



LATINX PRESERVATION

TOOLKIT



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Established in 2014, Latinos in Heritage Conservation is a national nonprofit dedicated to promoting Latinx leadership and engagement in historic preservation.

www.latinoheritage.us





Preface

by Latinos in Heritage Conservation Executive Director

Dear Amigxs,

I'm thrilled to share the first-ever Latinx Preservation Toolkit on behalf of Latinos in Heritage Conservation (LHC).. As the Executive Director, it's an honor to present the Toolkit—a vital resource that underscores our commitment to fostering cultural and racial equity in heritage conservation.

For too long, Latinx history and heritage have been marginalized and omitted, leaving neighborhoods vulnerable to disinvestment, displacement, and erasure. Our mission goes beyond architectural preservation; we aim to empower community leaders and foster vibrant, livable historic neighborhoods and barrios. This Toolkit, the result of four years of dedicated work, signifies a significant milestone in our journey toward inclusivity in historic preservation. As we celebrate Latinx preservation projects, we directly confront historical disparities and are committed to rectifying systemic inequities through the Latinx Preservation Toolkit.

Within these pages, discover a roadmap for communities to thrive and preserve meaningful stories and places. I extend my deepest gratitude to everyone who has been part of this journey. This Texas pilot for the Toolkit is just the beginning. We eagerly anticipate expanding the Toolkit's geography, topics covered, and community case studies in the future.

Together, let us continue working for a more equitable future that values Latinx heritage, people, and places.

Adelante!

Sehila Mota Casper
Executive Director
Latinos in Heritage Conservation



Land Acknowledgement


We begin by acknowledging that the land that these historic Latinx sites sit on today, are on traditional territories of numerous Indigenous peoples who have lived on and cared for this land for countless generations. Texas is home to a diverse array of Indigenous cultures, including the Caddo, Apache, Comanche, Tonkawa, Karankawa, Coahuiltecans, y muchos más.

We also acknowledge the historical significance of the Mexican Cession, a complex chapter in the history of this region. In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo marked the end of the Mexican-American War, resulting in the cession of a significant portion of Mexican territory, including parts of present-day Texas, California, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado. This event had profound and lasting effects on the communities that called this land home.

We recognize the cultural, historical, and social contributions of the Mexican and Mexican-American communities that have played a vital role in shaping the identity of Texas. The legacy of the Mexican Cession is a reminder of the diverse and interconnected histories that converge in this region.

While reading about these Latinx stories, let us acknowledge and respect the Indigenous peoples who have been the original stewards of these places, as well as the diverse communities that have contributed to the rich tapestry of Texas. May we commit to understanding the complexities of history and work towards building a future that honors the rights and contributions of all who call this land home.





“We told our
own story, and
thus that of
the United
States”

Doctora Antona Castañeda



The purpose

Empowering Latinx Communities Through Historic Preservation

Our heritage is a repository of traditions, values, and cultural practices—a collective memory. Preserving Latinx cultural heritage ensures that these traditions remain alive, inspiring future generations.

LHC is committed to preservation equity, striving to democratize the mainstream preservation field. The Latinx Preservation Toolkit serves as an introduction to the principles and practices of historic preservation, encompassing both community-led preservation and mainstream approaches. The Toolkit ensures equal access to information, empowering Latinx communities to preserve, celebrate contributions, and tell their own stories.

By empowering communities in both urban and rural landscapes, the Toolkit invites individuals to step into leadership roles, safeguard their communities, and preserve sacred Latinx sites. LHC aims to establish equitable practices and cultivate a new generation of heritage stewards deeply connected to their cultural roots.

Recognizing the community's eagerness to learn and contribute, LHC will utilize this Toolkit in workshops and teacher professional development trainings in the years to come. This initiative seeks to integrate Latinx heritage and preservation into K-12 and higher education curricula, extending its impact to younger generations and Latinx enclaves.

Beyond being a resource, the Toolkit acts as a catalyst for change, cultivating possibilities in communities nationwide and leaving lasting footprints and *semillas sembradas* (sown seeds) to create a more just future.





What is Historic Preservation?



