

Scientific Symposium
Changing World, Changing Views of Heritage:
the impact of global change on cultural heritage – Technological Change

7 October 2009
Valletta, Malta

HISTORIC GREEN
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Introduction

Long-term survival of a place or culture is greatly enhanced with a long-term outlook on how present day choices are part of a continuum which stretches over centuries. In the field of heritage conservation, people study how things change and survive over a long period of time. With forethought, decisions can be made which respect the context of a historic community in ways which will enhance the community's ability to sustain itself in the future. Heritage conservation is maintenance of a continuum of cultural values, traditions and meaning. With this comes a higher level of sustainability because people who feel a connection to a place, typically feel a responsibility to make better choices for future generations. Choices informed by what has worked in the past, and also respecting the cultural traditions and values of the region, tend to have greater longevity. These are part of the lessons offered through Historic Green projects.

Historic Green is an all-volunteer organization which aims to transform and revitalize distressed communities through education and service activities focused on heritage conservation and sustainable design. The organization's core purpose has been to explore and further define the intersection of sustainability and historic preservation within the built environment. People deserve access to resources which can help them restore their communities into vibrant, healthy, livable, and well-designed places with a bright future and a celebrated past! The work of Historic Green is about the possibilities of what a place can become when improvements are made with respect for the historic context.

This paper is about the efforts of Historic Green, which recently came together with a neighborhood in New Orleans, Louisiana, to support a new direction for a distressed community, one which merges a carbon-free and climate-neutral future with heritage conservation. Historic Green provides a model for engaging volunteers in rebuilding and recovery by emphasizing project-based, service learning tasks. The objectives of Historic Green include rebuilding with respect and foresight. Although a young organization, the work of Historic Green has successfully engaged people in green endeavors within a historic context. The organization's work needs to be discussed in an international forum, critiqued and considered as a possible model for similar communities elsewhere with comparable goals.

Reconstruction of damaged heritage resources in the aftermath of a disaster, (whether man-made or natural, is not new, nor is construction of energy efficient buildings; but merging these two into a single initiative, results in a new endeavor. And to do so with volunteers in a hands-on, educational format which offers lessons for both the volunteers and the local community is unprecedented. Historic Green has learnt that the current generation of students and young professionals demands a better, sustainable world and they are ready to demonstrate that continuity of built heritage is part of the equation, especially in disaster recovery when the collective memory of a community requires respect and restitution.

New Orleans

Many of the communities devastated by the effects of hurricanes Katrina and Rita along the Gulf Coast of the United States in 2005 are still in the process of rebuilding. Recovery from large-scale disasters is not a simple matter, yet the collective mind of the public unfortunately moves on after about six months to a year. Only now, four years after the storm events, have efforts to rebuild sustainably in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans come to a critical mass. As one of the hardest hit areas of the entire Gulf Coast in August 2005, the Holy Cross Historic District was submerged in 5 -8 feet (1.5-2.4 metres) of water following the storm. Other areas of the Lower Ninth Ward held up to 20 feet (6 metres) of water for nearly five weeks. The inundation was caused by a massive levee break nearby. At the southern end of the Lower Ninth in Holy Cross, nearly 6,000 residents were displaced, and numerous schools, churches and businesses were destroyed or severely damaged.

While the area has attracted the attention and support of many national figures and organizations only about 20% of residents have been able to return.

The Holy Cross neighborhood is a working class neighborhood, predominantly African American, comprised of low to middle income residents.² The neighborhood is multi-generational and consists of a bevy of variously talented residents such as artists, writers and musicians. More than 85% of this area's homes are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Lower Ninth Ward was ground zero: one of the hardest hit places in all of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. Entire blocks were leveled, businesses in shambles, essential services gone and the loss of life overwhelming.

Historic Green Background

The idea for Historic Green traces its roots back to the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) Emerging Green Builder's (EGB) committee, a national group of students and young professionals typically between the ages of 18 and 35. In June of 2007, EGB volunteers hosted a two-hour webcast, which provided information about the storm, the historic neighborhood and their lofty climate goals. The webcast was viewed by an estimated 10,000 people worldwide.

