

National Trust for Historic
Preservation's 50th Anniversary

Washington, DC

10/21/99

**PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION**

National Trust for Historic Preservation's 50th Anniversary
Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
The National Building Museum
Washington, D.C.
October 21, 1999

Thank you very much. Thank you, Dick. I am honored to join all of you in this beautiful venue for the celebration of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Anniversary—and to thank all of you for the many contributions that you make to communities throughout our country, and indeed for some of you, places throughout the world.

I want to thank Nancy Campbell for her very hard work, and for taking on this new challenge on behalf of the Trust. And William Hart, congratulations. And I am particularly pleased to see the dynamic trio who was just up here of Robert Bass, John Bryan, and Dick Jenrette, whom I know are making this campaign under Nancy's leadership a great success.

It is a privilege to be here with all of you, and I could certainly recite the many accomplishments that are represented in this room by those of you who have been stalwart preservationists and supporters of this Trust over the years. I want to thank the many members of Congress who are here, and those who were unable to be here but whom have made sure that the federal government monitors its commitment to our parks, our culture, and our history. I also want to thank the co-chairs who organized this gala. And I want to thank Stanley Lowe for his enthusiasm; Nancy Campbell and Bill Hart, again, for their vision of leadership.

I was delighted that Save America's Treasures is the theme of this conference. I want to thank everyone who has participated in and supported this campaign, for coming here tonight, and for the many many ways that you have made this a success because of your energy and generosity. I want to thank the staff of Save America's Treasures—at the National Trust, the White House Millennium Council, the National Park Service and Foundation—because they are the federal partner of this effort.

And I want to say a special word of thanks to Dick Moe. Anyone who has been around Dick for more than a minute knows how passionately he cares about the causes that the Trust advocates. He has been and will continue to be a strong proponent of the work of all of the rest of us. What does it say that he often leaves out that one important point when he talks about the Trust or Save America's Treasures or the \$65 million or so that it has raised? Because certainly none of that would have been possible without his imagination and commitment.

So on behalf of everyone here, and on behalf of all those monuments and artifacts and other expressions of our heritage that have been saved, I want to thank Dick Moe and all of you who are our partners at the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Now I have been on a few road trips with Dick, Nancy and other leaders at the Trust. And of course we have a saying: "What happens on the road stays on the road." But I can report to you that they are often treated a little bit like rock stars in preservation settings. People come up to them, shake their hands, and thank them for all the Trust has done to save their proudest symbols—from the Conservatory of Flowers in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park to the Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado. In so many different settings around our country, I have seen and heard and experienced the impact that preservation has made and is making.

For example, on our trip to Mesa Verde, I heard a wonderful story about how a park ranger, when he gives tours to children through those marvelous monuments of that ancient civilization, gathers them in a circle and asks them to cup their hands together and hold them, just for a moment, in the silence of the beauty around them. And then he tells them that they are holding the spirit of the place, and the beauty that it represents. And he asks them always to honor the ancestral Pueblo people, and to go through life preserving these kinds of areas, those buildings and other things of beauty. This is really what the Trust has done now for 50 years. It has asked us to cup our hands together and just imagine that we were, as I believe we are, the stewards and the trustees of the history and the culture and the beauty around us.

Back when the Trust began, I'm told there were only two people working there: Fred Rath and Betty Walsh. And there were no members at all. I can only imagine what they'd think of this extraordinary gathering this evening—the thousands of preservationists who've traveled from all over this country to attend this conference, who have dedicated themselves to holding our history in their hands and never letting it disappear.

As many of you know, Save America's Treasures is part of the White House Millennium Council that the President and I created over two years ago. When we began thinking about this unique moment in history—the end of a century and a millennium, the beginning of the next—we knew we wanted to do more than just attend a great New Year's Eve party. We thought that this would give us all an opportunity to ask Americans to find a way to honor the past and imagine the future—because after all, they do go together.

We stand here today knowing that not only the blood, but the experiences and hopes of our ancestors run through our veins. And it is through their languages and legends, their living monuments and living traditions that we can understand who we are, where we came from, and what we want to be.

That is the purpose of Save America's Treasures, as well as the work of the Trust. In the last 50 years, we have continued to expand the treasures that we hold in our hands.

