

Milford Wayne Donaldson FAIA
Chairman

Leonard A. Forsman
Vice Chairman

John M. Fowler
Executive Director



Preserving America's Heritage

September 29, 2017

Dear Fellow Members of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation:

As chairman of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), I take seriously my commitment to serve the people of the United States and carry out the agency's stated purpose. Toward that end, I wanted to share my thoughts with all of you in light of recent events unfolding in Charlottesville, Virginia, and around the country.

I believe strongly in the ACHP's mission to advise the President and the Congress on national historic preservation policy, and promote the preservation, enhancement, and sustainable use of our nation's diverse historic resources. Further, I believe in the power of history to inspire, encourage, and educate. Toward that end, I was appointed in 2010 and swore an oath to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States. After considering recent events in cities and towns across the country divided by hate speech, expressions of racism, violent demonstrations, vandalism, and other struggles over increasingly controversial historical monuments and memorials, I want to reaffirm my commitment to the ACHP and its purposes. Events in Charlottesville and elsewhere may be viewed as the antithesis of an open, peaceful, and democratic society, but it is even more vitally important than ever to carry out our mission to help America preserve and tell its whole story in ways that inspire, encourage, and educate, rather than repel and intimidate, our citizens and the world. It is essential to confront rather than hide from history, even if it is ugly, but it is equally necessary to learn from, rather than embrace and glorify, our past's darker moments.

The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) requires consultation in the case of projects carried out, permitted, or assisted by federal agencies that may affect historic resources that reflect the United States' rich and diverse history. Unfortunately as we know, portions of that history and public understanding of its meaning and significance can occasionally be controversial and divisive. Certain prominent historical individuals and groups, their deeds, and their symbolic representations and associations evoke images of past and even present racism, intolerance, enslavement, and genocide. With subjects as contentious as, for example, memorials to past conflicts and controversial individuals that were erected long after the historical events, perhaps with ulterior motives, open discussion about the meaning of history and how it will be portrayed and preserved is even more important.

I also continue to see a significant need to expand the number of historic sites to be considered under the NHPA that are associated with minority, immigrant, and other under-represented populations, while thoughtfully considering the views of those groups and individuals in how that history is preserved and conveyed to future generations. Yet, as Charlottesville and its aftermath illustrate, there is still much work to be done in that regard, as well.

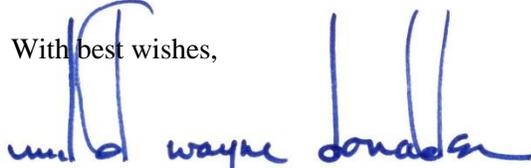
ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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It is my intention to begin a dialogue on these issues at our November business meeting and lead a wide-ranging discussion on how we might approach these issues in the future while offering our advice and counsel to others through the NHPA and other means. I welcome other ideas about direction and outcomes.

Thank you for your past and, I trust, future commitment to our important work.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Milford Wayne Donaldson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M" and "W".

Milford Wayne Donaldson FAIA

Chairman