



Best Practices Review

A quarterly publication on National Register Bulletin guidance

Nominating Properties for Cultural Significance under Criterion A

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Introduction

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to “expand and maintain a National Register of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture” (54 U.S.C. § 302102, emphasis added). *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation (Criteria Bulletin)* provides guidance to support the preparation of nominations under Criterion A not only for properties significant for “a specific event marking an important moment in American prehistory or history,” but also for “a pattern of events, repeated activities, or historic trends” (*Criteria Bulletin*, p. 12). This issue of the *Best Practices Review* discusses the wide reach of Criterion A and offers examples of properties listed for their historical cultural significance.

Consider That “Events” Include “Culture,” Too

Merriam-Webster defines “culture” as

the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; also, the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time.

(See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture>)

In National Register practice, culture is understood as “a pattern of events” or “repeated activities” significant under Criterion A, and the *Criteria Bulletin* provides as examples a building used by an important local social organization and a site where precontact Native Americans annually gathered for seasonally available resources and for social interaction (*Criteria Bulletin*, p. 12).

This publication compliments the guidance provided in National Register Bulletins by providing examples on specific topics. Your feedback is welcome; please contact Sherry Frear, Chief & Deputy Keeper, sherry_frear@nps.gov.

For copies of the nominations referenced in this document, please visit our [Sample Nominations](#) page.

For National Register Bulletins and other guidance, please visit our [Publications](#) page.

All images are from National Register nominations unless otherwise noted.

National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Prepare the National Register Registration Form (Form Bulletin) has long suggested “ethnic heritage” and “social history” as areas of significance for culturally-based historic events and activities: ethnic heritage is described as the “history of persons having a common ethnic or racial identity” and social history as the “history of efforts to promote the welfare of society; the history of society and the lifeways of its social groups” (*Form Bulletin*, pp. 41-42). Either area of significance is appropriate for ethnically or socially significant historic properties, including those significant to identity groups.

In the years since the Bulletins were published in the late 1990s, the areas of significance categories and subcategories for ethnic heritage and social history have evolved and expanded to encourage the nomination of the diversity of resources that reflect the depth and breadth of the nation’s history. The most recent list of suggested areas of significance may be found on the National Register’s publications page, at [National Register publications \(nps.com\)](https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications). Note that this current list is not prescriptive; that is, a nomination author is not required to select an area from this list and instead may identify any ethnic or social category or subcategory that is supported by the nomination’s historic context.

“Social history” is often selected as an area of significance for properties associated with a broad range of activities by identity groups or specific communities. For example, many historic places significant to LGBTQ+ communities are listed under Criterion A for social history, sometimes in conjunction with other areas of significance, such as “politics/government,” “health/medicine,” or “law.”

Identify a Tangible Property or Place

The values that inform our heritage are intangible; they live within our heads and our hearts. Properties included in the National Register—buildings, structures, objects, sites, and districts—are the tangible places that through their physical integrity and characteristics tell the story of that heritage. The National Register does not list intangible values, except in so far as they are associated with or reflected by historic properties. The National Register does not list cultural events, or skilled or talented individuals, or animals, as is done in some countries. Rather, the National Register recognizes physical properties that are place-based or relatively fixed in location (*Criteria Bulletin*, p. 4).

A Note on Traditional Cultural Places

A property need not be a “traditional cultural place,” as that term is defined in National Register practice, to be eligible for inclusion in the National Register for its traditional cultural significance to an ethnic or identity group. A TCP is a historic place where traditional cultural beliefs, customs, and practices have been and continue to be transmitted from generation to generation (*National Register Bulletin 38: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties* (1998), p. 1). Nevertheless, a place may be significant to an ethnic or identity community, and eligible for inclusion in the National Register, not as a place of continued, intergenerational, tradition-keeping but rather for a single event, or pattern of events or series of activities, as illustrated by the examples in this *Best Practices Review*.

Examples

This *Best Practices Review* offers three examples of places that convey the significance of their communities’ foundations, persistence, and continuation. They recognize the significant experiences of individuals and groups affiliated by ethnicity or identity, and they retain the integrity necessary to communicate their historic associations with people, time, and place.



Abe Lincoln Trading Company; Yoshiko Yamanouchi House; The Furies Collective house.