And it isn't just the famous monuments and artifacts. We need to see Main Street as a treasure. A series of shotgun houses in Jackson, Mississippi, as a treasure. A WPA mural in a post office as a treasure. Our photo albums, our scrapbooks, the letters that record how those of us came to be Americans—they are all treasures.

And so I have been very privileged in the last two years to travel from one end of our country to the other, and to see firsthand how you have worked to hold those treasures dear.

At the Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged, for example, I saw powerful reminders of one of the most painful chapters in our history and the people who fought to overcome slavery. You could almost hear Harriet Tubman's voice as she led slaves to safety. She would always repeat her motto, no matter what dangers were faced: Keep going. If you are scared, keep going. If you are in danger, keep going. If you want justice, keep going.

On a very, very hot July afternoon, with a very big crowd of citizens from the surrounding area of Auburn, New York, we watched young children from the church that now controls the property where the Tubman home is reenact that journey and those struggles, using those words and singing songs of freedom. So for them, the Tubman house and the Tubman story were not something that was to be read and forgotten in a schoolbook, but to be experienced.

I've also stood on the steps of the small, modest house and put up a flag that the National Trust would recognize this house as the home of a young Irish immigrant woman, Kate Mullany, who founded a union of collar workers, those who washed collars in laundries.

I've also been in Longfellow's home, looking with such interest at all of the documents that had been saved that truly chronicle the life of that family, and understanding the triumphs and tragedies of the history of poetry and what it reminds us of the human condition.

I've seen scientific discoveries at the Thomas Edison Invention Factory, where ideas gave birth to the movie projector, industrial research and development, and so many inventions that have revolutionized our lives.

And I've seen the proud history of Native Americans in the Pueblo of Acoma. On top of a mountain—which is the oldest continuously inhabited community in the United States—sits an ancient church which holds our religious traditions and the people that have passed them on from generation to generation.

Sometimes on our road trips, we have been fortunate enough to bring additional resources to these sites. Sometimes we have brought attention and recognition. But we have always tried to bring the message that preservation is not a luxury, but a necessity. Because if we lose our heritage, we lose our collective memory; we lose our heritage; we

lose our ability to revitalize communities—for we know that preservation and development must go hand in hand. If we lose our heritage, we lose an opportunity to understand and respect each other, and we abdicate the obligation each of us has to be caretakers of the past.

Over the past 50 years, as the circle of treasures we want to save has grown, so too has the circle of responsibility. Because as we know more of our history, we do have to step forward and be ready to act. And to everyone who has done so—in the private and the public sectors, through small contributions to multi-million dollar ones—I'm very grateful to all of you for the many contributions you have given that enabled us to raise the private match to the federal money that has enabled Save America's Treasures to reach and preserve 62 historic sites and collections. Last year, Congress approved \$30 million dollars to save important treasures, and that funding has been more than matched, dollar for dollar. As we gather tonight, in the midst of the budget negotiations, we hope and expect Congress will approve another \$30 million for the year 2000.

There are many wonderful stories about all of the sites we have visited. One of my favorites comes from a group of young preservationists, third-graders in Boulder, Colorado. For three years, they have raised money for Mesa Verde by doing extra chores and selling calendars they made themselves that they call, "Adopt a Ruin Calendars." The teacher who developed this project tells her students that they are having a hand in history, and she is right. One of the students who worked hard to raise pennies for preservation wrote, "I think 'Adopt-a-Ruin' is a good idea because in 40 years, my kids will probably want to see the ruins. So far, I have raised \$15, and I think the best part of that will be when I grow up and see the expressions on my kids' faces." Well, there is hardly a better description of why preservation is important.

And I'm told that in 1883, the architect of this great building also wanted it to serve as a time capsule. So he placed in the columns around us things like war records, newspapers, maps, and copies of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. He wanted to preserve our symbols of freedom and democracy. Well, that is what we are attempting to do by saving these treasures. And I hope, as we end this century and begin another, that we will continue to increase our commitment to ensuring that our collective memory never fails. So that on the 100th anniversary of the Trust, whether we need to be here in person or in virtual reality, we will be able to say that we too gave gifts to the future: the gift of freedom; the gift of memory; the gift that only culture, art and history can represent. And we will have done our part, not only to save America's physical pleasures, but the ideas and values they represent.

So let us honor the past, and demand a new future, and make sure we can create a future worthy of our ancestors, and one that every American feels a responsibility to hold carefully in his hand.

Thank you all so very much for what you have done.