



Best Practices Review

A quarterly publication on National Register Bulletin guidance

Assessing Integrity, Not Condition

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Introduction

Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance. The seven aspects of integrity—location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association—are the lens through which historic properties are assessed. But remember, “integrity” is not “condition,” a distinction that has existed since the inception of the National Register program. This issue of the *Best Practices Review* looks at examples of properties that are in poor condition but retain integrity for purposes of National Register listing.

Understanding the Aspects of Integrity

A property does not need to present all seven aspects. Determining which of these aspects are most important to a particular property relies on understanding its significance during a particular period. A property’s significance is the key to unlocking just which aspects of integrity are most important for that property.

Assessing integrity may require making a subjective judgment, but it must always be grounded in an understanding of a property’s physical features and how they relate to its significance. Assigning values of “high” or “low” or “sufficient” is not necessary: remember, it is not necessary to assess integrity on a sliding scale, as historic properties either retain integrity (that is, convey their significance) or they do not.

To retain historic integrity, a property will always possess several, and usually most, of the aspects. The retention of specific aspects of integrity is paramount for a property to convey its significance, and determining *which* of these aspects are most important to a particular property requires knowing why, where, and when the property is significant. The following explains how the seven aspects of integrity combine to produce integrity.

Location is the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event

occurred. The relationship between the property and its location is often important to understanding why the property was created or why something happened. The actual location of a historic property, complemented by its setting, is particularly important in capturing the sense of historic events and persons (Criteria A and B).

This publication complements the guidance provided in National Register Bulletins by providing examples on specific topics. Your feedback is welcome; please contact Sherry Frear, Chief & Deputy Keeper, sherry_frear@nps.gov.

For copies of the nominations referenced in this document, please visit our [Sample Nominations](#) page.

For National Register Bulletins and other guidance, please visit our [Publications](#) page.

All images are from National Register nominations unless otherwise noted.

Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property. It results from conscious decisions made during the original conception and planning of a property (or its significant alteration) and applies to activities such as community planning, engineering, architecture, and

Nominations Discussed in this Issue

Royal Theater, California

NR Ref. 100007474

Chief Otho S. and Susie P. Nelson House, Virginia

NR Ref. 100004262 Restricted/Redacted

Muddy Waters House, Illinois

NR Ref. 100008485

Rice Bay, Michigan

NR Ref. 15000353

These nominations are available on the National Register's [Sample Nominations - Integrity](#) webpage.

landscape architecture. Design includes such elements as organization of space, proportion, scale, technology, material choices, and ornamentation.

Setting is the physical environment of a historic property. Although location refers to the specific *place* where a property was built or an event occurred, setting refers to the *character* of the place in which the property played its historic role. It involves how, not just where, the property is situated and its relationship to surrounding features and open space.

Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time, and in a particular pattern or configuration, to form a historic property. The choice and combination of materials reveal the preferences of those who created the property and indicate the availability of specific types of materials and technologies. For example, local materials are often the focus of regional building traditions and thereby help define a sense of time and place.

Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people at a time in the past. It is the evidence of artisans' labor and skill in constructing or altering a building, structure, object, district, or site. Workmanship can apply to the property as a whole or to its individual components. It can be expressed in vernacular methods of construction and plain finishes or in sophisticated configurations and ornamental detailing. It can be based on common traditions or innovative techniques.

Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time. It results from the presence of physical features that, taken together, convey the property's historic character.

Association is the direct link between an important historic event, pattern of events, or person with a historic property. A property retains association if it is the place where the event or activity occurred and is sufficiently intact to convey that relationship to an observer. Like feeling, association requires the presence of physical features that convey a property's historic character.

Because feeling and association depend on individual perceptions, their retention alone is never sufficient to support eligibility of a property for the National Register.

Defining the Essential Physical Features

All properties change over time, and it is not necessary for a property to retain all its historic physical features or characteristics. The property must retain, however, the essential physical features that enable it to convey its historic identity. The essential physical features are those features that define both why a property is significant (expressed through criteria and areas of significance) and when it was significant (expressed through its period(s) of significance).

Each type of property depends on certain aspects of integrity more than others to express its historic significance. Determining which of the aspects is most important to a particular property requires an understanding of the property's significance and its essential physical features. A best practice is to include in Section 7 of the Registration Form a description, either in narrative form or with bullet points, that clearly addresses the seven aspects of integrity and relates them to the property's essential physical features. If a property is lacking in an aspect of integrity—for example, if some substantial amount of original materials are gone, as at the Muddy Waters House, discussed below—this should be called out and its impact on the place's integrity explained.