Historic Preservation is a diverse discipline committed to recognizing and safeguarding culture and history. Over time, Latinx and Indigenous communities have preserved their homelands, family stories, cultural traditions, heritage, and sacred sites, contributing to our collective legacy.

The practice involves protecting historic buildings, archeology, public lands, the environment, artifacts, and cultural traditions significant in our shared history. At its core, historic preservation honors and sustains elements shaping our cultural identity.

Preservationists identify and protect sites of historical and cultural importance using research, documentation, and restoration techniques. Beyond physical conservation, historic preservation interprets and shares stories embedded in these places, fostering an understanding of people and the lived experience. It intersects with public history, affordable housing, ethnography, real estate community building, stakeholder engagement, economic development, heritage tourism, and policy-making, among others, finding a balance between progress and protecting our heritage for future generations.

Our Historia. Our Futuro.



What makes a site historic?

According to mainstream Historic Preservation guidelines, a site is typically deemed historic if it is 50-years or older and fulfills specific criteria demonstrating historical or architectural significance. The site should also maintain strong integrity, meaning it closely resembles its original form during its significant historical period.

If you suspect that your building, structure, neighborhood, or cemetery holds historical importance, local government or the State Historic Preservation Office can offer assistance.

How can I preserve a site or history?

There are various ways to preserve a site or history. Here are some examples:

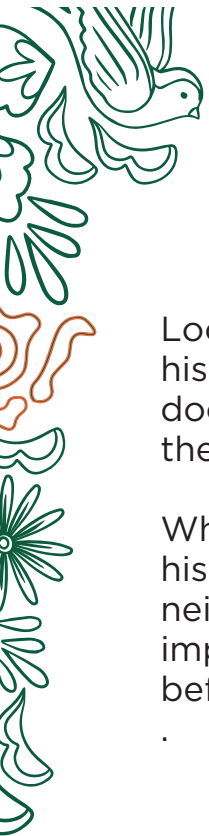
Preserve a structure:

Over time, a historic building might develop issues like wood rot or a ceiling needing replacement. In such cases, you can protect the building by restoring or rehabilitating it, preventing further damage. Many families and building owners are already engaged in this preservation work, often referring to it by different names.

Reuse Historic Buildings:

As time goes by, people and places change. Groups that work to preserve old buildings and places are finding new ways to use them. For instance, a building on historic Main St., once a general goods store, has been transformed into a panadería.





Historic Designation

Local, state, or federal agencies grant historic designations based on historical significance. The process typically involves thorough research, documentation, the creation of a nomination, and awaiting approval from the city, state, or federal government.

When a site is designated, it acknowledges its importance. In many cities, historic designations can be crucial in saving Latinx sites and neighborhoods from development, thus safeguarding cultura. However, it's important to note that designated sites may have to undergo approval before exterior construction begins.

Local City Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local Landmarks• Historic Districts
State Historic Preservation Offices	State registry
Federal Government, National Park Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Register of Historic Sites• National Register Historic District• National Historic Landmark

Historic designations can be granted at the city level through a local landmark, at the state level through a state register, and at the national level through the National Register of Historic Places. A National Historic Landmark is one of the nation's most prestigious designations, representing buildings, sites, districts, structures, and objects determined by the Secretary of the Interior to be nationally significant in American history and culture.

Historic designation offers numerous benefits, including early review of proposed developments by city planning, eligibility for grant funding, historic tax credits for sites listed in the National Register of Historic Places, heritage tourism, and economic development, among others.





Community Advocacy

Communities unite against threats of displacement and the demolition of culturally rich barrios. Latinx organizations actively collaborate with local preservation nonprofits, attend meetings with city and elected representatives, speak before the City Council, and secure historic designations for landmarks and districts within their neighborhoods. This proactive engagement underscores the significance of community voices in shaping urban development, highlighting the resilience and determination of these communities in safeguarding their cultural heritage against challenges.





Saving Sacred Lands

Communities conserve and protect the land where our descendants have rested for decades. Today, public and neglected lands face threats, including hundreds of forgotten and abandoned cemeteries where Latinx individuals are interred. Across the country, communities are working actively to preserve these overlooked sacred spaces in collaboration with relevant offices.



