

# **HISTORIC RESOURCE DOCUMENTATION**

## **Standards for Level I, II, and III Documentation**

**Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation**  
**Colorado Historical Society**

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The Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (OAH P) in the Colorado Historical Society has established three levels of documentation for historic sites. These levels should not be confused with the basic survey process which generates inventory forms as part of the identification and evaluation of historic resources. Level I, II, and III documentation are designed to document sites beyond the basic cultural resource survey.

Prior to the mid-1930s, no national or state program existed designed to systematically record historic properties. Local historical societies may have attempted to record sites and buildings, but there were no standards that provided for long-term preservation of resource documentation materials. The passage of the Historic Sites Act by Congress in 1935 established the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), a program to be administered by the National Park Service.

The Depression-era program took advantage of a pool of unemployed architects, historians, and photographers to staff the survey and established national standards for archival historic building documentation. Long-term archival quality documentation formed one of the key provisions of the HABS standards. The American Institute of Architects (AIA), the National Park Service, and the Library of Congress all assisted in the development of the standards. The Library of Congress established a HABS collection to store the records. HABS expanded in 1969 with the creation of the companion Historic American Engineering Record (HAER). HAER focuses on creating records of historic engineering features or significant industrial entities. HAER records structures such as bridges, dams, railways, factories, and other historic places significant more for engineering than architecture. The standards for HAER are somewhat different than HABS, however the drawing and photographic requirements are the same.

The need for archivally stable documentation methods which could be produced quicker and at lower cost than full HABS/HAER documentation led to the establishment of three levels of historic site documentation. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) first articulated these levels and they are often referred to as BLM Level I, II, and III documentation. OAH P standards for documentation are very similar to those of the BLM.

Those planning any cultural resource documentation project should discuss the appropriate level of documentation with OAH P. Although standards exist for each level, wide variations in cultural resources and existing associated documents warrants tailoring of the documentation process on a case by case basis.

### Levels of OAHP Site Documentation

- Level I** Most basic form of site documentation, similar to completion of OAHP cultural resource inventory forms with associated maps and survey report. However, all these materials must be in an archivally stable format. Photography consists of 35mm black and white format processed and printed to archival standards. Machine prints on resin paper are not acceptable.
- Level II** Intermediate level of site documentation, to include full descriptive and historical narrative (including relevant contexts), measured drawings, and medium format black and white photography, all in archivally stable format.
- Level III** Site documentation done to HABS/HAER standards, but documentation is reviewed by OAHP rather than the National Park Service and the final products are archived at OAHP rather than the Library of Congress.

Level I documentation is the preferred form of basic property documentation where staff time and funds permit. Unfortunately, seldom does time or funding permit this level of documentation as part of a basic survey. However, when survey work is anticipated to involve a group of resources with a high likelihood of significance, every effort should be made to record at the Level I standard.

Level II documentation is a good way to create archival records for previously identified properties of significance, when effects to a site must be mitigated due to impending loss, or when a site should be recorded because of progressing deterioration.

Level III documentation is reserved for particularly significant resources. These are either architecturally important buildings or structures representing significant engineering accomplishments. The determination as to whether a historic property should have Level III (or HABS/HAER) documentation is based on consultation not just with OAHP but with the National Park Service.

Whatever the level of documentation, it is important that one copy of the final documentation be publicly accessible at a location near the historic resource. A local library, historical society, museum, or a county or municipal office may be appropriate. In addition, one copy of the documentation is publicly available in the archives of OAHP.

### Level I Documentation

Level I documentation most closely follows the survey and recordation requirements set forth in the OAHP *Colorado Cultural Resource Survey Manual*, although the documentation must meet archival standards. In the area of photography, color films will generally fade within 25 to 30 years and are not acceptable for any type of cultural resource survey or documentation. However, the use of black and white photography does not guarantee archival quality. Since the 1970s, most commercial photofinishers have switched to the use of resin coated papers and machine processing to print black and white negatives. While machine printed photographs are acceptable for general architectural surveys, they are not acceptable for Level I documentation. Machine processing and resin coated papers are not archivally stable and will deteriorate over a period 30 to 50 years. The extra time and expense associated with producing archivally stable 35mm negatives and prints generally limits their use to sites thought to be potentially eligible for historic designation, in the National Register of Historic Places, the Colorado State Register of Historic Properties, or through a local landmarking process.

### Level II Documentation

Level II documentation represents a step up from Level I and is an excellent tool for recording historic structures and sites that are eligible for inclusion in the National or State Register, or listing as local landmarks, but that are not of sufficient architectural merit to require a formal project of HABS quality. Level II documentation provides archival quality documentation for a site without the expense and time-consuming effort of a Level III documentation. At least two sets of final documents must be prepared—one for deposit in a publicly accessible archive near the historic site recorded and a second in the archives of OAHF at the Colorado Historical Society in Denver. Level II documentation consists of three elements:

#### **Architectural and Historical Narrative**

The architectural and historical narrative should be at or near the level found in a National Register nomination. Because Level II documentation is generally reserved for buildings and sites determined to be eligible for official historic designation, architectural descriptions and historical documentation sufficient to facilitate such listing is appropriate and is consistent with the intent of Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The final documents should be on archival bond paper.

