Preface

This book aims to make historic preservation a more effective instrument for revitalizing inner-city neighborhoods through the strategic use of public history. Across the United States, historic preservation has become a catalyst for urban regeneration. Entrepreneurs, urban pioneers, and veteran city dwellers have refurbished thousands of dilapidated properties and put them to productive use as shops, restaurants, nightclubs, museums, and private residences. As a result, inner cities—once disparaged as zones of poverty, crime, and decay—have been rebranded as historic districts. While these preservation initiatives, often supported by government tax incentives and rigid architectural controls, deserve credit for bringing people back to the city, raising property values, and generating tourist revenue, they have been less successful in creating stable and harmonious communities. Historic preservation has enormous potential for enriching the urban experience. At its best, it not only invigorates local economies but strengthens communities by nurturing a deeper attachment to place, greater levels of social cohesion, and a collective agenda for local development. At its worst, however, it operates as a mechanism of capitalistic opportunism and aggravates social tensions by pricing the poor out of their own neighborhoods.

The central argument of this book is that inner-city communities can best turn preserved landscapes into assets by subjecting them to public interpretation at the grass roots. Bereft of interpretation, recycled buildings lose their capacity to anchor people in the flow of time and to expose relationships between the past and present. Only when associated with stories and imbued

with meaning do yesterday's material remains acquire the capacity to articulate shared values and visions. Only through careful analysis of previous uses and functions can communities build intelligently on what previous generations left behind. Only by acknowledging the full array of social forces that contributed over time to the uniqueness of urban places can city dwellers cultivate an inclusive sense of belonging and ownership that translates into collective stewardship. Yet buildings cannot speak for themselves. For all the inspiration, money, and sweat that have gone into salvaging aged structures and putting them to productive use, "we have not quite figured out," in the words of Rebecca Conard, "how to utilize historic buildings, structures, sites, and objects to communicate effectively the complex process of cultural layering on the landscape"[1] Fortunately, many of the tools we need are at our disposal because of developments in the fields of public history and archaeology. By adopting these best practices and more carefully aligning historical narratives with locally derived agendas for change, historic preservation can engage urban populations as self-conscious agents in the reproduction and revitalization of urban places.

Beyond Preservation is written from an "in-the-trenches" perspective of a participant-observer. Since 2000, I have had the good fortune to work on a variety of community-based history projects under the auspices of the Public Policy Research Center at the University of Missouri–St. Louis. As part of its mission to produce and disseminate methodologically sound research for broader civic purposes, the Research Center links a variety of local nonprofit organizations and government agencies to university faculty with relevant expertise. Hoping to take advantage of new state laws that offered generous tax credits for property rehabilitation in historic districts, several inner-city neighborhood organizations approached the Research Center for assistance in identifying and publicizing their historical attributes. In response to these requests, an archaeologist colleague, Timothy Baumann, and I established the Community History Research and Design Services (CHRDS) unit of the Public Policy Research Center in 2003. Through our activities in CHRDS, we developed and refined a model for involving residents in historical research that complemented preservation and community planning goals.

In crafting local-history projects, we drew heavily on the experiences and insights of others engaged in similar work in different parts of the country. This book documents many of the projects that influenced and inspired our efforts in St. Louis and serves as a catalogue of innovative practices in the fields of public history and, to a lesser extent, public archaeology. Just as CHRDS profited from lessons learned elsewhere, those with like-minded goals may benefit by reading about our strategies, mistakes, and accomplishments. In

this capacity, *Beyond Preservation* contributes to an ongoing dialogue among professionals and scholars in the fields of historic preservation, public history, public archaeology, and urban history. Although several professional organizations do an excellent job of circulating information within these respective fields through newsletters, journals, conferences, and Web sites, there are surprisingly few channels of communications that cut across them.

This book was originally conceived as a collaborative venture between me and Timothy Baumann. Jointly, we developed and organized several CHRDS projects that blended archaeology and history. The germ of this book was an article we coauthored on a community-history project in a North St. Louis neighborhood. It appeared in the Spring 2008 issue of *Historical Archaeology*, and portions of that article appear in different parts of this book. Unfortunately, a change in job venues and responsibilities prevented Tim from continuing the collaboration through the writing of the full manuscript. As a result, the sections about archaeology are more abbreviated than originally intended. Nonetheless, this book begins to puncture the long-standing communication firewall separating the related but distinct fields of public archaeology and public history.