Example: Consider Urban Disinvestment

Royal Theater

Guadalupe, Santa Barbara County, California, NR Ref. 100007474

Listed in 2022 at the local level of significance for the period 1940–1942 under Criteria A and C, for significance in the areas of Japanese heritage, entertainment/recreation, and architecture



Royal Theater, Guadalupe, California, front façade. (Carole Denardo, 2021)

The current condition of a building may provoke an immediate “no, not eligible, lacks integrity” response. Deterioration from a long-term vacancy can certainly impact condition but not necessarily its integrity. Such is the case with the Royal Theater in Guadalupe, California. Listed in 2022 under the context developed by *Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in California, 1850-1995 Multiple Property Documentation Form* (NR Ref. 10000486), this Art Moderne style building is significant both for its architecture and its association with the Japanese community in Guadalupe.

Arthur Shogo Fukuda, in partnership with Jack Genkichi Takeuchi, built the theater in 1939/1940. However, their relationship with the property was cut short when they were incarcerated in 1942 at the Jerome Relocation Center

in Arkansas, one of ten confinement sites administered by the War Relocation Authority to house Japanese Americans forcibly removed from the West Coast during World War II. Neither Fukuda nor Takeuchi resumed their relationship with the theater after their release .

Alterations were made to the building over the course of several changes in ownership. The last round of alterations date to more than 25 years ago, in 1997, and included roof replacement, asbestos removal, repainting, replumbing, rewiring, and new projection equipment installation. The building has been vacant since 2001 (Registration Form, pp. 6, 16).

The nomination walks the reader through the seven aspects of integrity, with one to three sentences addressing each, for example: “Materials: Most of the original materials, including the building fabric and fenestration, are still evident and unchanged” and “Feeling: There are few alterations and/or removal of original materials, and the building still substantially conveys the feeling of an earlier era and aesthetic” (Registration Form, pp. 6-7).

Example: Consider Rural Vacancy

Chief Otho S. and Susie P. Nelson House

King and Queen County and Essex County, Virginia, NR Ref. 100004262 Restricted

Listed in 2019 at the state level of significance for the period 1924–1967 under Criteria A and B for Native American heritage and association with Rappahannock Chief Otho S. Nelson and Tribal Secretary Susie Pearl Nelson

The Chief Otho S. and Susie P. Nelson House is significant for the period 1924 to 1967, the years Otho Nelson served as chief of the Rappahannock Tribe. The present form of the Nelson House is the result of several expansion campaigns since construction in the late nineteenth century: it is “a frame two-level ‘T’-shaped vernacular building with a metal roof. The house exhibits a blend of conservative construction techniques, traditional planning, and old-fashioned technology with newer architectural construction methods” (Registration Form, p. 4). Because of the extensive additive nature of the building, the architectural description is detailed over six pages. This includes oral history from the Nelson granddaughters that brings the interior spaces to life through descriptions of activities here during the time the building served as the Nelson home and farm, Tribal meeting place and cultural practices repository, and Tribal children’s school.

The house is clearly in poor condition: windows and doors are missing, and interior finishes have crumbled, exposing the lath in many areas. The integrity analysis is short but focused, methodically addressing each aspect of integrity and placing the poor condition of the house into context. For example, with respect to design, materials, and workmanship, the nomination explains that even in its current state, it presents “considerable information about historic uses of the dwelling and its evolution over several decades. Likewise, because the dwelling has not been substantially altered in the past several decades, its integrity of design has been retained” (Registration Form, p. 16).



Chief Otho S. and Susie P. Nelson House, King and Queen County and Essex County, Virginia, south elevation (left), interior views of living room (right), where Tribal meetings were held. (William J. Graham, 2018)

Example: Consider Comparables

Muddy Waters House

Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, NR Ref. 100008485

Listed in 2022 at the national level of significance for the period 1954–1973 under Criterion B for the significance of McKinley Morganfield (Muddy Waters) in performing arts



Muddy Waters House, 4339 S. Lake Park Avenue, Chicago, IL, front façade. (Erica Ruggiero, 2022)

Sometimes, a place is so altered as to bring the integrity of the place into question. In these situations, comparison with other properties is important to determine if there is a property—or which property—might best tell the story of a significant event(s) or person(s).

The Muddy Waters House, listed in 2022, is just such a place. Regarded as the “Father of Chicago Blues,” McKinley Morganfield—better known by his stage name “Muddy Waters”—was “one of the most important figures in the development of the distinctive electrified sound that married the Delta blues, from his home state of Mississippi, with amplification to create a powerful new genre of the urban blues unique to Chicago” (Registration Form, p. 9). A comparison study of residences associated with Waters was undertaken to demonstrate that while the residence at 4339 S. Lake Park Avenue has diminished integrity of materials, design, and workmanship, “it is the best intact residence associated with his life and career” (Registration Form, p. 5).

The integrity discussion in Section 7 “Narrative Description” describes the lack of integrity at other extant properties associated with Waters. The discussion of the Lake Park Avenue home frankly details changes that occurred after his death, including the extensive loss of materials.

