the audience. The variety in sessions was surprising. Session topics came from all areas of preservation: architecture, museums, law, living culture, planning. Personally, my two favorite sessions were "Closing a House Museum: From Lemons to Lemonade" and "Adopting and Using Demolition-by-Neglect Ordinances." They might not sound like the most exciting topics, but learning to use legal tools to aid in preservation can be a positive way to make sure one is successful in their preservation efforts. These sessions pushed a proactive approach to preservation. In the house museum session, the goal was to get away from the idea that the only way to save an historic house is to turn it into a museum. With a properly executed easement, the house can still maintain its historic integrity. The demolition-by-neglect session detailed ways to draft a thorough ordinance that can prevent structures from becoming so run-down from disuse or misuse that the only option is to tear them down.

The four days in Austin all kind of passed like a blur, but I would do it again in a heartbeat. It was a great experience to be around a group of people who not only enjoyed preservation but who had dedicated their careers to it. We might not have agreed on every little detail, but it is always exciting to know that so many people can come together and spend a week learning everything they can about saving history. I would wholeheartedly recommend the experience to anyone considering next year's conference in Buffalo.