



Best Practices Review

A quarterly publication on National Register Bulletin guidance

Evaluating Common Resources

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Introduction

National Register listings include common resources that may be abundant and, therefore, difficult to evaluate for significance. Common resources may be a group of property types characterized by common physical attributes, such as style, scale, proportions, architectural details, or methods of construction. For example, apartment buildings, various house styles of the mid-twentieth century, and schools are among the common resources that present evaluation challenges. Common resources may be united by shared historical or cultural characteristics, such as relationships to important persons, historic events, or cultural activities. They may be rural or urban, and found locally or statewide. Common resources are often addressed through the development of Multiple Property Documentation, a framework for nominating significant properties with shared themes, trends, or patterns of history.

Even where once-common resources have become relatively rare—for example, one-room schools (even derelict ones) are no longer a common sight in many rural areas—evaluation of significance cannot solely rely on that rarity to support significance. A justification supporting listing may be easier in such cases, but it is not a given. How, then, is a common resource evaluated for individual listing? This issue of the *Best Practices Review* provides guidance for evaluating common resources united by architectural characteristics.

Look to the MPDF Format

The Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) is typically used for documenting and evaluating common resources. As detailed in *National Register Bulletin: How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form*, the MPDF documents groups of thematically related properties: it defines and describes one or more historic contexts; describes associated property types related to the historic contexts; and establishes significance and integrity requirements for nominating properties to the National Register. Historically, the MPDF has leveraged historic contexts and registration requirements to create resource-specific guidance that increases appreciation for ordinary or vernacular buildings by providing an objective approach to their evaluation. However, preparation of the MPDF “cover” document—with a context, registration requirements, and property study list—typically requires significant time and resources. Short of preparing a MPDF, common resources may be evaluated through the same methodical approach.

This publication compliments the guidance provided in National Register Bulletins by providing examples on specific topics. Your feedback is welcome; 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.

Develop a Concise Context

As stated in *National Register Bulletin: How to Apply National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, to qualify for the National Register, a property must be significant; that is, it must represent a significant part of the history, architecture, archeology, engineering, or culture of an area, and it must have the characteristics or properties that make it a good representative of that significant aspect of

the past. The significance of a historic property can be understood only when it is evaluated within its historic context. For common resources, a concise context should document the resource type's historic development and key characteristics, and then suggest a basis for comparison among them to determine which are significant. For example, what makes one bungalow, among a hundred, significant?

Focus on Common Architectural Styles or Vernacular Building Plans

Architectural styles are academic tools to categorize and understand why buildings look the way they do. Because they reflect popular fashions, styles also can be helpful in dating buildings. Vernacular building plans may reflect not only popular fashions but long-standing traditions, as well. Grouping common resources by architectural style or vernacular building plan may be helpful in identifying from among them significant resources of a particular style or plan. *National Register Bulletin: How to Apply National Register Criteria for Evaluation* includes the following caution:

A structure is eligible as a specimen of its type or period of construction if it is an *important* example (within its context) of building practices of a particular time in history. For properties that represent the variation, evolution, or transition of construction types, it must be demonstrated that the variation, etc., was an *important* phase of the architectural development of the area or community in that it had an impact as evidenced by later buildings.

(“Distinctive Characteristics of Type, Period and Method of Construction,” p. 18, emphasis added.)

Evaluate Integrity

An assessment of integrity is part of the evaluation of any property or resource, but an assessment of a common resource should only be made after the significance of the common resources as a group is established. All seven aspects of integrity should be addressed: location, setting, design, material, workmanship, feeling, and association. For some common resources, some aspects of integrity may be less important than others. As explained in *National Register Bulletin: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, at page 4, “[a]ll seven qualities do not need to be present for eligibility as long as the overall sense of past time and place is evident.” Nevertheless, for common resources, integrity requirements may be more stringent, and the context statement may specify that individual resources must meet all seven aspects of integrity to be evaluated as significant.

Examples

Celine and Albert Goddard House

Pierre, South Dakota, NR Ref. 10002102

Listed 2018 with a period of significance of 1908 at the local level of significance under Criterion C for architecture.

The Goddard House is a one-and-a-half-story concrete block bungalow located midblock in a residential neighborhood with a setback typical of the era. As described in the nomination, the Goddard House “is one of the best examples remaining locally and the best example of a concrete block house whose blocks imitate dressed stone. Executed in a small, bungalow form, the house also represents a once common but increasingly rare housing type.” (Goddard Nomination, Section 8, p. 9.)



