

[Introduction to Preservation](#)

While the efforts to save Independence Hall in Philadelphia in 1816 were some of the first preservation activities in the United States, it wasn't until the Mount Vernon Ladies Association of the Union tried to save Mount Vernon in 1853 that preservation started to come to the forefront of important cultural activities. This was the first private group to launch a national preservation effort. At this point, supporters were largely private individuals and the goal was to primarily save landmark buildings for patriotic reasons. However, as time went on the state and Federal governments began to play a much larger role.

Below is a listing of key milestones in U.S. preservation history.

1872—Yellowstone National Park was made a federally protected area.

1875—Mackinac National Park on Mackinac Island became America's second national park. It remained a national park until it was transferred to the State of Michigan in 1895.

1895—Adirondack Forest Preserve was instituted by New York State.

1906—Congress passes The Antiquities Act. This is the first national historic preservation legislation and gave the President authority to designate historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures and other objects of historic or scientific interest. It also led to the survey and inventory of hundreds of historic properties, created stiff penalties for people who demolished properties on federal land and took the power of preservation enforcement away from Congress and gave it to the Executive Branch, where it still resides today under the guidance of the Secretary of the Interior.

1916—National Park Service was established to deal with areas too large to be preserved privately, such as Colonial National Historical Park in Jamestown and Yorketown, Virginia.

1926—John D. Rockefeller, Jr., funded the restoration and reconstruction of Williamsburg, Virginia.

1929—Henry Ford establishes the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan.

1931—Charleston, South Carolina is designated as the nation's first historic district.

1935—Historic Sites Act is passed by Congress establishing historic preservation policy to preserve for public use historic sites, buildings and objects of national significance for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States.

1949—National Trust for Historic Preservation is founded.

1966—Congress passes the National Historic Preservation Act—the most important historic preservation legislation ever passed. The legislation created the National Register of Historic Properties, allowed for the creation of State Historic Preservation Offices, established funding for preservation initiatives at the state and local levels and decided how to handle/preserve/protect historic properties owned by private land owners.

1970—Michigan passes Public Act 169, the Michigan Local Historic District Act, which established guidelines for creating historic districts. This act created a legal basis for making historic preservation a “public purpose” in Michigan.

1978—Revenue Act passed by Congress allowing for investment tax credits for the rehabilitation of historic buildings.

1999—Michigan amends PA 169 to include a 25% tax credit for residential and other historic structures.

2001—Michigan’s Historic Tax Credits are made permanent via state legislation.

While the preservation movement in the United States got a relatively late start, it has made considerable gains over the past century and a half. While the notion of what to protect has expanded, so too has the legislation that determines what should be protected and how to protect it. From the Mount Vernon Ladies Association to the Federal government and National Park Service to the National Trust for Historic Preservation and back to the State Historic Preservation Offices and local historic district commissions, the people and organizations of the movement have moved from the grass roots level up to the Federal government and back down to the state and the local government—because the power of preservation truly resides with individuals at the local level.