

# HERITAGE

THE UTAH HERITAGE FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

FALL 2013

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## A Time and a Place for the Ranch House

BY BIM OLIVER



*Early Ranch Style houses in Hurricane (left) and Orem (right).*

Pity the poor suburban Ranch house. Unassuming. Unadorned. Unappreciated. Given the fact that it is likely the most common house type in Utah, it's easily taken for granted. But the fact that most houses of this type were built in the 1950s and 1960s means that, simply by virtue of their age (50 years old or older), they may be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. So, perhaps it's time to reconsider the status and significance of Utah's Ranch houses.

Following World War II, conditions in Utah were (as they were in the rest of the country) ripe for a housing boom. Over 60,000 Utah service members were returning from the war, and the state's population grew rapidly. Mid-century standards produced by the Federal Housing Administration and the Urban Land Institute set the stage

for vast suburban developments on an unprecedented scale. Between 1940 and the mid-1950s, for example, Utah developer Alan Brockbank built 500 homes in his development that he would call "Rose Park" on the west side of Salt Lake City.

Although per capita income in Utah grew relatively slow after World War II, financing through the FHA and G.I. Bill provided the avenue to home ownership. Between 1944 and 1952, the Veterans Administration guaranteed over 2 million home loans across the country through the G.I. Bill. With both the supply and demand sides of the housing market intensifying, all that was needed was a product that was easy to build and inexpensive to purchase.

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Preserving, protecting and promoting Utah's historic built environment through education, advocacy and active preservation.

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# First Word in Preservation

In this issue of *Heritage*, you'll find "Profits through Preservation: The Economic Impact of Historic Preservation in Utah." This is an Executive Summary of conclusions from the study Utah Heritage Foundation commissioned in November 2012 and completed in June 2013. And the conclusions are revealing about how great an impact the composite sectors of historic preservation has on the state's economy. In fact, when combined together, the job creation and income production from historic preservation activities would be at least the third largest industry in the state. And the report is stuffed full of statistics, information, and case studies that support the findings in six areas: jobs and income, heritage tourism, property values, sustainability, downtown revitalization, and fiscal responsibility.

PlaceEconomics of Washington, D.C. was hired based on their proposal. Principal Donovan Rypkema along with his team of researchers Courtney Williams and Cara Bertron, conducted the study for Utah Heritage Foundation. PlaceEconomics contracted locally with Bim Oliver, Bob Young, and Chelsea Gauthier for research and writing sections of the report. The study was made possible through the support of several generous partners whose names can be found on page 8. In late June, Don Rypkema and I hit the road for a series of community presentations in Park City, Salt Lake City, Ogden, and Brigham City to begin disseminating the results. Over 100 people attended the presentations, including many elected officials and city administrators. Don will also return in September for a series of additional meetings as well as to give a presentation at the Utah League of Cities and Towns conference. If you'd like to see the presentation, visit our website ([www.utahheritagefoundation.org](http://www.utahheritagefoundation.org)) to view or download the PowerPoint or watch the presentation given at the Ladies' Literary Club building in Salt Lake City.

The Executive Summary is the first of three products that will be produced by PlaceEconomics. The others include a 24-page report with more in depth information on each topic area (available mid-September) and the technical report (available in October). All information is available at our website for download and use. And we hope that you do use this information! We believe that it makes a strong case that preserving our heritage

pays back many times over long into the future, thus making the choice to preserve an even smarter one.



Kirk Huffaker  
Executive Director

## A Time and a Place for the Ranch House

Enter the Ranch house. As Thomas Hubka has observed, it was almost always mass-produced, the product of an emerging “modern commercial-industrial economy.” And that new economy was extremely efficient at producing low-cost housing. According to a study by the National Bureau of Economic Research, housing prices nationally peaked in 1952 then dropped precipitously over the next 15 years.

But the proliferation of the Ranch house was much more than a manifestation of market economics. It was the quintessential expression of the “modern” lifestyle. According to the National Park Service (which, among other responsibilities, manages the National Register of Historic Places), “with its low, horizontal silhouette and rambling floor plan, the [Ranch] house type reflected the nation’s growing fascination with the informal lifestyle of the West Coast and the changing functional needs of families.”

The operative term here is “informal.” The Ranch house transformed the small, segregated spaces of its boxy predecessor, the World War II Cottage, into a larger, less compartmentalized living environment. Yes, sleeping spaces were separated from living spaces. But the latter tended to be more connected through an open floor plan in which one space simply led into another. Consider, by contrast, the Victorian home, that might contain several of the following: a parlor, a sitting room, a drawing room, a music room, a dining room, and so on and so on.

