Sustaining Cultural Heritage at UNH

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Building a new road? A cell phone tower? A pipeline? A new government building? Building anything with federal funds or on federal property requires that one must conduct a review of the impact of the project on tangible cultural resources, which includes archaeological sites and historic buildings, under section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA). But building a new student center, a new dorm, or a new business school on your land-grant university campus? More often than not, no cultural resource review is required. What responsibility do land-grant universities have to the tangible cultural heritage on their land when section 106 is not mandated? As a land-grant institution and one that takes sustainability seriously, what should UNH’s role be in managing its cultural heritage?

Every community has a distinctive cultural heritage, a legacy of physical remains that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations. The distinctive cultural heritage of a community is one of its most significant assets, providing, among other things, grounding and authenticity, but cultural heritage is highly vulnerable to change. Without formal policies in place, cultural resources are easily damaged and/or destroyed by modern activities.

While many universities increasingly focus on promoting sustainability and becoming more sustainable themselves, many do
not have formal policies and procedures in place to protect their tangible cultural resources.\textsuperscript{v}

The growth of sustainable development on campuses has often overlooked cultural resources, yet these resources are always non-renewable and sometimes completely irreplaceable.

I first came to these issues while developing and teaching my course ANTH 444 The Lost Campus: The Archaeology of UNH.\textsuperscript{vi} During this course, I asked students, working with Milne Special Collections and Archives at the Library, to identify places on campus that may hold historic sites.

Thompson Hall is already listed on the National Register of Historic Properties and the Pandora building at the UNH Manchester Campus\textsuperscript{vii} is in a Historic District but through this process, I have been struck by the truly significant cultural resources on our campus that are less obvious and striking constructions. For instance, we have underfoot remarkable archaeological sites like the Barracks (next to the MUB) built during WWI when UNH was turned into an Student Army Training Camp as well as one of the oldest Train Depots on the Boston-Maine Railroad (now located under the Great Lawn). While Section 106 review comes into play when places like Thompson Hall may be impacted, I have been struck by the lack of formal procedures and policies to identify, protect and manage the other abundant resources on campus that are not covered by Section 106 review.

As a Faculty Fellow in Culture and Sustainability, I have been advocating the development of a UNH-wide Heritage Management Plan that establishes policies and protocols for protecting all of UNH’s tangible cultural heritage. Working with the Culture and Sustainability Task Force, we have written a

\textbf{The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966}

This act was established to protect historical and archaeological sites across the US as these were becoming ever more impacted in the context of post-WWII expansion and development. Section 106 of NHPA requires that Federal agencies take into account the effect their projects have on properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. However, Section 106 review is not always mandated at land-grant universities.

The Barracks in 1918 (Photo from the Moran Collection, UNH Special Collections)
draft version of such a plan. In Fall 2014, we embarked on a two-year pilot program that will allow us to assess what best practices are, what work is feasible within the extant structures of UNH, what additional supports and costs may be, and the like.

In working on this topic, it became clear we need a dual process for assessing, managing, and making decisions about historic buildings and archaeological sites (together forming the tangible heritage sites on UNH property). Developing a plan for managing archaeological sites is likely to be a more straightforward process than for historic buildings because archaeological sites have their value in situ, that is, in their original place, and when they are disturbed (not by professional archaeologists) they lose their value, whereas historic buildings often need renovations to maintain their value. Therefore, our pilot program focuses on archaeological site management. During this two year pilot program, the Anthropology Department and Facilities and Campus Planning at UNH will be in active communication to discuss land-disturbing activities and to work together to decide potential impacts and best practices for handling possible disturbances of archaeological sites. As part of the pilot program, we are creating and maintaining an inventory of all historic and archaeological site locations (and potential locations) on campus. This inventory is contained in a spatially referenced Geodatabase (in ArcGIS). One aim is for this database to become applied in Dig Safe® such that an alert is sent when a project will impact an area with high archaeological sensitivity.

Over the course of the next two years, we hope to develop the relationships and knowledge necessary to make a well-developed archaeological management plan that will be useful for UNH over the long
term. During this process, I aim to explore how the ethos of UNH as a land, space, and sea grant university -- rooted in public outreach, with a strong connection to land, and a commitment to sustainability -- translates into care of cultural heritage resources. In exploring this translation of ideas into on-the-ground procedures, it is my hope our work will inspire and provide best practice examples for other campuses that do not yet have heritage management policies. Students, the heart of UNH, have been involved in this effort to consider in more detail UNH’s cultural heritage resources from the start -- through ANTH 444, as mentioned above. Their findings and their questions are what inspired me to look more closely at this matter and I will continue to include students as key participants in this cultural heritage management process.

Endnotes

i. Note, a few states do have strict policies that mandate cultural resource review of non-federal projects, most notably California’s CEQA

ii. Follows the UNESCO definition of cultural heritage


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