Although the approach outlined in this book can be adapted readily to many kinds of places, it applies most directly to inner-city neighborhoods in the United States. CHRDS has concentrated its activities in the core areas of a major metropolis; hence the prescriptions offered in this book spring from inner-city settings. Personal experience aside, there are good reasons why such environments merit special attention. In recent years, preservationists have focused their efforts and scored their biggest victories in downtown districts and their surrounding neighborhoods. Thus, the inner city represents fertile terrain for expanding on recent successes and further broadening the scope of preservation. Moreover, the continued revival of the urban core remains vital to the sustainability of metropolitan regions. For too many years, cities have bled investment and population to the greenfields of suburbia. The result has been an environmentally destructive and socially fragmenting pattern of metropolitan development, commonly referred to as sprawl. Although it would be foolish to argue that inner-city environments have any more inherent historic value than their suburban counterparts, their preservation and regeneration offer greater possibilities for managing natural resources efficiently and integrating diverse urban constituencies and cultures more tightly within a cohesive whole.

Advocating interpretive frameworks that speak directly to the issues confronting inner-city neighborhoods and seeking to build on preservation methods already operating in these places requires some understanding of the

dynamics that gave rise to current conditions and practices. Hence, this book is as much urban history as it is prescriptive analysis; the approaches recommended herein are placed directly in the broader context of urban developments over the past half-century. Thus, the opening chapter traces the evolution of historic preservation as an urban revitalization strategy, with particular emphasis on the period after World War II. During these years, preservation gained currency as an alternative to urban renewal, and its effectiveness became increasingly measured according to economic criteria. What was sacrificed, however, was preservation's capacity to facilitate a constructive dialogue between past and present and unify people around a shared civic vision. As a result, neighborhood rehabilitation caused considerable social disruption and conflict. Chapter 2 expands the historical perspective by describing how a more democratic brand of public history and public archaeology emerged from the intellectual ferment and social revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s. Some of the most exciting projects constructed in this mold sought to strengthen people's attachment to place by employing the built environment as the primary vehicle for communicating history to present-day audiences. Thus far, however, there have been few attempts to use public history in the pursuit of specific community-development goals.

Chapter 3 documents an initiative on the north side of St. Louis that sought to revitalize a distressed neighborhood by merging historic preservation with cutting-edge practices in public archaeology and history. Under the auspices of a U. S. Housing and Urban Development Community Outreach Partnership Center grant, faculty, staff, and students from the University of Missouri–St. Louis collaborated with a neighborhood organization to develop a series of programs that attracted fresh investment, established a sense of neighborhood identity, and stabilized the population without sacrificing its social diversity. The project was unusual in granting primary authority over research design and interpretation to local residents rather than professionally trained scholars. A consideration of the project's accomplishments and shortcomings introduces readers to some of the issues confronting public historians who seek collaboration with inner-city communities in preservation-based revitalization projects.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 address selected challenges and opportunities associated with the public interpretation of historic urban landscapes. These chapters draw on projects in other parts of the country in addition to several in St. Louis. Chapter 4 explores the challenge of aligning public-history-based preservation initiatives with community planning efforts. Chapter 5 argues for a more comprehensive approach to landscape preservation by considering the role of the natural environment in historical development and community

revitalization. Chapter 6 considers some of the difficulties associated with reaching consensus in historical interpretation across the professional, ethnic, racial, and class divides that commonly characterize university-community partnerships.

The book concludes with some suggestions for developing public-history projects that contribute to economic revitalization through historic preservation and social stabilization. If not exactly a road map, as no two cities or even neighborhoods warrant the same approach, Chapter 7 offers some general principles and techniques worthy of consideration.

Understandably, some readers may be wary of a book written from such a subjective stance. I recognize the inevitable conflict between the goal of critical analysis and my personal investment in a particular brand of historic preservation. To guard against this bias, I have attempted to ground my argumentation in a wider literature and—wherever possible—note the limitations as well as the benefits of the strategies endorsed here. At the same time, I make no apologies for measuring public history and preservation endeavors against a model of grassroots preservation activity that I have played some role in shaping. I will leave it to readers to judge my dexterity in performing this balancing act.