Determined to take further action, several EGB committee members visited New Orleans upon a friend's invitation in the Fall of 2007, a little over two years after the storm. Internationally-renowned green architect, Bob Berkebile, had been instrumental in working with the Holy Cross neighborhood after the hurricanes, drafting a community-wide sustainability plan and working with New Orleans non-profit Global Green to site their planned green homes in the area. Yet the amount of devastation still present shocked them. Could this scene possibly be in the United States; or anywhere in the post-industrialized world for that matter? Compelled by what they saw and the people whom they encountered, they resolved to publicize the misfortune of those in one historic neighborhood, Holy Cross, in the hope of raising awareness about the plight of its residents.

Through the formation of Historic Green as an organized initiative, the group realized that the next step in its evolution would involve organizing an effort to help. Thus, they set out to organize a two-week volunteer effort in March 2008, during the traditional spring break period for college students, to be known as *Spring Greening*.

Historic Green estimated that perhaps some 100 to 120 volunteers might join them, but made its programs scalable to suit any number. It is fortunate they did, as nearly 350 people from across the U.S. volunteered during the inaugural event. In the subsequent year, volunteer efforts tripled and additional growth is projected.

Volunteers

Historic Green's programs have been attractive to young volunteers for various reasons, but the core of the work – sustainable restoration in distressed communities, is attractive because it is the only program of its kind done in a large-scale, meaningful way. Sustainability certainly is a driver, but so is the cultural relevance of the existing building stock, much of which in the Holy Cross neighborhood, is owned by third generation families. In addition, volunteers tend to be designers and students unfamiliar with construction trades, but who are eager to learn about sustainable and heritage conservation practices.

Volunteerism is a strong and growing movement. University students and young professionals feel they can and should do something to make the world better.³ These volunteers want to know how to make positive, lasting change. Historic Green is working at the forefront of the defining ideology of our time. Various people have discussed and do study the overlap between sustainability and heritage conservation, but Historic Green brings volunteers to teach and apply the principles in real situations. The lessons resonate with those engaged in the tasks.

"The time I spent assisting Historic Green in their mission of creating healthier, safer, more livable communities, began March 10th in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, Louisiana. When I arrived I was much like any other volunteer there to help, ambitious and willing to work on any project. However I was given the opportunity to be a project leader and work with a coalition of green-minded individuals known as the Alliance For Affordable Energy (AFAE). After working with the AFAE on a project, start to finish, which involved the installation of a radiant barrier and weatherization of a home, I was able to then show the proper procedure to students and professionals who stretched from Seattle, Washington, to Burlington, Vermont." -- Zach Potts, Historic Green volunteer, March 2008.

Daily management of numerous volunteers requires a place where volunteers can gather and project leaders can manage activities. A centrally located facility for administrative functions is essential. Religious spaces and civic or community buildings can serve this purpose very well. In New Orleans, Historic Green found The Lower Ninth Ward Village to be a fabulous partner for this purpose.

Partners

The Lower Ninth Ward Village, located at 1001 Charbonnet Street, has been Historic Green's base of operations since the first event in 2008. The Village plays the role of cultural and command center: the place for volunteers to check in every morning, receive orientation, safety training, tools and perhaps most importantly, a connection to the heart and soul of the Lower Ninth Ward community. Guided by the vision of neighborhood resident Ward "Mack" McClendon, the purpose of the Lower Ninth Ward Village is to serve as a focal point for residents returning to the neighborhood by offering a number of services in one centralized location, thereby contributing to community revitalization.

Fortuitously, the New Orleans region has become a nexus of green activity and has been a heritage tourism attraction for decades. There are potential partners on the ground with complementary objectives for sustainability as well as heritage conservation. New relief organizations are unnecessary, as many exist and are quite capable of applying resources. The goal is to get the existing organizations, agencies and other entities collaborating in a responsible manner for the long-term survival of the whole community.

