

THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. What is the National Register of Historic Places?

The National Register was established by Congress in 1966, and is part of the National Historic Preservation Act, and is supervised in each state by a State Historic Preservation Officer. The Register is the official list of the nation's cultural resources considered worthy of preservation. The National Register seeks to recognize properties of historical, architectural, and archaeological significance, through a program of registration, financial aid and incentives, and partial protection from destruction by federally funded projects. This program is administered in Iowa by the State Historical Society of Iowa which has as one of its main concerns the preservation of those buildings, structures, sites and objects which effectively illustrate the many facets of the state's history.

2. How does Iowa's National Register Program work?

The Historic Preservation Office gathers information about historic properties in Iowa through professional surveys and research, and from material submitted by interested individuals, historical groups, and a variety of federal, state, and local agencies. Those properties that have been nominated and for which sufficient information exists to determine their significance in terms of National Register criteria are submitted by the staff to a review body made up of representatives from the preservation professions as well as interested citizens from around the state. This review committee meets in public session three times per year to consider each property submitted, and to vote on the qualifications of each for the National Register of Historic Places. Nominations for properties so approved are then made to the National Park Service in Washington, D.C. If the National Park Service approves a nomination, that property is listed on the National Register. Nominations are generated both by this office, by local governments and other agencies, and by interested members of the public.

3. What about the rights of owners of properties listed on the National Register?

National Register status in no way limits the right of an owner to preserve, alter, or even demolish his/her property. Owners are not required to do anything, or sign anything, or make any commitments regarding the use of their property, unless they have received federal funds. In those few instances a covenant will be developed for a certain number of years, depending upon the amount of funds received. In some communities, properties, which are located within National Register historic districts may come under local design review ordinances. This is because those communities often use National Register designation as a test in creating local historic districts with the same boundaries.

4. Do owners of National Register properties have to allow public access to the property?

Definitely not. National Register status does not alter the right of an owner to maintain his/her accustomed privacy. The National Register is not a tourist program, and any encouragement of visitors is strictly the choice of the property owner. If, however, (and only if) an owner obtains federal preservation assistance involving exterior or interior improvements not appreciable from the public right-of-way, the property must be opened for exterior or interior public visitation (depending on whether it is the exterior or interior that is historically significant) a minimum of 12 days each year, as specified by the owner.

5. What about financial aid?

At the present time there are programs which offer financial incentives for the restoration/preservation of properties either listed on the National Register or considered eligible for the National Register. Property owners are encouraged to contact the State Historical Society of Iowa, for information about the programs available and assistance in applying for them. Information is available on their website at <http://www.iowahistory.org/preservation/index.html>, Financial Assistance.

6. How are National Register properties protected?

The powers of the staff are limited in this respect, to reviewing those projects which are funded, wholly or in part, by the federal government and which impact, directly or indirectly, listed or eligible properties. National Register status does not mean that a property cannot be destroyed by a highway, by Urban Renewal, or some other project. It does mean that before a federal agency can be involved in any way with such a project, i.e. by funding, licensing or authorizing it, the federal agency must consider alternatives by which National Register properties might be saved from destruction. After the review process has been completed, the agency may choose to avoid the property, or it may decide to go ahead with the project, even if a National Register property is destroyed in the process.

Get additional information concerning the National Register of Historic Places from our website at <http://www.iowahistory.org/preservation/index.html> or from the National Park Service website at <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr> or contact:

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National Register: Myths, Misconceptions, and Realities

The National Register Does

1. Identify historically significant buildings, structures, sites, objects, and districts, according to the National Register Criteria for Evaluation.
2. Encourage the preservation of historic properties by documenting the significance of historic properties and by lending support to local preservation activities.
3. Enable federal, state, and local agencies to consider historic properties in the early stages of planning projects.
4. Provide for review of federally funded, licensed, or sponsored projects which may affect historic properties.
5. Make owners of historic properties eligible to apply for federal grants-in-aid for preservation activities. Presently, in Iowa, these funds are limited to survey, nomination, and planning projects with limited funding available for the development of architectural plans and specifications for buildings listed on the National Register. The State Historical Society of Iowa, however, administers the Historic Resource Development Program (HRDP) which makes available matching grants for the rehabilitation of properties listed on the National Register.
6. Encourage the rehabilitation of income-producing historic properties which meet preservation standards through tax incentives

The National Register Does Not

1. Restrict the rights of private property owners in the use, development, or sale of private historic property.
2. Lead automatically to historic district zoning.
3. Force federal, state, local or private projects to be stopped.
4. Provide for review of state, local, or privately funded projects which may affect historic properties.
5. Guarantee that grant funds will be available for all significant historic properties.