

# Blazing the Trail: *The Historic American Buildings Survey Turns* 90

For ninety years, the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) has been the at the forefront of recording America's rapidly-vanishing built environment, embracing buildings ranging from the architect-designed and monumental to the humble vernacular to tell all American stories. Over 45,000 buildings and sites are now represented in its archive of measured drawings, photographs, and historical reports.

Established during the Great Depression, HABS was a call to action spurred by the loss of America's early architectural landscape, a concept that remains relevant today. It was the first time that the federal government took action to recognize and protect the nation's architectural legacy. It also laid the groundwork for many preservation initiatives to come, establishing practices and concepts such as field survey, listing, and providing information on historic sites for the public benefit.

Now entering its tenth decade, HABS continues to be a leader in the profession. Holding to our mandate to continually test new recording technologies, methods such as terrestrial laser scanning, digital photogrammetry, and digital large-format photography now form the backbone of our field recording process. Every project pushes the envelope in new and different ways.

In this exhibit, you will see how HABS has adapted these new technologies to our workflow, as well as some of the challenges faced along the way. You will also see how HABS continues to expand the breadth of its collection: from the addition of once-cutting edge Mid-Century Modern designs, to the critical task of recording and preserving sites pivotal to the American Civil Rights Movement.

The history of the built environment is inextricably intertwined with the stories of the people who constructed and used it; HABS documentation thus serves as a mirror, reflecting the nation's achievements and aspirations, successes and failures, as well as our everyday lifestyles and folkways.