Currently, New Orleans is rife with green activity from several agencies. Perhaps the highest profile activity in the city is currently being undertaken by a Historic Green partner, The Make It Right Foundation. The Make It Right Foundation is building 150 new, green affordable homes just blocks from Holy Cross in the area most devastated by the levee breach. In this area, homes and businesses were knocked off of their foundations by the force of the water.

The lead champion for the Make It Right efforts has been Hollywood luminary Brad Pitt, who has brought much needed attention and resources to the community. Before endeavoring into the Make It Right project, Mr. Pitt helped fund a one-block redevelopment project in the Lower Ninth Ward known as the Holy Cross project. This project included five new single family homes, a multi-family structure and a community center. The project achieved a LEED® Platinum rating from the US Green Building Council. It was directed by New Orleans' office of Global Green USA – Global Green's only satellite office. Global Green USA is the US affiliate of Green Cross International founded by Nobel laureate Mikhail Gorbachev.

The U.S. Green Building Council also has a growing presence in New Orleans with the emergence of a statewide USGBC chapter and several integrated EGB programs. New Orleans' EGB program was founded by several members who participated in the inaugural Historic Green *Spring Greening* event.

Also noteworthy are several New Orleans-based green organizations which support sustainability efforts within the city. Examples of these are the Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development and the Alliance for Affordable Energy, who help make city's dwellings affordable through weatherization and energy efficiency practices, a key element in preservation and sustainability.

New Orleans is not lacking for strong partners in heritage conservation, either. The city is widely known for its beautiful architecture, which includes the distinctive Creole cottages and shotgun houses. Many surviving examples can be found in the Holy Cross Historic District and were built of recycled boards from barge boats floated down the Mississippi River. Many groups and individuals have worked hard over the past decades to preserve New Orleans. The Preservation Resource Center (PRC) is a leader in these efforts. Their Operation Comeback program rehabilitates vacant, historic properties and sells them at cost. This program is a great partner for Historic Green because it has project sites which can be used as hands-on case studies for multiple lessons in heritage conservation and sustainable design.

Following the 2009 event, the Director of Operation Comeback, Pam Bryan, wrote: "From the outset, the partnership between Historic Green and Operation Comeback of the Preservation Resource Center has served as a model indicative of the best of partnerships in which each partner has enjoyed a prosperity resulting from the blend of historic preservation and sustainable restoration. Such reward from this winning combination is the accountable and measurable results reverberated back into the Holy Cross community to assist in its revitalization. Over the past two years, volunteers from Historic Green and the staff of Operation Comeback have worked together to provide restoration sites in Holy Cross for skilled and unskilled construction crews and experienced craftsmen in the preservation trades."

The most important partners, though, are those organizations representing the community. One of the strongest and oldest community groups is the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association (HCNA). The HCNA created the Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development (CSED) to stimulate civic engagement and restorative rebuilding in the community. The project strives to encourage repopulation, sustain natural systems, assist community leadership and preserve resources in the Lower Ninth Ward. The CSED assists returning residents by acquiring resources in bulk and training residents in rebuilding homes using energy efficient, sustainable materials and technologies.

CSED staff member David Eber wrote: "The Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development (CSED) is so thankful for the commitment of Historic Green to the people of the Lower Ninth Ward. They know that true sustainable and green communities are nothing without the people... The CSED believes that civic engagement is central to creating healthy and sustainable communities, and we are so glad that Historic Green agrees! We know that there is room to reach more people because the need is so great, but people know about Historic Green and they know that they care about the community. Our impact can only grow next year, because name recognition should only make outreach that much easier."

Heritage Conservation and Sustainability Issues

There are some very simple lessons to be learned from the surviving historic buildings in Holy Cross which translate to any structure enduring the test of time. Where people choose to build, the materials employed, and the construction details have a huge effect on survivability, as one might expect. Yet these seemingly simple lessons are often forgotten over time. Disaster recovery projects which involve historic buildings become excellent case studies to see what survives best.