Documenting History:

Families document the histories of their loved ones and neighborhood by collecting pictures, newspaper clippings, documents, and other materials. Often, a family member preserves the history of their household by creating a scrapbook, documentary, or other production.

Another method of documenting history is by photographing or scanning historic pictures and storing the digital files on a hard drive, in an archive, museum, or on an online server.



Storytelling and Oral Histories:

The history of colonialism led to settlers destroying many of our ancestors' written and sculpted histories. . Still, our descendants preserved their past by passing stories down from generation to generation through tales, songs, dances, and legends.

Oral histories have served as a powerful tool against cultural erasure, especially during times of slavery and racism. The shared oral stories are more than mere tales; they are vital for passing down the history of our ancestors.





Preserving Latinidad:

Preservation not only includes historic places, but also protects the cultural practices and traditions of various nationalities from Latin America and the Caribbean, including Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Guatemalans, Argentinians, Haitians, and more. Preserving Latinidad encompasses the protection of music, foodways, paintings, murals, sculptures, dances, and creative expressions. This includes retaining celebrations such as Día de los Muertos, Fiesta de los Reyes Magos, Festival de la Calle Ocho, and traditional foods like conchas, lechon asado, pupusas, and countless more cherished traditions.





Proven Practices



Pike Park

Dallas, Texas

“They were letting the history get away from us...But if you let it go, that's it.”

Marcelo Bravo



Pike Park Dallas, TX

Founded in 2008 and established as a nonprofit in 2013, the Dallas Mexican American Historical League (DMAHL) is dedicated to preserving and documenting the rich history of Mexican Americans and their barrios in the Dallas area.

Pike Park, located in the barrio known as Little Mexico, has been a cherished space for generations of Mexican Americans. The park continues to be a vital site for community gatherings during Cinco de Mayo and Mexican celebrations, historically serving as a hub for grassroots organizing and protests. It symbolizes the resilience and unity of the Mexican American community in Dallas.

Community Advocacy

DMAHL and community activists persist in their efforts to preserve Pike Park. Despite its designation as a protected landmark by the City of Dallas in 2000, the community's displacement, which once hosted cultural celebrations, has resulted in the park largely remaining empty. DMAHL is actively speaking with elected officials and exploring innovative strategies to promote the use of park facilities by visitors, community members, and local businesses, aiming to prevent potential loopholes that might be exploited for the demolition of the last remaining community remnant of Little Mexico.

Watch our
video here





Cedar Creek Cemetery Bastrop, Texas

“ I think the one thing we need to take from this is that if you are just a private landowner and you see someone coming into your house with a bulldozer, you can make a difference. You can go out and talk to people and protect it! ”

Pat Cunningham



Old Latin Cemetery Cedar Creek, Texas

By adopting a holistic approach to conservation, communities safeguard physical spaces and cultivate their ties to the land, nurturing a sense of continuity that weaves past, present, and future narratives.

These communities work to preserve the land where their ancestors have lived and rested for decades. Cedar Creek, formerly a part of the Old Camino Real, also known as the Kings Highway, bears historical importance as a prominent route for travelers.



*Watch our video
here*



Preserving Sacred Spaces

In 2021, Pat Cunningham discovered white irises along a path near her home, leading to the unearthing of grave markers over a century old, all bearing Spanish surnames.

Upon hearing of a new development in this area, Cunningham prevented developers from demolishing the Old Latin Cedar Creek Cemetery. She marked the cemetery's boundary with pink tape, leading the developers to install a protective fence. With assistance from the County Historical Commission, Cunningham notified the Bastrop County Clerk of the abandoned cemetery and applied for historical designation in 2023. She is currently awaiting a response from the Texas Historical Commission.