It should come as no surprise that in writing a book about collaborative projects I have relied heavily on the assistance and support of others. It is a great pleasure to be able to thank them here. The University of Missouri–St. Louis has provided a supportive environment for conducting work that often falls beyond the orbit of acceptable scholarly activity. Alan Artibise and Mark Tranel, directors of the University's Public Policy Research Center, graciously provided CHRDS with resources and an institutional home. Kay Gasen and Lynn Josse were of invaluable help in cultivating constructive relationships with community partners and generating publicity for CHRDS activities through a variety of conferences and symposiums. Through the generosity of the Research Center and other external funding sources, I have had the good fortune to work with some wonderful graduate research assistants, including Chris Hanks, Ryan Flahive, Dan Goodman, Loren McLane, Justin McKnight, Justin Watkins, Elizabeth Perkins, and Raymond Perkins. Benjamin Israel deserves special mention for doggedly tracking down information about innovative public-history and preservation initiatives across the nation. Jay Rounds, director of the University's Museum Studies program, helped keep me abreast of community-engagement initiatives in the world of museums.

Beyond the University of Missouri–St. Louis, many friends and professional colleagues made important contributions. I gained a wealth of insights

about urban development and public-history practices through casual conversations with Joseph Heathcott, Mark Tebeau, Andre Odendaal, Eric Sandweiss, Sylvia Washington, Chris Wilson, and Marci Reaven. Patricia Cleary, Laura Lyon, Caleb Carter, and Ellen Thomasson helped me procure photographs for this book. Two journals, *The Public Historian* and *Historical Archaeology*, published earlier versions of portions of this manuscript.

Elsewhere in this preface I mentioned my partnership with Tim Baumann, cofounder of CHRDS, now at Indiana University, but I cannot overstate his contribution to this book. Not only did he do as much as anyone to shepherd the various community projects we initiated in St. Louis, but he was instrumental in crafting the approach to public history described in this book. I deeply regret that we were unable to carry through on our original intention to write this book together.

The editors and staff at Temple University Press have been a joy to work with. I thank Mick Gusinde-Duffy for helping me make some critical editorial decisions and for guiding the manuscript through the review and production process smoothly. Series editors David Stradling, Zane Miller, and Larry Bennett made the usually difficult decision of choosing a publisher an easy one by displaying extraordinary enthusiasm and confidence in this project as it neared its final stages. Along with two external readers, Max Page and the anonymous Reader B, David and Zane also read through the entire manuscript and offered sound editorial criticism.

This book surely would not have been written were it not for all the dedicated citizens of St. Louis who agreed to embark on public-history projects in conjunction with the University of Missouri–St. Louis. Without question, my best education in public history came from my conversations and interactions with neighborhood residents and community representatives in the City of St. Louis. To thank each of them by name would consume dozens of pages, but at the risk of excluding and perhaps offending many who donated significant time and energy, I would like to publicly acknowledge the following community volunteers: Carole Gates, Susan Tschetter, Gloria Bratkowski, Johnnie Owens, Alvin Willis, Pamela Talley, Mattie Divine, Ernestine Isaiah, Geraldine Finch, Jackie Jaekels, William Perry, Linda Coleman, Kenneth and Clara Coleman, Columbus Edwards, Shirley Leflore, Thomasina Clarke, Sylvia Bennett, Andra Lee, Sheryl Robnett, and Glenn Haley. In addition, the staff members of several community organizations were indispensible to the work described in this book, and so I owe a debt of gratitude to Doug Eller of Grace Hill Settlement House, Sean Thomas and Diane Roche of the Old North St. Louis Restoration Group, Irving Blue and Ralph

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I have saved my most heartfelt acknowledgement for last. My wife, Kathryn Hurley, has added to this project in so many ways. This book has benefited directly from her exquisite editorial guidance and her fine cartographic skills. Her companionship, patience, encouragement, and wise counsel were no less instrumental in bringing this book to fruition. Writing it certainly would have been a much lonelier process without her, and I will remain forever grateful for her willingness to share my exhilaration and frustrations throughout this roller-coaster endeavor. It is with great delight and love that I dedicate this book to her.