

Draft Remarks
Background Information For White House Speech Preparation
Preserve America Neighborhoods, Grants, and Communities
Caucus Room, Cannon House Office Building
March 9, 2006

Thank you, Secretary Norton, and thank you, Representative Turner and Representative Miller, for your warm welcome. And I'd like to recognize John Nau, Chairman of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and Lynn Scarlett, Deputy Secretary, Department of the Interior, who are co-chairs of the *Preserve America* Steering Committee, for their leadership in this program.

Thank you all for being here this morning. It is so exciting to gather again, just three years after the *Preserve America* initiative began, to celebrate two new *Preserve America* programs and recognize the continuing success of the *Preserve America* Community effort.

I just met with many of the people who really make *Preserve America* work, officials and volunteers from the communities and historic preservation organizations across the nation that take the lead in fulfilling the motto of *Preserve America*, to help all Americans and all our visitors from abroad to "Explore and Enjoy Our Heritage." They have joined us since our beginning three years ago and are helping to bring the educational, cultural, and economic benefits of preservation to their communities, states, and our nation.

When we announced the very first eight *Preserve America* communities in January, 2004, we could not have known that just two years later we would have more than 362 designated communities in 46 states. Dozens more additionally have applied, and we are expecting hundreds more to join their ranks in coming years, from every state and territory.

When I first announced the initiative on March 3, 2003, I noted that America was filled with historic landscape, architecture, and communities. That a trip through America was a trip rich in heritage. And that to create a better future, we needed to remember our history.

I'm pleased that so many Americans are so eager to remember, to preserve, and to share their heritage. They are making the vision a reality through their efforts and creativity. It is an absolute delight to be able to better help them go about this great work through two new components of the initiative – *Preserve America* Community Neighborhoods and *Preserve America* Grants, the first of which are being announced today.

We met last July in Nashville, Tennessee, to announce the creation of the new *Preserve America* Community Neighborhood program and to open the application process for those designations. There are 90 metropolitan areas in the United States with 200,000 or more residents. These areas are essentially collections of neighborhoods, many of them former rural towns or historic suburbs that were absorbed into a larger urban government. We thought it made sense to allow the opportunity for distinct historic neighborhoods in these urban areas to become *Preserve America* Community Neighborhoods, not in competition with the larger urban area but in partnership with it.

I am delighted that we are welcoming the first five *Preserve America* Community Neighborhoods today, and particularly pleased that The District in Nashville, where we made the announcement last summer, took our challenge and is one of these new entities. Nashville, helped by the vision of its leaders such as Mayor Bill Purcell, is using its historic structures and landscapes to

revitalize the city and its many unique neighborhoods, building pride in community, making the city more wonderful for residents and visitors, and investing wisely in sustainable preservation.

They're doing such a great job there that the Shelby Street Bridge, completed in 1909, still is carrying traffic and is so well-maintained there are no weight limitations on trucks using it. And of course, when it comes to adaptive reuse of historic structures, The District still is getting great use out of the Union Gospel Tabernacle, which in 1897 was converted to the South's largest-capacity assembly hall and became Ryman Auditorium, which in turn became the original home of the Grand Old Opry. They're making good contemporary use of the past in Nashville.

Another of the five neighborhoods we recognize today is familiar from a trip we took to Louisville, Kentucky, less than two years ago, where we recognized Kentucky's leadership status in the *Preserve America* Community effort. The Historic Portland neighborhood developed along the falls of the Ohio River to help commerce and travelers bypass the obstacle along a major artery for travel and commerce linking east and west. I'm indebted to the Historic Portland officials for sending us a copy of an 1857 community directory, from which we learn that among its residents George Niece was a huckster, David Walker was a fanning mill maker, Michael Bardell was a backman, and Catherine Willey was a widow. I think a little further interpretation is needed to tell those stories to today's Americans. Fortunately, that interpretation is being provided by those in the best position to relay that history, as Historic Portland will also receive one of our first *Preserve America* Grants.

