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# How We Got the Last County on the National Register

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By Sarah Alban

Visit the *National Register of Historic Places* listing on the web, and *read the nomination for the Stoutimore Home in Plattsburg*.

Maybe you've peered at the Federal Reserve Bank in Kansas City or traversed the battleground at Wilson's Creek National Battlefield. Certainly you've ascended the Gateway Arch and toured the Governor's Mansion in Jefferson City.

Properties like these tempt us to explore the past. But how do these properties become preserved and part of the National Register of Historic Places?

Often, professionals are trained by their job or their degree to nominate properties for the register. They can earn up to eight thousand dollars for one listing, or for multiple properties or a historic district, up to thirty thousand dollars.

But occasionally, a novice visits the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) website inquiring how to nominate a property.

We all have buildings we could nominate. Our predecessors realized that several decades ago.

"The spirit and direction of the Nation are founded upon and reflected in its historic heritage," wrote legislators in the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act.

They believed preserving our past orients our future, just as a compass orients our present.

Nearly fifty years since the act was passed, people like me are still nominating properties. I Googled "How to put a property on the national register," with a mind to go through with the process. Thanks to the auspices of *Missouri Life*, I embarked to learn how any Jane Doe—armed with a computer, a library membership, and a general interest in history—could put a property on the register.

Which property? The choice was obvious: I would select any property within the only county in Missouri that was not on the register: Clinton County. In 2013, it

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was Missouri’s sole county—out of 114 without a property on the register.

Clinton County lies forty miles northeast of Kansas City. Its seat is Plattsburg, where historic architecture flourishes: American Foursquare, American Movement, Colonial Revival, Craftsman bungalow, Queen Anne, Eastlake, National Folk, Tudor Revival, and others.

When my mission began, none of these beauties were on the register.

To select one, I phoned the SHPO staff in Jefferson City and asked, “If I’m a writer with zero experience in historic preservation, what would be a good property to nominate in Plattsburg?”

Tiffany Patterson, the SHPO national register coordinator at the time, suggested four houses. I tracked down the owners’ phone numbers from city hall, and the Brown family said they would let me nominate their property, a Second Empire, late Victorian-style home that had been built in 1892.

Filling the Void

How Clinton County became Missouri’s only county without a register listing is an enigma. A century ago, Clinton County was known as the “Mule Capital of the World,” supplying more than 350,000 horses to the government during World War I. A century before that, it was home to David Rice Atchison, known for serving as “President for a Day.” (Whether or not he actually served is debated.)

Plattsburg began as a few log cabins, susceptible to bad storms and weathered by time. In the 1890s, the Rock Island Railroad brought a depot to the town, which spurred agricultural growth on the rich soil.

Soon, the wealthy of Plattsburg invested in a variety of architectural styles, building their dream homes that led to the town’s architectural diversity.

Somehow, even with that wealth of history, Clinton County had nothing on the register. “That’s our big gap on the map,” Patterson said during my exploration process.

In the late 1800s, David and Sallie Stoutimore had a dream home in mind. The young couple had worked family farmland for ten years. As reward, Sallie’s father paid for them to have any home they liked. They chose a Second Empire design

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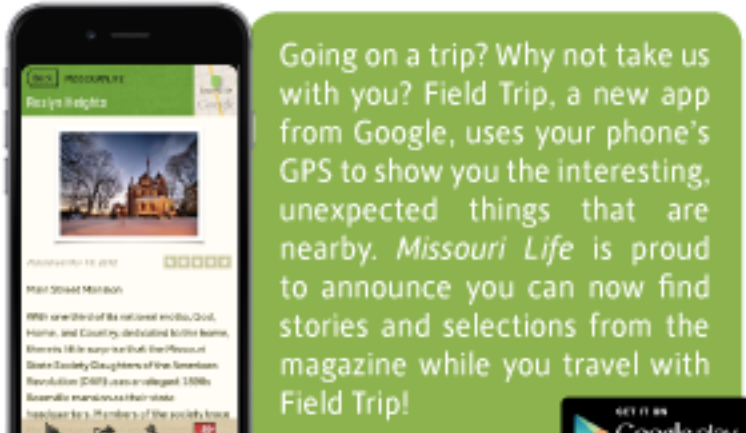
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and had the home built at 501 S. Birch Avenue.