Westside

San Antonio, Texas

“ It's buildings, but it's also about language. It's also about cultural traditions. It's telling stories, giving workshops...it's how to dance a chotis and a polka and whatever sort of dances that also are getting lost... So, it's all of that, it's broader than just the preservation of buildings. ”

Graciela Sánchez



Westside San Antonio, Texas


In San Antonio's western region, Mexicanxs and Mexican Americans formed communities amid growing U.S. segregation. Motivated to actively challenge various societal issues, including imperialism, sexism, homophobia, discrimination, classism, and environmental degradation, Latinas in San Antonio aimed to create an organization. Graciela Sánchez, a Westside native, collaborated with like-minded individuals, transforming the Interchange Network into the envisioned Esperanza Peace and Justice Center in 1987.

Preserving Place & Communities

Preservation groups, like Esperanza Peace and Justice Center and the Westside Preservation Alliance, protect the cultural landscape that reflects the experiences of a whole community rather than the lives of leaders.

For instance, the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center has preserved small homes (casitas) where Latinxs lived in the early 1900s, demonstrating the documentation of the lives of working-class individuals from the Westside.





LULAC Council 60 Clubhouse Houston, Texas

“ I remember looking up. I could see holes in the ceiling. . . I could see the rafters. And I just had this terrible thought of one day we're going to be in a meeting, and that second floor is going to fall right upon us. ”

Alfonso Maldonado



LULAC Council 60 Houston, Texas

In the 1950s, LULAC Council 60 emerged as a leading chapter, with key members like John J. Herrera (1952-53) and Felix Tijerina (1956-60), who served as national presidents and propelled Houston's Mexican American community to national prominence. The Council played a pivotal role in shaping the Mexican American electoral block, influencing President Kennedy's visit to Houston, and shaping federal programs.

By the 2010s, the LULAC Council 60 Clubhouse had deteriorated, becoming unsafe for meetings due to damage from storms, humidity, and environmental factors, particularly affecting the roof and infrastructure. This deterioration underscored the urgent need to preserve the building due to its historical significance.



Preserving a Structure

After Hurricane Harvey flooded the Clubhouse, Council 60 partnered with the National Trust for Historic Preservation to address the most severely damaged sections. The team initiated emergency stabilization efforts.

Expanding on their preservation successes, Council 60 established C. 60 Inc., a nonprofit focused on rehabilitating the Clubhouse for future programming. Currently, C. 60 leads initiatives to transform the Clubhouse into a historical and cultural hub, preserving its legacy as a communal space for local community organizations and advocates.



Data Information

19%

U.S. Latinx population
reached 63.6 million

1 in 5

Latinxs make up nearly
one-in-five people in the U.S



Latinxs are the second largest
racial or ethnic group

2

2012

American
Latino
Heritage
Theme Study
Released

Percentage of
Spanish
speakers in
2019

62%

>1%

Less than 1% of sites
listed in the National
Register of Historic
Places represent
Latinx history

*Our history
remains unseen*



Acknowledgments



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PUBLIC PARK *Civil Rights* **HISTORY** **STORIES** *Public Park* **LATIN**
BRACERO **FARMWORK**  *Abandoned Cemeteries* **CULTURE**
SPANISH  *Community* **STORIES** **ADVOCACY** *Land* **FARM**
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SPANISH  *Community* **STORIES** **ADVOCACY** *Land* **FAR**
PUBLIC PARK **LATINX** *History* **CIVIL RIGHTS**  **BRA**
ND *Advocacy* **CULTURE**  *Bracero* **SPANISH** **CO**
ANDONED CEMETERIES **COMMUNITY** *Farmwork* **CIVIL RIGH**
CHICANX *Civil Rights* **HISTORY** **STORIES** *Immigrant* **LATINX**
Spanish **STORIES** **PLACES** *Chicanx* **IMMIGRANT** **BRACERO**
PUBLIC PARK *Civil Rights* **HISTORY** **STORIES** *Public Park* **LA**
BRACERO **FARMWORK**  *Abandoned Cemeteries* **CULTURE**
SPANISH  *Community* **STORIES** **ADVOCACY** *Land* **FAR**
PUBLIC PARK **LATIN** **LATIN**  **S** **RIGHTS**  **BRA**
ND *Advocacy* **CULTURE**  *Bracero* **SPANISH** **CO**
ANDONED CEMETERIES **COMMUNITY** *Farmwork* **CIVIL RIGH**

