

The National Park Service's HABS and HALS Programs

The following interview describes the federal documentation programs that are available to the Stein Garden as National Historic Landmarks. The participants are Catherine C. Lavoie, chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and Christopher M. Stevens, principal landscape architect at the Historic American Landscape Survey (HALS). Dorothy Fue Wong conducted this interview on April 25, 2012 in Washington D.C.

Wong: What is HABS?

Catherine Lavoie: The Historic American Building Survey (HABS) is actually the oldest and first historic preservation program within the Federal Government. It was created to make sure that there would be a lasting record of our cultural heritage. At the time it was formed in 1933, there was a recognition that there were many important historic buildings that were being lost. So the idea of creating a permanent record and having public access to that material was very important.

We still do that almost 80 years later. We create measured drawings, large format photographs, and written reports of historic architecture. In 1969 the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) was added to focus particularly on significant sites and structures in the fields of engineering and industry. In 2000, the Historic American Landscape Survey was also added in recognition that historic landscapes were very unique resources not included in HABS and HAER.

Wong: What is the Historic American Survey (HALS)?

Christopher Stevens: HALS was established in 2000 and it has grown by leaps and bounds. Like other documentation programs, we are involved in a tripartite agreement. It is like HABS whose three partners are the National Park Service, American Institute of Architects, and the Library of Congress. HALS's partnership consists of the National Park Service, the American Society of Landscape Architects, and the Library of Congress. The Library of Congress is the repository for the National Park Service Heritage Documentation Program's collections of drawings, history, and photographs.

The other partners, which are the professional associations, help to advocate for the National Park Service and were really instrumental in getting us created in the first place. They are the National Park Service's friends and advocates.

The National Park Service Heritage Documentation Programs prepare documentation around the country and monitor all the documentation that comes into the collection. A large component of our collection is mitigation documentation of Federal properties or federally funded projects that will alter or destroy a historic building or landscape. This documentation consists of large-format photography, written historical report(s), and/or measured drawings. This documentation (based on the Department of Interior Standards) is especially important for historic sites that have suffered from disasters and the severe effects of climate change.

Wong: What can the Stein Garden cities do in being part of HABS and HALS?

Catherine Lavoie: I think probably the most important factor would be to develop a written historical context, utilizing the existing National Historic Landmark nomination. It has a good site plan that shows the inter-relationship of buildings and landscapes with the various features that make them significant. I think that is first and foremost.

Christopher Stevens: In addition to the National Landmark documentation, Clarence Stein's book [*Toward New Towns in America*] shows the plans of the individual structure types and the ideas that went behind those designs. Those two resources are really great building blocks to start, as well as any GIS records that might be there—either in the county or state level. All of these sources would be a great way to start preparing HABS & HALS documentation.

Wong: How can students and universities be involved in these projects? The Stein Garden cities have limited budgets to hire additional personnel.

Catherine Lavoie: Education is a big part of what we do. We have a summer recording program that trains students and volunteers in HABS methodology. We also work with individual universities or colleges and professors who are willing to take on such work. We can provide classroom instruction and review of HABS drawings and other documentation to make sure that it is done appropriately and according to our standards. We are more than happy to provide general guidance and instruction if you want to work through a local preservation or architecture department towards that end.

Christopher Stevens: We do have many cases of this type of collaboration. And the most successful are when the professor becomes familiar with HABS & HALS

and works with the students closely. We're happy to review documents in our office and help along the way. This could be a class project, which we often get and receive, or a thesis project that could involve multiple communities.

Catherine Lavoie: Our guidelines and standards are online, so anyone can go to our website and download them. Within the past year actually, we've created what we call the HABS field guide, which is directed specially towards students and non-professionals. Our measured drawings guidelines assume that you have some architecture background. However, the HABS field guide is really a very basic "how to." The idea was that preservation students and others without an architecture background could take these most basic guidelines and create a simple floor plan or something of that nature.

As we discussed before, it is not necessary to actually produce measured drawings of every building. You would want to do measured drawings of a representative sampling of the various types so that you would have something that could be used in reconstruction or rehabilitation, or in the case of a disaster.

Wong: Many of these communities have architects and landscape architects. What do you think of a collaboration of these professionals – some of them retired – working with the university?

Christopher Stevens: That would be great. These professionals, with knowledge of living in their community, could mentor the students at the university who might be more familiar with some of the more modern computer programs. Working together, they can come up with important HABS & HALS documentation. I think that would be a great collaboration.

Wong: The Stein Garden cities are very interested in disaster planning and recovery. Please explain the interface of HABS and HALS with GIS in preparing the necessary documentation for disaster preparation.

