

TIPS FOR DOCUMENTATION

Measuring & Documenting Structures & Environment

Excerpted from David A. Taylor's *Documenting Maritime Folklore (Library of Congress 1982) p39-41* and reprinted with permission.

For a thorough documentation of a site, it is necessary to gather a variety of contextual data. These data include information about the history of the landmark and its use in the area, as well as information about the designer(s), builder(s), owner(s), and the uses of, and modification to the site being documented.

Properly executed measured drawings are the most accurate record of a building. Unfortunately, exact scale drawings can be expensive to produce since they often require the services of an architect or draftsman. However, for the purposes of many projects, serviceable drawings can be produced by fieldworkers who do not possess formal training in architecture.

Conduct a preliminary survey. Before measurements activities commence, it is important to decide which buildings should be measured, how much time and personnel can be devoted to the task, and the manner in which the work should be conducted. Since it is essential to understand the structure of a building in order to determine what types of drawings should be made, it is beneficial to make a preliminary survey. Because it is seldom possible to record every detail of a building, the fieldworker must decide.

Record measurements by hand & work partners. This can be efficiently accomplished by three-person teams: two to take measurements and one to record measurements in a field notebook. Two can accurately collect data if one calls out measurements and the other records them. Because it is difficult to measure large surfaces without assistance, single fieldworkers cannot work as efficiently.

Conduct interior measurements (when applicable). In addition to other data noted above, measurements of buildings should be supplemented by interior and exterior photographs, and by inventories of furnishings and sketches of their placement. Artifacts found within the structure or on its property are particularly significant, and they should be fully documented.

Draw features to be measured prior to actual measuring. To ensure that field measurements are properly interpreted when it is time to use them to produce a scale drawing, it is helpful to sketch the feature to be measured in field notes before measuring begins. Then, as measurements are taken, they can be written alongside corresponding aspects of the sketch. Measuring devices employed by fieldworkers include tape measures, folding and straight rulers.

After preliminary survey and drawings, four types of site drawings can be made:

- **Site Plan.** This indicates the building's relationship to streets or roads, structures, gardens, or other features of the immediate environment.
- **Floor Plan.** This records room layout, and locations of doors, windows, stairways, and major features of each relevant level of the building.
- **Location Plan.** This locates the property with reference to highways, towns, and natural features.
- **Exterior Elevation.** This represents the façade of a building projected on a vertical plane.

To give you an idea of what a professional drawing looks like, visit the Historic American Buildings Survey (http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/collections/habs_haer/).