I had found my home, but I had my work cut out for me.

### **Step 1: Drink from the Hose**

Some jobs feel like drinking from a fire hose. Nominating a property can feel like drowning in one and going back for more. Here's how you can survive the first step:

The nomination form lives in a Microsoft Word file that you'll find on the SHPO website, [www.dnr.mo.gov/shpo/index.html](http://www.dnr.mo.gov/shpo/index.html). To find it, click on the Assessing NR Eligibility tab on the right, and scroll to the bottom of the page. The link to the PDF is called "National Register nomination form (including continuation sheets) DOC." Knowing the name is useful when selecting among the files listed on that webpage. The form is ten pages long and takes seconds to download. In theory, you could download it today, fill out the blanks, and turn around a nomination form tomorrow.

I won't walk you through all ten pages, but here's what you have to know about digging into documents so detailed that they might just be from Lucifer's desk.

### **Step 2: Get Descriptive**

The first page is a breeze. You fill out simple stuff: address, property name, and so on. The hardest part might be a geographic "code." You can find this by Googling "National Parks Service Bulletin 16A code." Bulletin 16A is a webpage on the National Parks Service website that gives examples of how to fill out the national register nomination form. Bookmark Bulletin 16A. Print it.

The first difficult parts of the nomination form revolve around two essays: a narrative description and a statement of significance. These essays are written on something called "Continuation pages," which are extra blank pages at the end of your nomination. The form is programmed to expand and to contract as you type, so don't worry about the formatting.

The section 7 "Narrative Description" essay captures the physical and historic essence of your property: where it is, what it looks like, how it was built, etc. Additionally,

"The Statement of Significance" essay in section 8 involves when it was built and how it has changed over the years. In a way, writing this is like creating a thorough



Facebook profile; you want to give your reader a good idea about how the property looked over time. Channel your elevator-pitch mojo, and get ready to persuade.

In addition to providing a history of your building that includes who used it and how it was used, you will want to explain why the property is important. I wrote that the Stoutimore home is the only Second-Empire style home in Plattsburg; that style is also rare in the region.

The best way to get this essay right the first time is to consult the State Historic Preservation Office. If you're nominating your late-Victorian home, for instance, they can direct you to examples of other strong nominations, such as late-Victorian domestic-dwelling nominations that impressed them. Bulletin 16A also suggests ways to structure the paragraphs to meet NHR standards.

My essay spanned six pages.

To start, I consulted assessor records to find owners, interviewed living owners, poked through some online historic census records, and gleaned pertinent facts from a survey the SHPO had done on my property's town, Plattsburg. And it's worth noting the SHPO could know something about the property that you don't.

Make a case for why your property belongs on the register. Missouri receives a relatively high volume of nominations, about twelve to fifteen per quarter. You'll want yours to stand out.

### **Step 3: Point and Shoot**

It's smooth sailing once your essays are in tip-top shape. At this point, you've done the heavy lifting: the research, the writing, and the sourcing. You've waded through architectural jargon.

What's left is listing a bibliography for your essay sources and creating a map record of your property. SHPO limits your map resources, but I found Bing Maps most useful, though you may use Google Maps, and a few others specified by the SHPO. You'll also need to provide floor plans (try an online service such as Google Free Floor Plan Creator or Autodesk Homestyler). I also provided names and contact information of the home's owner.

Next, grab a digital camera or consult a photo-sawvy friend. Shoot in high-resolution (300 digital pixels per inch or the highest resolution possible). Capture the exterior

and, if applicable, the interior.