Christopher Stevens: HABS and HALS work as partners with the Cultural Resource Geographic Information System facility (CRGIS). They offer advice for disaster relief, but they also are really involved with reporting cultural resource standards within the National Park Service. The state and county level also does GIS, and they would probably have more information related to the Stein Garden cities.

GIS is a program that records things geospatially as they occur on the earth. It's a great tool for producing HABS & HALS documentation. However, the level of detail in the HABS & HALS documentation is much greater. For it takes in the 3D aspect of details—how it is built, what the materials are, what the textures are, and what it looks like. Thus, GIS is a good building block. It is really crucial for disaster relief to have all of that geospatial information to know exactly where everything is located. One can start with GIS, but then go into doing the detailed landscape plans with the HALS documentation and the buildings with the HABS documentation.

Catherine Lavoie: GIS a great framework for doing HABS & HALS documentation. It greatly assists in a survey or site plan because you can guarantee that the various features are accurately located.

Wong: Please elaborate on how HALS can help in producing a Cultural Landscape Plan, which is the primary document for preserving a historic landscape.

Christopher Stevens: We have some people who have private practices in the United States that have produced a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) by reformatting the HALS historical report, and it is done with very little effort. It is just repackaging this digital information. The resulting Cultural Landscape report can be used as a tool for managing the landscape and making treatment decisions.

The open-ended HABS and HALS collection is copyright free and available to the public via the Library of Congress website. The Library of Congress archives our collection for a minimum of 500 years, but we know it will probably go much longer than that. Everything in our collection is available at a very high resolution, whether it be the drawings, the large format photography or the written Historical Reports.

Conversely, a Cultural Landscape Report can be reformatted with very little effort into a HALS Historical Report by following a format established by the National Park Service. It can then go online into the collection and disseminated widely, copyright free.

Catherine Lavoie: Chris pointed out the availability of the outline formats for HABS and HALS. One of the strengths of this approach is that it makes it easier for a non-professional to also contribute because, if you look at the outline, the questions prompt you to give the information that's required. It helps to guide the

process. That's one of the reasons that we stick to that format because it does help people who don't have experience to work to our standard.[See HABS and HALS outline formats at <https://www.nps.gov/hdp/standards/habsguidelines.htm>]

Wong: In summary, what would you recommend that a Garden City do first?

Christopher Stevens: GIS is probably a really great way to start to get the features recorded geospatially so that you have that geo-reference building block to start the landscape plan. And we already mentioned the Clarence Stein and the National Historical Landmark nominations. It is a really sound way to start with historic contextual and geospatial information. This information could then be used to either build HALS or the Cultural Landscape Report or both. There's no strict order of which comes first. It's really based on the community's needs.

If a Garden city need a management plan for the landscape and buildings (like treatment guidelines), a Cultural Landscape Report and a Historic Structures Report might be the way to start. A Garden city may want to start with HABS and HALS to have sound documentation that will go into the Library of Congress and be there in case there is a disaster. We have examples of HABS & HALS projects which have been used after a fire or an earthquake to help reconstruct or rehabilitate the resource. A Garden city would be in a strong position to face the challenges of future disasters and climate change by having all four documentations—the two written reports with HABS and HALS records.

Wong: Catherine, do you want to add anything to what Chris has said?

Catherine Lavoie: Chris has done a good job. It does really depend on your needs. It is important to have good baseline information. If you think you might want to rebuild or rehab, you will need the historical context to inform your decisions and measured drawings to undertake the actual work. The value of the drawings for the researcher is to understand the relationships of buildings and their interior spaces. This tells us about how the spaces flow, how they work together within the surrounding landscape. I think that is really important. The spatial arrangement is an expression of how people lived during that particular historic period. It is important to record that as well as the nuts and bolts needed for reconstruction or rehabilitation.

Christopher Stevens: And our collection at the Library is one of the most popular collections online that the Library of Congress has for K thru L.

Catherine Lavoie: Right. It helps when you apply for grants to demonstrate that there is public benefit and an educational aspect to the HABS/HALS collection, which is widely used by K thru 12 students and educators.

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HABS/HALS records can be found on the Library of Congress website
www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/

Further information can be found on

— Facebook: www.facebook.com/HeritageDocumentationPrograms

— YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/HDPNPS

The following HABS records are examples of best documented planned communities:

Aluminium City Terrace, East Hill Drive, Pennsylvania

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/item/pa2949/>

Belair at Bowie, Maryland

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/item/md1757/>

*Rancho Santa Fe, California

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/item/ca1694/>

Town of Penn-Craft, Pennsylvania

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/item/pa2598/>

*Techwood Homes, Georgia

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/item/ga0662/>

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Additional documentation found on entering Library of Congress website.

*(asterik) denotes line drawings.