Goddard House, east façade, 2017. (CB Nelson)

As detailed in the nomination, the design of the Goddard House is a very typical form that could be found in any community in America. The Statement of Significance is divided into four sections, moving from the general to the specific:

Concrete Block Construction. This provides background information on concrete in building construction.

Architectural Classification. This section discusses the bungalow form, the use of formed concrete block construction in Pierre, and possible origins of the plans for the house, such as plan books or kit houses, noting neither are likely given the relatively early construction date.

Development in Pierre. This section provides a brief context for housing development in Pierre.

History of the Goddard House. A history of the construction and ownership of the house is provided.

While these categories may suggest book-length documentation, the property description is only three pages and the Statement of Significance is five pages.

Singhi Double House

Rockland, Maine, NR Ref. 100003589

Listed in 2019 with a period of significance of 1891 at the local level of significance under Criterion C for architecture.

The Singhi Double House is a one-and-a-half-story house with a rear ell that creates a T-shaped plan. This two-family dwelling with mirrored elevations and floor plans is a late example of the large number of double houses that were built in Rockland between 1837 and the early twentieth century. By 1912, almost 10 percent of the city's residential building stock were double houses, ranging from small, vernacular dwellings to architect-designed, high-style homes with significant square footage.

The nomination describes the significance of this property as follows:

The significance of the Singhi Double House is based on two sets of characteristics: the double house plan and the manner in which it...reflects some of the ideas of wealth and stability that authors of pattern book houses espoused in their volumes. The house was built as an investment, rather than to be owner occupied, but at the same time it was designed to give the appearance of a single-family home.

(Singhi Nomination, Section 8, p. 11.)



Singhi House, east and north facades, 2019. (Michael Goebel-Bain)

Like the Goddard House nomination, the Statement of Significance is clearly divided into sections that place the Singhi Double House in context:

Double Houses in Rockland
The Double House as an Investment

This context's focus on double houses in Rockland notes that the property type is common locally and in the New England region. While this is not a multiple property document with multiple examples of this property type, the nomination provides a good starting point for developing one.

Old Enon Road Stone Arch Culvert

Enon, Ohio, NR Ref. 09000209

Listed 2009 with a period of significance of 1871 at the local level of significance under Criterion C for architecture.

The Old Enon Road Stone Arch Culvert was built by Samuel L. Taylor under contract to Clark County, Ohio. It spans the scenic uppermost gorge of Mud Run at Rocky Point, a craggy and lightly wooded place of scattered suburban housing in a predominantly rural setting. The Culvert is approximately 20 feet wide, 24 feet long, and 16 feet high, with a barrel vault 12 feet wide, and is constructed entirely of locally quarried dolomitic limestone.

The nomination provides a solid context for this common resource:



View of culvert, looking north-northeast, 2006. (Douglas Bailey)

In Ohio, stone culverts and bridges were built during all of the 19th century and well into the 20th century. Culverts are small bridges (invariably single span) and drains allowing small and intermittent streams to pass beneath roadways. Because of the great numbers of small stream courses in Ohio, incredible numbers of culverts were built under Ohio roads. The number of such culverts varied with road class and increased through time as more roads were improved. Better roads had more culverts and fewer fords.

(Old Enon Nomination, Section 8, p. 4.)

Significance is described as follows:

First and foremost, the Enon Road Stone Arch Culvert (1871) is a fine and rare example of a mid-sized single-span barrel-vaulted stone arch culvert once commonly found on roads of all classes throughout the State of Ohio. The culvert (1871), a.k.a. Bridge No. 1479, is the oldest structure in the official inventory of 241 active bridges and culverts in Clark County...and is the only remaining stone culvert in the Clark County inventory.....

(Old Enon Nomination, Section 8, p. 4.)

The nomination benefits from unusually good primary documentation, including information on the mason, and supports significance by making a compelling case for the culvert’s integrity, with a break-down of each of the seven aspects of integrity.

Attwood House

Fordyce, Arkansas, NR Ref. 100008979

Listed in 2023 with a period of significance of 1961 at the local level of significance under Criterion C for architecture.

Through its massing and floor plan, this property represents a typical suburban Ranch house located on a large open lot. Built in 1961, the one-story house includes a detached carport linked by a covered walkway. A large Colonial Revival style porch is a distinguishing feature, but is only a stylistic embellishment. The nomination includes a brief context for postwar Ranch houses. More importantly, the nomination also provides a context to support the architectural significance of this particular house in Fordyce. Surviving interior finishes also support eligibility for individual listing. Alterations to the property, including several noncontributing structures, are noted in the nomination, but do not detract from the historic setting of the property.



Attwood House, north façade, 2022. (Ralph Wilcox)

[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.