As Historic Green volunteers disassemble damaged buildings, project leaders explain why the damage occurred and how to retain the sound material which survives. With this knowledge one can better repair existing buildings, make new additions, and build new structures. The local population can retain these lessons and outside volunteers can bring similar thinking to their own communities for dissemination.

Volunteers, led by sustainability and preservation experts, focus on green design to restore or reconstruct the once beautiful housing to its original charm and provide significant energy saving features for the residents. Great emphasis is placed on retention of historic material, especially character-defining features. Although badly damaged, the historic district survives largely intact. Holy Cross was built on ground above sea level and thus the flood was not as deep or prolonged. In addition, the older buildings are survivors of previous floods. Thus, they offer engaging lessons in craftsmanship, durability, longevity, and passive survivability.

Historic Green Highlights in New Orleans – "Spring Greening"

To date, Historic Green has executed two successful *Spring Greening* events in New Orleans. In two years, Historic Green has hosted more than 800 volunteers for a total of 1700+ volunteer-days providing more than US\$500,000 in construction services to Holy Cross and surrounding neighborhoods. Historic Green has been able to accomplish this with a two-year budget of US\$50,000, thus reaping US\$10 of services for every one dollar spent.

Funds are necessary to run the programs. Like any other non-profit organization, Historic Green must raise the money from private donors and other philanthropic sources. For example, a major donor for 2009 was The Salvation Army. In response to a proposal from Historic Green, Captain Ethan Frizzell, Commander of the Salvation Army Greater New Orleans Area, provided US\$5000 of materials for rain garden projects and US\$5,000 of materials for radiant barriers, insulation and weatherization. Cynthia Morrison, Salvation Army Community Recovery Director, helped secure Historic Green's proposal to utilize The Salvation Army's portable kitchens to provide lunches for all of the volunteers as well as community residents. A community crawfish bowl, sponsored by The Salvation Army at a cost of US\$3,000, brought together over 200 neighborhood residents and volunteers at The Village in celebration of Historic Green's recovery efforts in the Lower Ninth Ward.

Historic Green's focal area for 2009 was St. Claude Avenue, which serves as one of the major entrances to and thoroughfares through the Lower Ninth Ward. St. Claude runs along the northern edge of Holy Cross Historic District, as well. The street has high value with regard to the cultural heritage of the community. Projects included repairs and improvements to homes and businesses along the avenue from Egan St. to Forestall Street. Volunteers painted; planted rain gardens; repaired concrete; put up a new fence; picked up trash; cleared vegetation from sidewalks and more.

The choice of a focal point for 2009 projects was a difficult one, as many properties in the neighborhood needed the work and care of Historic Green volunteers. Many individuals and partner groups contributed to the decision to focus efforts on St. Claude Avenue. After the street was selected, questionnaires indicating possible repair work were passed out to all property owners. Volunteer work focused on the properties of the individuals who responded to questionnaires distributed by project leaders. In recent months, the *Main Street* program has collected information and suggestions from the community in regards to improvements to St. Claude and Claiborne Avenues. The energy generated by the work of the volunteers along St. Claude will hopefully be carried on in this project to bring additional hope to residents in the area.

During the two *Spring Greening* events in 2008 and 2009, student and young professional volunteers also participated in a LEED® Platinum charrette for the Preservation Resource Center. The work included deconstruction of a severely damaged property which would ordinarily have been demolished. All sound material was carefully salvaged and stored nearby for reuse on the same property. The salvaged material will be reintegrated into the new building, designed to evoke the memory of the missing structure. Volunteers continue to be intimately involved in this project scheduled for completion after the third annual *Spring Greening* event in March 2010.

Historic Green volunteers and educators have also been responsible for some industry advances including the creation of a new standard insulation technique which can be retrofitted into historic homes in hot-humid climates. Due to the age of these historic structures, most were built without insulation and were intended to 'breathe,' meaning water vapor did not condense or get trapped inside hidden cavities in the construction. The advent of air conditioning drastically reduced building performance and indoor air quality. New Orleans receives more than 60 inches (1.5 metres) of rain per annum, which not only affects energy, but is also a concern for indoor air quality when proper moisture management has not been carried out when adding insulation.

