



HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION OF RESOURCES IN OAKLAND COUNTY

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Can a map become a vehicle for community action? The answer is yes when referring to the Oakland County Historical and Cultural Resources Inventory Map. The completed project represents the combined efforts of academic investigators, their students, County Planning officials, and State of Michigan grant support.

The map, which was introduced September 16, 1998 at Meadow Brook Hall during the seminar, Preserving Oakland County's Heritage, displays the key archaeological, architectural and historical sites that can be found in Oakland County. It is valuable to various users ranging from local planners, historical groups, small museums and developers as a tool for historic preservation planning. Real estate agents will also want to tell newcomers about the quality of life to be found in this county. Featured speakers at this conference included Michigan State Representative David Galloway, scholars from Oakland University who carried out the research as well as professional planners who discussed the resources available for historic preservation and how to use them. The story of the map is interesting because it shows how different groups can cooperate to achieve a great deal. Moreover, it has the promise of bringing together even more people, who are interested in preserving the local heritage.

Nineteen years ago, two Oakland University professors were awarded State of Michigan grants. Professor Richard Stamps' award was to conduct an archaeological survey and Professor John Cameron's grant was to document architectural resources in the County. Professor Stamps, with the aid of Rick Zurel and students, developed a three-part approach to the issue. First they inventoried all the documentary resources about archeological sites. They checked history books, large museum files, and technical works to do a thorough review of the literature. Second, they interviewed and used questionnaires to gather information from local collectors, amateur archaeologists and people in small historical museums to make sure they had covered all possible sources. Third, they conducted some first-hand explorations walking through fields, wood lots, and digging test pits.

Two-hundred- forty- six prehistoric sites or "find spots" were recorded in the county. Stylistically, the remains appear to represent artifacts from the earliest Paleo Indian period through Archaic, Woodland and Historic periods. The majority of the artifacts appear to be from the Archaic period and are located along the interface between the glacial lake bottom in the southwest corner of the county and hilly upland glacial moraines and till plains to the northwest. Thirty-two historic sites were located which date to the 19th century.

Professor Cameron and his students photographed all pre-World War II structures in selected communities. The photographs, negatives, and index cards showing the location and general characteristics of each site were recorded and added to the State of Michigan's architectural inventory. In some cases, the group recommended that certain sites be placed on the National or State lists of Registered Historic Sites or that local communities provide some recognition for the sites.

The effort resulted in technical reports, which went on file in Lansing at the Michigan History Division and selected archaeological archives. The confidential nature of site locations on private property prohibited the public distribution of

the report. It was the desire, however, of the researchers to find some practical application for the data collected. The intent was to share the academic knowledge recovered from the research with the general public.

The material was then turned over to the Oakland County Development and Planning Division. Archaeological and architectural data was combined with other data that had been collected, such as natural beauty roads and champion trees. The Planning Group plotted all this data on a map* that lists the historical and cultural information for the entire County. The map has been converted into Geographic Information Systems, (GIS), to accommodate all the layers of information.

The conference at Meadow Brook Hall, where the map was introduced, provided an opportunity to bring together representatives from local government, academic, volunteer groups and businesses for the purpose of presenting new tools and sharing information on the economic benefits of historic preservation. Preservation is important as it enriches the quality of our lives through a greater understanding of the past and helps to develop a sense of belonging and shared citizenship for all people.

*The complete map is available for purchase at the Oakland County Planning Department.