

Mervin Richard Personal Statement

Despite having had three different names over the course of its history, Heritage Preservation was fixed in its dedication to preserve the cultural heritage of the United States, set on taking a leadership and educational role by providing assistance to museums, libraries, archives, historic preservation associations, individuals, and others. With the backing of a motivated and resourceful staff, Heritage Preservation identified risks to individual artifacts and collections and brought them to the attention of many. Their innovative programs rallied a host of professionals, not just in the field of preservation but other fields as well. Staff worked tirelessly to find avenues of funding for programs. To its great credit, Heritage Preservation never operated in a vacuum, for it collaborated with the American Institute for Conservation, Institute of Museum and Library Services, Smithsonian American Art Museum, National Endowment for the Arts, to name a few.

What distinguished Heritage Preservation from similar groups was its almost singular focus on the artifacts themselves, particularly those under the care of small institutions and under-equipped (even ill-equipped) groups. While the organization had a membership, members received few benefits other than those offered freely to everyone. The focus was not on providing for members but, instead, on preserving the country's cultural heritage.

I happily served on the board of directors from 1998 to 2013. Save Outdoor Sculpture!, the Conservation Assessment Program, and several emergency preparedness programs – all successful enterprises – were well underway when I joined. Additional initiatives were added during my tenure: the Museum Assessment Program, Save America's Treasures, the Heritage Health Index, the second phase of the Heritage Health Index (completed in 2014), Rescue Public Murals, and Connecting to Collections.

For me, one of the most enjoyable aspects of my involvement was getting to know and working closely with the staff. They surely deserve the lion's share of the credit for developing and maintaining the organization's worthy programs. Talented, dedicated, and passionate about their mission, they were fully committed to making every program a success. It was a privilege to work with each and every one of them. Larry Reger led the team brilliantly for twenty-seven years. He was the heart and soul of Heritage Preservation, a person of great vision, energy, and ability. Larry seemed to know everyone in Washington, and if not, they knew him. His close ties to Congressman Sidney Yates, government agencies, and many foundations were invaluable in securing funding both for programs and operational expenses.

In June 2015 Heritage Preservation's role as an advocate for protecting the nation's cultural heritage came to an end. It was a sad event for all but with a drop in federal funding for operational expenses, the writing was on the wall. Federal funding had begun at \$250,000, gradually rose to \$768,000 by 1993, declined to \$300,000 in 2001, and reached zero in 2011. We investigated alternative options but to no avail. More than once Larry reminded me that nothing lasts forever. Nonetheless, he rightfully maintained that we could be proud of what we had accomplished. And all was not lost. Heritage Preservation's legacy continues in programs

that were picked up and endure to this day under the auspices of the American Institute for Conservation and the Institute of Museum and Library Services.