



# BUILDING BLOCKS

Mills Group Newsletter

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Welcome to another issue of Building Blocks and our connection to you on the news and events of the Mills Group. We are finding the schedule for the spring and summer with many large new home projects, downtown revitalization projects, and construction starting in the Spring on the new 911 Center in Kingwood, WV keeping the whole staff very busy.

You will find this issue sharing with you the preservation process of the Tucker County Bank Building in Parsons, WV, an article on the case study in the routine acts of preservation and we were also featured in the Business of the Week section of the Dominion Post.

We look forward to your comments and input with our newsletter.

Michael J. Mills

### Tucker County Bank Building- Parsons, WV



The Mills Group tackled one of its most ambitious preservation projects yet with the Tucker County Bank Building in Parsons, WV. The three-story brick structure erected in 1903 is an enduring symbol of the golden age of highland lumber and rail. The Parsons Revitalization Organization (PRO) - the project client - hopes the building's restoration will be the first step in a new age of prosperity for Parsons and Tucker County.

As with any preservation project, an historic structures report was necessary. Over the course of months, Mills Group staff have utilized site visits and research to assess the building's existing conditions, the changes it has undergone, and its history. The recently completed document not only lays out the facts as they are today but also clearly maps what needs to be done to restore this edifice to full working capacity. One key step in the process is applying for the building to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, a compendium of the United States' cultural legacy maintained by the Department of the Interior. Researchers are promoting the Bank Building under Criteria C of the Register's requirements. In other words, it is being forwarded as an outstanding example of period architecture that has withstood the test of time, no mean feat in a town ravaged by the Flood of 1985. A successful nomination would recognize the building's merits and by extension Parsons' unique characteristics.

Fundamental points of the nomination are the building's age, style, purpose, location, previous and current state. With a firmly established timeline from the land purchase to construction and first tenant, Mills Group researchers sought to tell the building's story. They discovered it was a Romanesque Revival structure that incorporated elements from other styles. People familiar with the building's history - themselves participants in it - related personal anecdotes that demonstrated the building's importance to a burgeoning town in the Allegheny Highlands. Investigating historic photographs allowed researchers to chart the building's progress through time. Not only was each frame insightful to the Tucker County Bank Building but also to Parsons as a whole. The good times and bad times of a century and more lived in the mountains all laid out and wound around a red brick structure that resisted the toughest impulses of nature to destroy it and the town.

The project is a profession-affirming one for a preservationist. Whatever the outcome, researching the National Register nomination has been an invaluable process for the Mills Group. This marks the first time the firm has undertaken a National Register nomination for a client. Staff members learned new methods of deduction, found new places to seek information, and compiled it all in an interesting format that will certainly enlighten later work, improving its quality by giving them an extra example to reference.

This will definitely be a helpful tool as the Mills Group accepts new projects and expands its boundaries. Staff members will be acquainted with making a convincing argument in a written statement read by someone they have possibly never met face to face. This is exemplary of the constant learning environment the Mills Group strives to maintain.

### Preventive Maintenance and the Projects that Ensur: A Case Study in the Routine Acts of Preservation...

Historic preservation movements are often a reaction to society's inability to maintain cultural resources - previous generations' built legacy. The importance of this responsibility lies in the nature of ancestral structures. Those were built not just for their own era but also for posterity.

Good maintenance practices require the proper data for decision making and a common language to work from. In very general terms building maintenance may be defined as 'the preservation of a building so that it may serve its intended purpose' and 'a combination of any actions carried out to retain an item in, or restore it to an acceptable condition.' The conservation of historic buildings is the first line of defense and requires an offensive stance.

Exposure leads to deterioration, an important concept. All objects are in the process of change. Preventive maintenance can slow the process. Badly executed maintenance can hasten ruination. This problem is aggravated by conservators and stewards not recognizing that good maintenance requires skill, education, knowledgeable oversight and reliable record keeping. One of the crucial problems of preservation today is thus the development of policies, technologies, and tools for reducing this abrasive wear along the interface to acceptable minimal levels and holding it there across time.

The reality of dealing with any historic building is that change happens over time. Sometimes catastrophic events force building stewards to act. Throughout the history of any building many events will take place directly affecting the components that constitute the whole. Events begin with design, followed by construction, then routine and deferred maintenance and modifications.

With each incident there should be accompanying documentation that will provide invaluable data. Documentation will never be perfect since people associated with a building - janitors, maintenance personnel, contractors, owners, tenants - change over time leaving gaps in coverage, changes in format and differences in focus. This turnover is most acutely felt since first hand, primary source knowledge is the most helpful.

Too often building documents become part of the building's dead files (archives) or, worse yet, the circular files. Building stewards are thus challenged in their attempts to establish the baseline data and document changes by the search for documents and the need to fill in gaps and consolidate varying formats. The compiled data needs to inform the personnel with qualitative and quantitative information to allow for conscientious decision making.

Following a collaborative team approach involving facility staff, trades people, architects and engineers is required. The personal knowledge of those who have lived and labored in the facility is inestimably important. Building change over time and the rate of change can be directly related to the maintenance activities that have or have not been done over time.

The start to any existing building's problem solving exercise involves the following process: Research the building-Observe existing conditions-Analyze issues and opportunities-Develop alternatives-Make recommendations-Assemble construction documents-Provide construction observation. A plan that takes one through a series of activities/milestones is a recipe for successful consulting.

### We were pleased to be featured as the Business of the Week in the January 11th issue of the Dominion Post..

Michael Mills, of the MillsGroup LLC, began his business in the fall of 2005 and strives to create new structures influenced by the past.

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YEARS IN BUSINESS: Started firm in fall 2005

SPECIALTY: Architecture, planning and preservation with an integrated sustainable design approach.

MISSION OR MISSION: Designing on the principles of the past and preserving for the future.  
COMMENTS: Since starting the firm in fall 2005, we have maintained a focus on the design of the new structures which encompass the rich architectural character of the past, executed site plans that are respective of the opportunities and constraints and developed sensitive preservation plans for historic buildings. We are diligent in understanding our clients spatial needs, design goals and budget. Our design process is built on the foundation of research, data collection, client collaboration and creative solutions. West Virginia abounds with unearthed architectural treasures. A goal of the practice is to embrace the architectural heritage of the region and to celebrate the best of our past. Our firm is committed to a quality end product which is derived from experience, diligence and collaboration. We look forward to bringing our talents to support you on your next project.

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