#### **Measured Drawings**

Level II documentation often requires measured drawings. Basic dimensions are recorded, along with details such as the size of window and door openings. Field sketches are redrafted into a scale drawing (often 1/4 inch equals 1 foot). Drawings can be done by almost anyone who has some basic drafting skills. It is also possible to generate these drawings using graphics programs on a computer. Good measured drawings directly reduce the amount of narrative description needed to record the resource.

The primary difference between a Level II measured drawing and the more formal HABS/HAER documentation is that special HABS mylar is not used, an architect does not necessarily do the measured drawings, and the drawings can be done on either archival paper or mylar. Level II measured drawings can be placed on mylar for archival permanence. These drawings may also be made on archival bond paper (this is especially true using a computer), which will provide long-term life.

Generally, Level II drawings are simpler than those for HABS/HAER. They are normally for “lesser” structures, and they can be done by almost anyone with a pencil and artist’s sketch pad. Level II measured drawings are a good way to dimensionally represent a historic property without having to create HABS/HAER architectural plans.

### Medium Format Photography

Archival photography is important to fully document a historic property. A large film format will capture details while allowing for enlargement of negatives without significant loss of quality. Level II photography is a compromise between small format and large format negatives. Using cameras that require 120 size film, various sizes of negatives can be created. Standard formats are 6 centimeters by 6 centimeters (2 ¼ inches by 2 ¼ inches), 6 centimeters by 7 centimeters, 6 centimeters by 8 centimeters, and 6 centimeters by 4.5 centimeters. All of these formats use 120 size film and have attributes suitable for mid-level archival photographs. The film should be processed and printed following generally accepted archival standards.

Level II photography, with a medium format camera, allows for detailed recording of a historic property, without the expense and difficulty of a 4 inch by 5 inch (or larger) view camera. Medium format equipment is often more accessible and may be used by photographers who have less proficiency than is needed to use a large format camera.

Label the backs of the photos with the following information preferably in soft pencil. An indelible ink (non-water soluble) may also be used. Do not use computer generated stickers as they are not archivally stable.

1. Name of property
2. Site number
3. Photograph number

Prepare a photograph log similar in form to the following:

#### PHOTOGRAPH LOG

The following information pertains to photograph numbers 1-\_\_ except as noted:

Name of Property:  
Location:  
Photographer:  
Date of Photographs:  
Location of Negatives:

<u>Photo No.</u>	<u>Description of View and Direction of Camera</u>
1	
2	

Submit both photographs and negatives in archivally stable sleeves.

### Level III Documentation

Many publications exist that provide guidance for the preparation of HABS/HAER quality documentation (see the bibliography for citations). The National Park Service reviews and approves all HABS/HAER documentation. At least two sets of the final documentation are prepared. One set goes to OAHP for inclusion in its publicly accessible archives at the Colorado Historical Society in Denver. A second set goes to the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. Additional documentation sets may be required for deposit in a local archives. If after consultation with OAHP a decision is made to document a property for inclusion in the official HABS/HAER collection, then the National Park Service will provide project guidance and review/approve all documentation.

In the case of Level III documentation (HABS/HAER equivalent), OAHP will provide project guidance and will review/approve all documentation, although the documentation must meet existing HABS/HAER standards. At least two sets of final documents must be prepared—one for deposit in a publicly accessible archive near the historic site recorded and a second in the archives of OAHP at the Colorado Historical Society in Denver.

Preparing Level III documentation is a three part process that involves specific tasks for the historians, architects, and photographers involved. Each task can be accomplished individually, but the results of each come together to form the final documentation. The descriptions below are brief overviews of the necessary documentation. For fuller information, see the sources noted in the text or in the bibliography.

### **Measured Drawings**

These drawings must be made on mylar that is dimensionally stable and of archival quality. Special inks such as Pelikan must be used and the drawings must be prepared to HABS standards for line weight, lettering size, and so forth. Level III drawings can be very complex depending on the size and scope of the building or engineering feature being recorded. In the case of industrial facilities, one or more drawings should show the operating or production process. Normally, a professional architect is required to measure and draw HABS/HAER and Level III plans to specifications. Complete drawing standards are outlined in the National Park Service publication, *Field Instructions for Measured Drawings*.

### **Historical Documentation**

A professional historian is usually required to properly research and write the historical documentation needed by HABS/HAER. The historian researches ownership of the property to determine its legal location, date of construction, and the architect and builder responsible for the design and construction. In addition, a search for original plans is undertaken and any alterations or additions are noted. A general architectural narrative is written to supplement the measured drawings that include architectural style and character, exterior and interior descriptions, and overall site appearance. Some of this information should already be available from site inventory forms or possibly from a National or State Register nomination for the property.