After Waters died in 1983, the property eventually entered into receivership during the 1990s, and ultimately fell vacant. It was during this period that the home was

vandalized and scrappers stripped the home of salvageable materials that could be resold, rendering the building uninhabitable and open to the elements. The nomination describes the conditions, relating them to the original design:

In late 2021 and early 2022, what remained of the interior was removed down to the studs. The original layout of each floor, except for the basement, remains intact. The basement originally also had partition walls that separated the rehearsal studio from the living quarters. The original layout is unknown as the walls have been previously removed. New steel columns on concrete footings have been introduced through the center of the space to stabilize the wood frame structure.



Muddy Waters House, 4339 S. Lake Park Avenue, Chicago, IL, first floor living room (left), stairs from basement to first floor (right). (Erica Ruggiero, 2022)

The original wood floors, as well as the remaining simple rectilinear trim at the first floor living room arched window remain. The original stairs (only the treads, risers, and stringer) between the basement and first floor and the first floor and second floor also remain intact.

(Registration Form, p. 6).

As conveyed through oral histories in Section 8 “Statement of Significance,” vivid descriptions of the activities in a variety of the interior spaces speak to Waters’ association with this property. As described by Waters’ granddaughter Amelia Cooper, “That house was Muddy and Geneva’s prized possession” (Registration Form, p. 19).

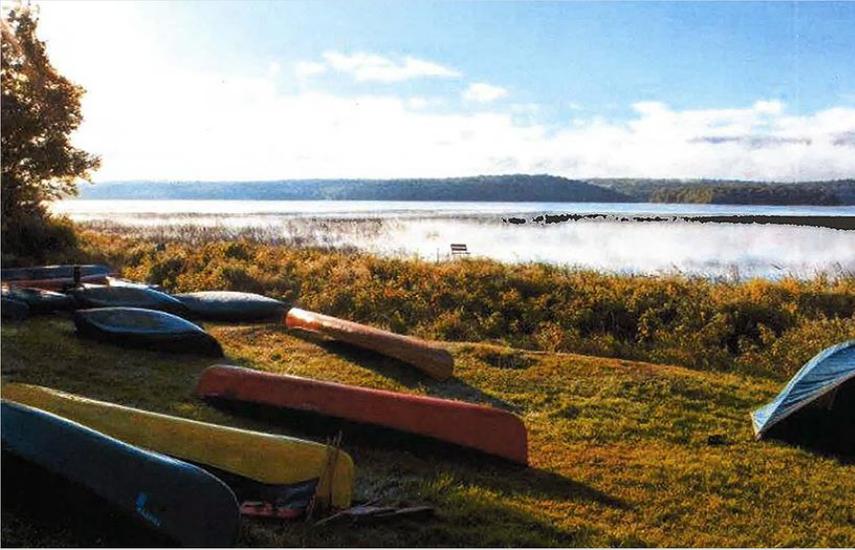
Example: Consider Community Perspective

Rice Bay

Watersmeet Township, Gogebic, Michigan, NR Ref. 15000353

Listed in 2015 at the state level of significance for the period 1784–1965 under Criterion A for significance in agriculture, conservation, and Native American heritage

Rice Bay is listed as a site of ongoing cultural significance to the Ojibwe people and as such is considered a traditional cultural place (TCP). The annual rice harvest here played a central role in Ojibwe migration to the area and led to the establishment of a seasonal, and later permanent, settlement. While it is literally the cycle of natural landscapes to evolve over time, the fundamental characteristics and most important physical aspects of those landscapes should be apparent for a place to possess integrity in terms of National Register eligibility.



Rice Bay, Michigan, canoes gathered at Old Village for wild rice harvest. (Camilla Mingay, 2012)

Human impacts—such as flood control measures, irrigation efforts, and recreational activities—in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have degraded or eliminated many rice beds throughout the region. For a traditional cultural place, integrity should always be assessed from the point of view of the traditional community. This can be documented—as all National Register nominations are required by regulation to be “adequately documented”—by assessing its integrity within the context of the place’s specific significance to the community. As described in the nomination,

The history and evolution of the wild rice harvest, from the eighteenth century to the present day, indicate that the traditional practice and its associated cultural significance remains largely unchanged. Furthermore, the location of Rice Bay—in close proximity to the traditional village of Ketegitigaaning, a significant example of Ojibwe-owned lakeshore—adds to the “integrity of feeling and association” of the site. The proximity of Rice Bay to Ketegitigaaning is significant due to the primary importance of the village as the cultural and community center of the band, especially as many rice beds in the region have been destroyed or are located on private property.

(Registration Form, p. 22.)

Despite both the human impacts and natural changes that have reduced the size of the place as traditionally used by the Ojibwe people, it retains integrity and continues to convey its significance.

[The National Register of Historic Places](#)

is the official list of buildings, structures, objects, sites, and districts significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture.