Abe Lincoln Trading Company

Clearview, Okfuskee County, Oklahoma, NR Ref. 100009607

Listed in 2023 at the local level of significance under Criterion A for Ethnic Heritage/Black, Commerce (period of significance ca. 1903–1973) and Community Planning and Development (period of significance ca. 1903–1910); and Criterion C for Architecture (period of significance ca. 1903)

Note: Funding for the Abe Lincoln Trading Company nomination was provided by an Underrepresented Communities Grant administered by the National Park Service.



Abe Lincoln Trading Company, Clearview, Okfuskee County, Oklahoma, 2022. (Kory Van Hemert)



Abe Lincoln Trading Company building in use as a bar and juke joint, date unknown. (Cowan and Arnold, "The Last Chance Bar")

The Abe Lincoln Trading Company building, constructed of local red sandstone ca. 1903, served as the offices of the Lincoln Townsite Company—founded by Black entrepreneurs Lemuel Jackson, James A. Roper, and John Grayson—which established, planned, and promoted the all-Black community of Clearview through 1910. The building subsequently housed a series of other businesses that served the residents of Clearview, including a dry goods/grocery store; a pharmacy/drugstore; and a bar/juke joint.

Architecturally modest in style, it is both the oldest building in the town of Clearview and its best extant example of the one-part commercial block-type. This all-Black town is located within Muscogee (Creek) Nation territory, and this nomination was supported by both the Muscogee Nation THPO and the Oklahoma SHPO. As the authors state on page 25 of the nomination, the Abe Lincoln Trading Company building represents the successful efforts of the Lincoln Townsite Company to develop “an environment of respect, support, and self-sufficiency in Clearview. This building is evidence of a distinctive landscape of racial fulfillment and self-realization, and it was part of the social movement to establish and maintain all-Black towns” in Oklahoma and the Midwest during the Jim Crow era.

An excellent historic context documents the establishment of all-Black towns throughout the Midwest and Great Plains during the years following the Civil War, with an emphasis on the Great Migration era that rose in response to Jim Crow policies. Relationships with Indigenous Nations before, during, and after the implementation of federal removal and allotment policies are also discussed. The nomination clearly describes what constitutes an all-Black town according to current scholarship: “Black founders, a Black-dominated governance structure, Black town officials, or a Black postmaster” (Lincoln Trading Co. Nomination, Section 8, p. 11). Noteworthy is the explanation of the ways in which this small building, within its local context, is woven into the fabric of our diverse and complex American history:

To learn about these towns as individual places and shared communities is to explore how common experiences connected and benefited a complicated intersection of people from differing ethnic heritages. Regardless of derivation, the Black men, women, and children who sought independence and autonomy in these towns were able to partially avoid the realities of a racist standard... In many ways, these all-Black

towns were not entirely dissimilar from the traditional organically developed Freedmen’s communities common in the South since the people who inhabited both types of settlements all sought self-determination. However, in the twin Oklahoma and Indian Territories, with their many Native American groups, land ownership was considerably more likely for freedmen, and this conspicuous advantage foreshadowed a social movement with its own distinctive landscapes (Lincoln Trading Co. Nomination, Section 8, p. 10).

The nomination concludes by locating Black autonomy in this particular historic place, and by connecting it to other locations throughout the United States that merit further attention from the preservation community:

Even as [all-Black towns] have dwindled, they portray distinctive landscapes that are evidence of a surge in racial fulfillment and self-realization. These enclaves are significant for resulting in a positive and permanent group ideology without white or Native American interference. In effect, the all-Black towns of Oklahoma institutionalized a social movement (Lincoln Trading Co. Nomination, Section 8, p. 21).

Yoshiko Yamanouchi House

San Mateo, San Mateo County, California, NR Ref. 100009653

Listed in 2023 at the local level of significance with a period of significance of 1957–1973 under Criterion A for Ethnic Heritage/Japanese, Social History/Women’s History; and Criterion B for its association with Yoshiko Yamanouchi

Note: This nomination was supported by the Multiple Property Documentation Form “Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in California, 1850-1970,” NR Ref. 100004867, accepted 2020.



Yoshiko Yamanouchi (San Mateo Buddhist Temple Centennial Book, Dedication)

The Yoshiko Yamanouchi House is listed the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criteria A and B in the areas of Ethnic Heritage/Asian/Japanese and Social History/Women’s History for its association with a prominent member of the *Issei* (immigrant) generation in San Mateo’s Japanese American community.