Capture some sky and grass in the outside shots to show the property in context with the environment.

You can see good photo samples in current nominations on the site. The goal is total property documentation, not artwork, so no Instagram filters.

The nomination requires both digital and printed photos. Digital photos must be in TIFF file format, which I achieved by converting my camera's photos through PhotoShop, though some cameras can shoot natively in TIFF or RAW.

Burn the files to a compact disc. Printed photos must be in black and white on archive-quality paper and ink. Neither Kinko's nor Office Depot knew what "archive quality" meant when I inquired, so I opted for a college campus print shop's top-quality glossy card stock and ink for eleven cents a print. You'll need two printed copies of each photo, plus the images on CD.

With the nomination form, essays, floor plans, maps, bibliography, and prints packaged and mailed, you can breathe easy ... until you receive revisions.

#### **Step 4: Revisit and Revise**

A few weeks after you submit the nomination form, you'll receive a package from the SHPO. By this point, you should be old friends with the staff because little information in your nomination should be new to them, and their comments should be easy to address.

"Sometimes, we will get a complex nomination at deadline, and it's the first time we've seen or heard about it," says SHPO Historic Survey and Registration Coordinator Michelle Diedrich. "Those don't always make it to the agenda."

The SHPO and I went through three sets of revisions, including two before the quarterly meeting and one after the meeting (my formatting was incorrect initially).

Luckily, their patience springs from a fountain of youth, and deadlines are rolling, though you'll want to hit one of the four annual deadlines listed on the SHPO's website.

Each deadline lands about three months before the quarterly Missouri Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (MOACHP) meeting in the Lewis and Clark

Building in Jefferson City. If your building is in a region with a Certified Local Government (CLG), the deadline arrives a couple weeks earlier. (CLGs are local governments that are certified to carry out some of the purposes of the National Historic Preservation Act. The SHPO lists CLGs on its site.) Single site non- CLG properties have a later deadline.

With your deadline identified and met, you're ready to roll.

### **Step 5: Party Time**

With a successful nomination listed, you're invited to the MOACHP quarterly meeting in the capital city.

In fact, you're given coffee, donuts, and soda while a group of people devoted to preserving Missouri's history discuss updates on historic preservation throughout their regions. The session is live-streamed on the SHPO site while passionate people discuss the disrepair, pending demolition, or salvation of registered properties as you wait to make the case for your property to be born again on the register.

The MOACHP board have read your nomination and formed their opinions on your property, so your presentation should be concise; a short PowerPoint will do. This is a time to remind them of your property's story, show additional photos, and chat over breakfast about the significance of your property.

"Most of the nominations that make it to this point—the quarterly meeting—get voted to go on to the National Park Service," Michelle says.

She told me not to worry too much during a break in the meeting, after which point I walked to the podium. I presented my case for the David L. and Sallie Ann Stoutimore House.

Then, I waited.

### **Step 6: Missouri's Compass**

"It was always a goal of Dr. [Bill] Foley when he was the chairman of this committee to make sure that every county in Missouri had a property listed," SHPO Director Mark Miles said on May 10, 2013. "It's taken a long time to don that. But this Plattsburg nomination is an excellent example."



That day, the Stoutimore House became Clinton County's first property on the register. Although the Brown family does not live there now, the SHPO alerted them to the home's listing, and the mayor was also informed. As of early May, the home was for sale.

Today, the Stoutimore Home is one of 2,150 Missouri nominations successfully logged on the register, and though the distinction is primarily honorary, property owners can apply for tax credits to offset the tremendous expense of historic rehabilitation. Commercial-property owners can get more incentives than residential property owners.

"On the bright side," Michelle says, "a National Register listing does have the tendency to instill pride in communities and property owners."

And that's just it: the authors of the 1966 Historic Preservation Act never intended to shower gold coins on owners of historic properties. They intended to instill pride, remind others of the past, and create a future for the next generation by preserving what came before.

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