

Book Review

Buying Time for Heritage: How to Save an Endangered Historic Property

(revised and expanded edition)

By J. Myrick Howard

(Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 344 pp.

From small towns to the largest cities, nearly all heritage organizations are called upon at some point to save a threatened historic building. Such challenges often include an urgent demolition delay, a shortage of financial resources, absence of ideas, and much hand-wringing among supporters. Too often, such efforts fail.

Buying Time for Heritage has been a classic guide for preserving historic properties since 2007, and the revised edition is an essential preservation tool. Author J. Myrick Howard brings 45 years of experience as president of Preservation North Carolina to updating this how-to volume with a large assortment of well-tested preservation actions that have been utilized by organizations and even by small groups of activists. Appendices offer helpful model documents for those undertaking preservation projects.

Howard uses the analogy of an “animal shelter for historic houses” to explain how preservation organizations can save “sick pups” from demolition and bring them to a condition that enables sale to others with protective covenants. In this work, the organization can avoid the capital-intensive creation of another museum or similar expensive use. Howard tells us repeatedly that “it is all about real estate” as he walks through explanations of valuations, purchase options, life estates, historic tax credits, and other techniques that contribute to successful property preservation. Howard’s emphasis is on achieving good results with little to no capital outlay by the heritage organization itself, instead engaging other people’s money in projects. This is given credence through case studies documenting successful efforts, ranging from preserving 1,100-square-foot houses to taking on the preservation and reuse of

a 660,000-square-foot mill building.

Targeted at individuals and organizations that take a role in preserving historic properties, this handsomely illustrated book will also serve as a text for students of historic preservation. Howard remarks: “We wanted to broaden the preservation movement to encompass historic districts, downtowns, adaptive use, vernacular architecture, and diversity.” He gives examples in each area, especially noting projects for underserved communities, such as preservation of the Rosenwald schools constructed in the early twentieth century to benefit African Americans in segregated communities. Through the practical examples presented, the book also provides a history of Preservation North Carolina and its evolution through the years.

With its many detailed explanations, *Buying Time for Heritage* is less useful for individual homeowners, except in explaining preservation easements as proactive long-term protection for properties. Howard veers at one point into his philosophy of institutional gov-



ernance, focused on quick action by staff and limited engagement by boards. While this approach may work well in organizations sharply focused on real estate, it would not meet expectations for best practices for most heritage organizations.

Finally, Howard talks about how preservationists can be flexible, in contrast to the sometime view and occasional reality that they are inflexible. He tells us that “[p]reservation is largely about leaving a better legacy for the future, rather than worshipping the past.” In its closing, *Buying Time for Heritage* emphasizes “[t]he ability to connect the long-term goals of preservation with more immediate community needs.” That admirable heritage goal is well supported by this updated publication.



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