The period of significance begins with the completion of her house in 1957 and ends with her death in 1973. This small historic district includes a mid-century Modernist ranch house, an entrance gateway, and other associated resources designed by architect Donald H. Brandes in 1957; a Japanese “hill-and-pond” garden completed in 1958 by landscape designer Nagao Sakurai; and the Katsura Building, Walkway, and Garden completed in 1968 by architect and garden designer Kodo Matsubara, a scholar of Japanese *sukiya*-style architecture. These nine buildings, structures, and sites together create “an ensemble of designed landscape and architectural features whose character reflects both suburban residential design from the post-World II era and traditional Japanese style architecture and garden design” (Yamanouchi House, Section 7, p. 4).

Yoshiko Yamanouchi frequently used her home and its gardens to strengthen relationships within the Japanese American community, and between it and San Mateo, hosting many events here. In the spring of 1963, she welcomed the San Francisco Garden Club and Ikebana International at her home to celebrate these two organizations’ first joint flower show. Later that year, she hosted the city council members of “sister cities” San Mateo and Toyonaka, Japan. In 1964, Mrs. Yamanouchi held a formal dinner here for Japanese Prime Minister Eisako Satō and his wife. Archival sources, as well as interviews with family and with scholars of Japanese gardens and architecture, quoted in the nomination help readers understand Yoshiko Yamanouchi’s commitment and tireless work to honor her heritage and foster appreciation for Japanese culture in the Bay Area:



Left, front of Yamanouchi House, with Japanese style hill-and-pond garden. (Denise Bradley)



Right, Yamanouchi House Katsura Walkway with Moon Viewing Veranda in foreground. (Denise Bradley)

In a newspaper article in the *San Mateo Times* written to describe the recently completed Katsura Building, Walkway, and Garden, Mrs. Yamanouchi explained that “she had always hoped that she would be able to bring a portion of Japan’s heritage of beauty—‘a beauty that is easier to understand if actually seen’—to the community which had been so good to her family.” In another *San Mateo Times* article, Mrs. Yamanouchi stated that she viewed the Katsura Building and its garden setting as a “symbol of her lifelong desire to ‘provide a bridge of understanding and appreciation of the centuries-old heritage of beauty cherished by all American citizens of Japanese ancestry’” (Yamanouchi House, Section 8, pp. 40-41).

The Furies Collective

Washington, DC, NR Ref. 16000211

Listed in 2016 at the local level of significance with a period of significance of 1971–1973 under Criterion A for Social History, and Criteria Consideration G for properties less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Note: The Furies was recommended for designation as a National Historic Landmark by the National Historic Landmarks Committee of the National Park Service Advisory Board at its November 2023 meeting.

When the Capitol Hill Historic District (NR Ref. 76002127) in Washington, DC, was listed in 1976 for its significance in architecture and community planning, this 1913 rowhouse was included as a contributing resource. Only three to five years earlier, the building had been home to The Furies, a lesbian feminist separatist collective who fought for recognition within the women’s movement, and whose publications gave voice to their dynamic social and political agendas on a national scale. Rather than add this social and cultural history as additional documentation to the existing district listing, this building was individually listed in 2016 expressly for its direct associations with The Furies under Criterion A in the area of Social History. In a concise significance summary, the nomination presents The Furies and, importantly, places the collective’s work directly within this building:

The Furies Collective house is directly connected with the early expression and definition of the character, role, and ideology of the lesbian community as a social and political community unto itself, and within the second-wave women’s movement and American society in general in the early 1970s. The house became the operational center of the lesbian feminist separatist collective, The Furies, between late 1971 and the autumn of 1973, which created and led the debate over lesbians’ place in society (Furies Nomination, Section 8, p. 7).

The first five pages of the Statement of Significance present a short contextual history for lesbian feminist separatism and its rise within feminism. The nomination then describes the building’s central role in the work of the collective over its brief but influential existence, utilizing oral histories and archival materials :

The Furies rented 219 11th Street SE [which] provided adequate space for meetings and for the publication project, the creation of a national lesbian feminist separatist newspaper, *The Furies*. The basement provided space for working on graphics, layout, and composition of the newspaper. The house also provided space for collective meetings, consciousness-raising sessions, and educational/training sessions (Furies Nomination, Section 8, pp. 12-13).



219 11th Street SE, Washington, DC, in 2015. (Patsy Lynch)



Inside the house, packing and distributing the newspaper in 1972. (Joan E. Biren)

[The National Register of Historic Places](#)

is the official list of buildings, structures, objects, sites, and districts significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture.

