

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's 2010 conference in Austin, Texas has been on my mind for several months. As Vice-President of UMW's Historic Preservation Club it was my duty to plan and, in my case, execute many of the key details for travel to and from the conference. However, such as task and several late nights were all worth the effort.



The most difficult part of the planning was securing funds from different UMW institutions to lower the attendance costs for each individual student. The Center for Historic Preservation, the Historic Preservation Club, and the Office of Student Activities and Community Services were all instrumental in offering funding and, thereby, opportunities for five historic preservation students, including myself, to attend this year's NTHP conference. I can assert and echo the thankfulness of UMW's conference attendees for the financial support.

When I took HISP 209 or "Planning History and Practice" last year, the preservation department's planning professor Andrea Smith told my class about her penchant for explaining to her husband the planning practices and histories of each city they visited, and I thought how great it would be to travel with such a knowledgeable person. Naturally, I was thrilled to learn this fall that professor Smith would be attending the Austin conference as well.

As, I'm sure, professor Smith was glad, our primary activity of the trip was not focused as much toward trivia but more toward attending conference sessions. The conference schedule was filled primarily with multiple topic-specific sessions

bookended by two larger events, the opening and closing plenary assemblies. Other more informal events, designed for meeting other preservationists, were scattered throughout the daily and nightly schedules.

The topic-specific sessions were the most enjoyable part of the conference. While the opening and closing plenary events and a few other conference-wide gatherings boasted the “big name” speakers, the topics of the speeches were often generalized in order to apply to all conference attendees, no matter their level of education in historic preservation and related issues. Laura Bush, the former first lady and preservation advocate, was the exception. Although she did not delve much deeper into the minutiae than the other plenary speakers, her use of specific examples, humor, and her general oratorical skill made her speech a pleasant break from a few of the other speakers who seemed to get lost in the ephemera of preservation theory and goals.

In my four days at the NTHP convention I attended several smaller sessions as well. A diverse range of topics was available from which to choose. Many focused on sustainability, a theme the National Trust seems to have embraced over the past few years.

My favorite sessions were arranged more as visual presentations. Two were focused toward developers doing large-scale, sustainable rehabilitations of primarily abandoned industrial buildings. A handful of developers each presented their most recent, award-winning projects with photographs and explanations of the processes, problems, and solutions they encountered. Another enjoyable session was focused on the weatherization and continued use of historic windows. Since these “eyes of a building” provide such historical context and character to a structure, it was great to see experts advocating and educating about the windows’ preservation and use as viable and even preferable alternatives to new, plastic-framed windows.



The National Council for Preservation Education also offered a couple beneficial programs. One NCPE session called “Considering a Preservation Career?” offered more information on the future and trends of employment in historic preservation as well as insights into the wealth of graduate programs nationwide.

Beyond just information for possible future studies, I was also fortunate enough to make a few professional contacts within the preservation community. At NCPE events I met a few directors of graduate programs as well as students from programs from across the country, each giving his or her own insight into graduate level education. At some sessions I was also fortunate enough to meet preservation leaders from my

home state of Maine, as well as prominent figures in the field in which I wish to work.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's annual convention is a wonderful tool for preservation students and professionals alike. Although the conference may not cover all of the topics one wishes to learn about or offer plenary sessions specifically catered toward one's specific interests, it has a customizable schedule with several informative, interesting, and useful sessions. I wish to return to the conference next fall in Buffalo, New York, and I hope my fellow UMW students will join me. It is a beneficial experience providing useful information, new ideas, contacts, and a taste of the professional world to which we aspire. Oh yes, and it's a really good time as well.