

Industrial Archeology at Cultural Resource Documentation Services
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Cultural Resource Documentation Services is a one-man operation in the United States aimed at producing documentation of industrial sites and associated resources, either for public records and education (as required by Federal law in some cases), or as planning information for conservation, adaptive reuse, restoration, and maintenance. Documentation also serves as a form of insurance — it is striking to consider that in the United States about 40% of restoration projects suffer fires of one degree or another (the extensive fire damage to the ship *Cutty Sark* in London was recently in the news). Without documentation, I frequently wonder how site owners faithfully recreate lost design and appropriately substitute new materials, or whether they are satisfied with “Hollywood stage sets” in the end. I frequently team up with other people or firms who have specific complementary expertises, since the wide variety of projects requires a number of differing specialties. This permits me to be more flexible and tend to the technical aspects of the work (which I enjoy far more than administrative paperwork and countless meetings). Usually my clients and I arrive at a scope of work and costs via planning and negotiation, and jobs find me through “word of mouth” advertising. I rarely “bid” jobs competitively, since bid preparation consumes a lot of time and often results in disappointments. Cost is always a factor in any kind of work, but quality, thoroughness and expertise are also important when working with National Historic Landmarks and other significant properties.

What attracts me to IA is its interdisciplinary nature. As a child I enjoyed a variety of pursuits ranging from cartooning, to mechanical drafting and machine shop work, model building, model railroading, woodworking, architectural history, graphics and photography, general sciences and engineering, chemistry, and history. Once I had obtained a Masters degree in Architecture, I decided to see what other forms of employment had to offer. In the process I came across industrial archeology as practiced by the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) program at the United States’ National Park Service. I remained with the program 12 years until family obligations required me to return home to South Carolina and employ myself as a private consultant. During my years at HAER I wrote several guidelines and participated in a large number of documentation projects, all of which served me well as an “expert.” My particular specialty was measured drawings, with a secondary role as researcher and writer as well as project manager. I have found that in the United States measured drawings projects are much rarer than those that produce researched papers and photography. As a consequence, I find it necessary for survival to work on a wide variety of resources ranging from southern plantation homes and workers housing to wind tunnels of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, historic sailing and powered vessels, bridges, machinery, mining sites, parks and military sites. Larger buildings and sites frequently have archives of architectural and engineering drawings to work with, and in the past few years I have engaged a number of mapping projects, many of which rely on historical records as well as data from surveyors’ total stations, GIS systems and aerial mappers’ orthophotographs. CAD (computer aided design) has been an integral part of my work since 1994, since it offers efficiencies and aesthetic characteristics manual drafters can only dream about. On occasion I have used the output of 3D scanners for individual objects (such as a ship hull), but for the kind of detailed analyses necessary to thorough documentation or preparations for restoration, these instruments’ output must be supplemented by hands-on measurements and considerable personal examination. Oddly enough, I have rarely done in-ground excavations in the manner of traditional archeologists!

With reference to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Architectural and Engineering Documentation, I am also concerned what constitutes a verifiable “field note” from electronic data-gathering systems and digital photographs, since digital files are much more ephemeral and machine-dependent than traditional paper-based notes, images and other records. The immense efficiencies realized by computer-driven tools risk total data loss from a number of failure points.

An overly enthusiastic reliance on them appears irresponsible when records of past and current work must be consulted in the future to continue professional maintenance and interpretation of historic properties. Historically, digital data have become “locked up” in obsolete or proprietary file formats and media. These cutting-edge issues remain to be resolved.