Not so far north of Louisville, another of our first neighborhoods is Irvington, located in Indianapolis, Indiana. Irvington also grew due to the westward expansion of America, as what is today Washington Street was a segment of the National Road, the very first major land route instigated by federal government to help tie the nation together and promote the common good. Among many other notable heritage features, Irvington holds the longest consecutively held event in Indianapolis along Washington Street. Appropriately, that's the Halloween Festival, where children paint scenes on the windows of historic buildings – Don't worry, they use suitable washable paint – and there are street fairs and ghost tours where you just might encounter John Dillinger, who botched a robbery in the area but escaped. At least, he escaped temporarily. Some say he's back for good. A Halloween Festival is wonderfully appropriate, for you see Irvington was named for famed author Washington Irving, who penned "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."

David Morgan, the State Historic Preservation Officer of Kentucky who has much to do with the fact that Kentucky has 66 *Preserve America* Communities or neighborhoods, more than any other state by a considerable margin, is eventually going to figure out a way to get his office designated a *Preserve America* community. He isn't there yet, but he's making great progress in his state.

Lexington, Kentucky, has two neighborhoods among the first five designated. They are Gratz Park, once really a park where Union soldiers bivouacked during the Civil War and where the Blue Grass Trust for Historic Preservation has its offices; and Bell Court, a gem of a residential area named for Bell House, which once hosted Mary Todd Lincoln. This area has been preserved largely by the Bell Court Neighborhood Association since 1962.

Congratulations to the first five *Preserve America* Community Neighborhoods.

We also are recognizing 14 recent *Preserve America* communities today. I enjoyed meeting some of their representatives earlier. Together, the communities and now the neighborhoods are telling

their stories, which, combined with the heritage of thousands of other communities, is our collective story as a nation.

You have done so much for all of us in sharing your heritage. It is a tremendous honor for me in turn to be able to begin to help *Preserve America* Communities, State Historic Preservation Officers, and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers in interpreting and sharing their past through the new *Preserve America* Grants program..

For many years, a program known as Save America's Treasures has helped fund bricks-and-mortar physical preservation and restoration of heritage assets. But preservation of resources is not enough. Preserving the resource is crucial; but that resource must then be made accessible so it can tell its tale of heritage to the people of today and tomorrow's generations.

As historian David C. McCulloch has said, "History is a guide to navigation in perilous times. History is who we are and why we are the way we are."

Today, for the first time, we are announcing the first 45 *Preserve America* Grants. These new matching grants are available to assist local economies to fund self-sustaining ways to promote their cultural resources through heritage tourism. These first grant recipients are receiving almost \$3.5 million altogether. Another \$1.5 million is available for a second round of grants to be considered and awarded later in 2006. And the President's budget requests \$10 million for these grants in 2007.

We were pleased that these grants are awarded to every region of our nation, and are to be used widely for education and training, marketing, planning, and research.

As you will soon hear, the projects for which these grants are given depend upon grass roots determination, creativity, and efforts and must be matched by funds from other sources. They represent a hand up, not a hand out. We know that investment in heritage tourism and related preservation economic activities return many times their value to their communities, states, and the nation.

These are wonderful projects. I'd like to note that both the Louisiana and Mississippi state historic preservation officers are among the 13 total SHPO recipients receiving grants to help them rebuild their heritage tourism industry in the wake of Katrina. This is in addition to the larger \$3 million supplemental funding request the President has made for the state historic preservation offices in those states and others affected by these storms with their unprecedented damage to help preserve remaining heritage resources through other efforts.

But these grants reflect our nation's diversity and reach. From the agricultural heartland of Brookings, South Dakota, which will receive funding for a comprehensive heritage tourism plan; to Gloucester, Massachusetts, which can now better develop educational resources explaining its maritime past.

From Vancouver, Washington, which can now develop appropriate heritage curriculum from kindergarten through high school graduation; to establishing a tourism center in a prominent historic building located on the Mississippi River in Rock Island, Illinois, that is now facing the threat of demolition.

From promotion of 18 Kansas historic sites to helping New Hampshire improve interpretation at its five state historic site museums; these first *Preserve America* grants will continue to fulfill the

promise of the National Historic Preservation Act, which turns 40 this year, and the *Preserve America* effort, which together help make this a richer nation.

Novelist Pearl S. Buck observed, “One faces the future with one’s past.” Knowing what we have faced as a nation gives us the strength and courage to realize the obstacles we face today can be turned into tomorrow’s bright legacy for the future.

Thank you, *Preserve America* communities, neighborhoods, and grant recipients, for helping us build a better future on the foundation of our often challenging – but in the end – our incredible and wondrous past.

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