

June 2005

Preserve America remarks

Gale A. Norton, Secretary of the Interior

It is a pleasure to be with you today.

Preserve America represents a commitment to both the past and the future. That is the reason we have gathered — to celebrate the designation of Preserve America communities, and to remind ourselves why we are doing so.

The story of America is written in her communities. Their streets tell how Native American trails became rutted wagon tracks, which then became superhighways. Their residences tell how rough-hewn cabins became Victorian homes; how trading posts have become skyscrapers.

Through Preserve America, these stories come alive. Chapters that were sawn from wood and shaped from steel are being restored and heralded for future generations to read and treasure.

Each of the communities certified today has a different story to tell—stories of the fishing huts that became Alpena, Michigan and the frontier railroad camp that became Evanston, Wyoming; or stories of the pioneers who took the

Wilderness Road through Pineville, Kentucky and the Mormon settlers who built the community of Kanab Utah.

Each community has its own story. And these stories present opportunities—opportunities for heritage tourism, education, and historic preservation.

On March 3, 2003, President Bush signed an Executive Order that calls for the Federal government to provide leadership in America's heritage, and encourages federal agencies to form partnerships for the preservation and use of historic and cultural resources.

Preserve America lies at the center of this effort.

The Preserve America Initiative encourages and supports community efforts to preserve our cultural and natural heritage and to weave this heritage into their economic and educational fabric.

Preserve America is intended to inspire and to instruct.

Through the vision and leadership of First Lady Laura Bush, who serves as the Honorary Co-Chair of Preserve America, communities across America are finding new ways to celebrate their history and tell their stories.

Preserve America has several different components, each with the same purpose.

Today we are designating Preserve America communities. Last month, the President and First Lady honored the winners of Preserve America Presidential Awards. Four winners are selected each year for exemplary contributions to heritage tourism and historic preservation.

Preserve America also has several educational components. Last October, after a nationwide search, Kathleen Kean of Wisconsin was announced as the first Preserve America History Teacher of the Year.

Students are learning how to become involved in historic preservation projects within their communities, thanks to a teacher's manual created by Preserve America and its partners, the History Channel and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.

Preserve America is often profitable for participating communities. For instance, the Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program, which is jointly administered by the National Park Service and state preservation officers, is the most effective federal program at encouraging private investment in rehabilitating historic buildings.

The tax credit applies specifically to income-producing structures. Since its inception in 1976, it has prompted significant investments in historic preservation.

Last year alone, 1,200 projects were approved, more than 50,000 jobs were created, and almost \$4 billion in investment was leveraged.

By restoring historic structures and reviving urban centers, Preserve America projects are retelling the story of America and renewing the American dream.

In his farewell address to the Nation, Ronald Reagan called for “an informed patriotism.” He warned, “If we forget what we did, we won’t know who we are. . . . An eradication of the American memory . . . could result, ultimately, in an erosion of the American spirit.”

Preserve America guards against that erosion of spirit. Preserve America communities tell the story of where we came from and what we were. Even more importantly, they tell of where we could go and what we can become.

So let us continue our great work of preservation while looking forward to an even brighter future.