Conclusion

Historic Green's motivations to invoke change include cultural degradation, climate change, habitat loss, and loss of a community's social fabric. The focus is on the built environment and the natural spaces surrounding it; nevertheless, the energy and enthusiasm of the volunteers influences more than just the physical environment. Keys to success of Historic Green's endeavors, based on New Orleans experiences to date, are as follows:

- Rebuilding within distressed and historically impoverished communities gives meaning to the volunteer service and places Historic Green in communities likely to be receptive to new ways of thinking. Historic Green defines "distressed" communities as those which have faced disaster or decline from natural and/or human causes.
- Respect and desire for heritage conservation must be present. Project work occurs in a tangible, historic district of reasonable integrity or else within a community which has a defined cultural heritage. The local population must see value in retention of their heritage.
- Local expression of commitment to Historic Green endeavors is necessary. The leaders of the communities must invite Historic Green or be publicly open to projects and educational content which will focus on principles of sustainability with heritage conservation included as a natural component. The community must be able to articulate and share the values integral to their heritage and identity. With this information, the Historic Green project leaders can be aware of what needs to be preserved and restored.
- All parties must place high value on minimal environmental impact with change and development.
- Skilled project leaders are critically important. People are needed who understand the philosophical principles of Historic Green, have relevant construction experience and can manage volunteers. The people engaged by Historic Green in leadership and teaching roles are exceptional.
- Volunteer workers invigorate projects. The volunteers need to be accessible by some reliable means of communication, usually the Internet or E-mail, and available for intensive 5 – 10 day bursts of activity. Historic Green's work energizes and uplifts everyone involved.
- Local amenities are needed. The volunteer workers, event organizers and project leaders need safe and healthy accommodation. Also, a central command facility and gathering place is essential.
- Local partners are necessary. Organizations on the ground with complementary objectives are necessary for successful project engagement and execution. Partnerships within the targeted communities increase the effectiveness of the volunteer efforts. The Historic Green programs offer service learning and educational content best applied in support of ongoing efforts which will be perpetuated by others.
- Education is a core endeavor. The Historic Green effort is brief and intensive. A primary objective is to help people learn to recover and rebuild for themselves intelligently.

- Respect: Historic Green values continuity of people; community and identity of place. This includes a person's, and a community's, right to enjoy their natural surroundings and celebrate their local heritage. The organization embraces activities which foster sustainable living, equitable economic development and conservation of a community's cultural uniqueness.

After two successful events in New Orleans and a lot of careful thought, the leadership of Historic Green is currently exploring options for expansion of activities into other distressed communities. The program appears to be replicable on an international level, which is why ICOMOS invited this paper to be submitted. Now is the time for open discussion on the experiences of Historic Green and how this program might further objectives of ICOMOS and others, such as UNESCO World Heritage. Historic Green resonates with the ideals of students and young professionals who want to make a meaningful impact on the future of their world. Historic Green offers a responsible outlet for those who can see that a sustainable future includes retention of cultural heritage as part of green building.

Historic Green seeks expanded partnerships, including intellectual and financial support. What can be done to further the objectives of Historic Green so more volunteers are engaged on a broader range of projects? Where might the principles, espoused by Historic Green, be employed to engage other distressed communities in meaningful and lasting recovery?

References

¹ Heather Gay, Jeremy Knoll, Dave Macaulay, and Susannah Tuttle contributed words and ideas to this paper.

² Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, <http://www.gnocdc.org/orleans/8/index.html>, researched 1 August 2009.

³ Research on "Millennials," Americans born after 1977, indicates increased involvement in civic affairs and higher rates of volunteerism. See National Conference on Citizenship, <http://www.ncoc.net/>; fact sheets by Deloitte Consulting, LLP; and The Millennials: Americans Born 1977 to 1994 □ American Generations Series; 3rd Ed., New Strategist Publications, Inc., June 1, 2006.