The property must also be placed in a historic context. Context means how the property fits into the history and social structure of a given period of time and geographic location. Context involves the development of an overall picture into which a historic site fits. Because only properties eligible for or listed in the National or State Register are recorded to HABS/HAER or Level III standards, the historical narrative must discuss the significance of the property within its context.

Additional documentation includes a bibliography of sources and supplemental data, such as copies of deeds or other property records. All of the documentation must be printed on archivally stable 100% rag bond paper. All attachments, appendices, plans, photocopies, and other supplemental material must be on archival paper. Information on complete historical documentation for a HABS/HAER or Level III project can be found in the National Park Service publication, *Historian's Procedure Manual*.

### Archival Photography

The final part of a Level III project is the photography. In addition to archival drawings, photographs provide vital views of a property and its setting. HABS/HAER will accept only large format negatives corrected for distortion using a view camera. HABS will not accept negatives any less than 4 inches by 5 inches. The preferred format is 5 inches by 7 inches. Negatives larger than 8 inches by 10 inches are unacceptable. The film should be processed and printed following generally accepted archival standards.

Label the backs of the photos with the following information preferably in soft pencil. An indelible ink (non-water soluble) may also be used. Do not use computer generated stickers as they are not archivally stable.

1. Name of property
2. Site number
3. Photograph number

Prepare a photograph log similar in form to the following:

#### PHOTOGRAPH LOG

The following information pertains to photograph numbers 1-\_\_ except as noted:

Name of Property:  
Location:  
Photographer:  
Date of Photographs:  
Location of Negatives:

<u>Photo No.</u>	<u>Description of View and Direction of Camera</u>
1	
2	

Submit both photographs and negatives in archivally stable sleeves.

A view camera is the only machine that can be adjusted to compensate for distortion and it can correct perspective problems. Additionally, a large format negative provides a wealth of detail that is often hard to record with a smaller format film. Naturally, only black and white film is acceptable due to its archival stability. Complete information about preparing photographs for HABS/HAER or Level III documentation may be found in the National Park Service publication, *Specifications for the Production of Photographs*.

Specific information about producing various forms of documentation can be found in numerous publications. Frederic J. Athearn's, *A Window to the Past - A View to the Future*, a publication of the Bureau of Land Management, provides excellent guidance for photodocumentation. Other general sources include: *Recording Historic Buildings for the Record*, John Burns, ed.; Terry Buchanan's *Photographing Historic Buildings for the Record*; and Jeff Dean's *Architectural Photography: Techniques for Architects, Preservationists, Historians, Photographers, and Urban Planners*. See the bibliography for additional sources.

Again, always contact OAHP before beginning any documentation project to establish the appropriate level of documentation, content requirements, and locations for deposit of the final documentation.

### Bibliography

Athearn, Frederic J. *How to Improve the Quality of Photographs for National Register Nominations*. Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1996.

\_\_\_\_\_. *A Window to the Past - A View to the Future: A Guide to Photodocumenting Historic Places*. Denver: Bureau of Land Management, 1994.

Burns, John A. (ed.) *Recording Historic Structures*. Washington, DC: American Institute of Architects, 1989.

*Colorado Cultural Resource Survey Manual*, Volumes I and II. Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society, 1998.

Dean, Jeff. *Architectural Photography: Techniques for Architects, Preservationists, Historians, Photographers, and Urban Planners*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981.

National Park Service. *How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*. Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1996.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Transmitting Documentation to HABS/HAER/WASO*. Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1985.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Field Instructions for Measured Drawings*. Washington, DC: National Park Service, n.d.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Specifications for the Production of Photographs*. Washington, DC: National Park Service, n.d.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Manual for Editing HABS/HAER Documentation*. Denver: Rocky Mountain Regional Office, NPS, 1986.

O'Donnell, Eleanor. *Researching a Historic Property*. Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1996.

### Examples of Level II and III Documentation

All documentation cited below is available in the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation at the Colorado Historical Society, in Denver.

#### Level II Documentation

<u>Report No.</u>	<u>Documentation Title</u>
AH.C.R1	Cinderella City Shopping Center Level II Documentation (1998)
BL.FA.R1	Stroh/Dickens Farm Level II Documentation (1996)
DT.LM.R21	Level II Documentation of Structures Within the Historic Town of Bowie and the Associated King Mine (1996)
EP.DA.R9	Fort Carson Hospital Level II Documentation (1996)

#### Level III Documentation

<u>Report No.</u>	<u>Documentation Title</u>
DV.LG.R41	Sixth/Speer/Lincoln Project Documentation (1992)
GF.CH.R7	Shoshone Power Plant (Glenwood Canyon) Level III Recordation (1985)
5DV1005.2	John Deere Plow Co. Warehouse
5DV4346	Prince of Peace, God in Christ Church
5GL10	Needles Eye Tunnel, Moffat Line Over Rollins Pass
5LR1565	Cunningham Bar
5LR1571	Charles Ridgen Farm
5ME6962	Atkins Farm
5PA418	DSP&P Railroad
5PE1477	Property at 1123 W. 15th St., Pueblo
5TL70	Cresson Mine