The “open” floor plan of the Ranch house extended to and actually incorporated the outdoors. Most were constructed with sliding glass doors that led onto a patio and into the backyard. As professor of landscape architecture Christopher Grampp has observed, following World War II family life moved increasingly to the rear of the home, and modern conveniences like the electric dryer and automatic sprinklers changed the role of the backyard from a utilitarian space to a place for family activity.



*The rigidly rectangular ranch house style was pushed in to the forefront in the 50's and 60's by popular magazine publications including Better Homes and Gardens, Good Housekeeping, House Beautiful, and Sunset.*



But the greatest appeal of the Ranch house was that it accommodated the “modern lifestyle.” Life in the Ranch home played out on one level. The homemaker (yes, that was still you, Mom) no longer had to schlep laundry up and down stairs or go upstairs to wake the kids. Bedrooms, the utility room, the kitchen were all located on one floor – the ground floor. And the open floor plan tended to facilitate a less formal, more casual environment for socializing. But as Cara Greenberg has noted, the appeal of a “modern”

*(continued on page 4)*

## A Time and a Place for the Ranch House



*Most ranch houses in Utah feature a brick exterior and a hipped roof. Earlier ranch homes favored the carport while the later style usually has a garage attached to the end of the home.*

home may well have had much deeper emotional roots in the desire “to escape the stuffy, old-fashioned rooms of their own youths and be, as every young generation wants to be... ‘modern’.”

With all of these attributes in its favor, why, then, is the Ranch so often overlooked as a historic house type? After all, its older cousin, the Bungalow, is revered in Utah. Yet, in its time, the Bungalow was the cheap and easy equivalent to the Ranch. And like the Ranch, the Bungalow is generally plain, simple, unassuming.

Perhaps the Ranch home’s greatest crime is that it is ubiquitous. It’s so common that any one may seem insignificant. And, to many, it doesn’t look “historic.” Granted, it is, in fact, a very modern structure. It shares with its high-style modern cousins (on the other side of the family from the Bungalow cousins) those attributes that we would clearly identify as “modern.” It emphasizes the horizontal. Even its large windows, including picture windows, tend to be longer rather than taller. And the roof has only the slightest pitch, although some roofs are flat. Its façade is most often asymmetrical (in later versions, accentuated on one end by an attached garage). And it displays minimal, if any, ornamentation.

It’s this latter quality – the “unadorned” personality – that is perhaps the most misunderstood. It suggests (or as been interpreted to mean) that the architects and builders who built these homes didn’t care about the outside or the “curb appeal” of the home. But the Ranch home was really about

what happened on the inside much more than what happened on the outside. What builder Cliff May, the person most credited with the developing the Ranch house type, shared with “high-style” Modernist architects like Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and others was a focus on function rather than on form. As the website [ranchostyle.com](http://ranchostyle.com) observes, Cliff May was concerned with “livability rather than façade.”

Or, from the more academic perspective of Thomas Hubka: “The aesthetic idea of the ranch house provided a concise ethical statement about the need to maintain a utilitarian attitude toward living.”

This simplicity of style is what makes the Ranch house most vulnerable to modification. It’s hard, for example, to turn a Victorian home into bungalow or, for that matter, to turn a bungalow into a Victorian home. But the Ranch house’s lack of style makes it easily convertible – to apply any number of treatments to transform it into a house that makes a more personal aesthetic statement. But perhaps a step back, another look will allow us to appreciate the Ranch house for what it was and still is: simple, functional, modern housing.

But the argument is now being made in other parts of the country (most notably California, one of the places where the Ranch house originated) that the Ranch house is significant as a statement of cultural history. And many of the Ranch houses built in Utah in the 1950s and 1960s are now maturing to the point at which – simply on the basis of their age – they could be considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

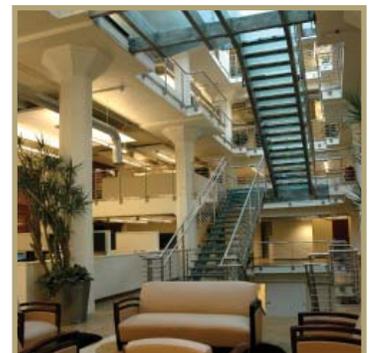
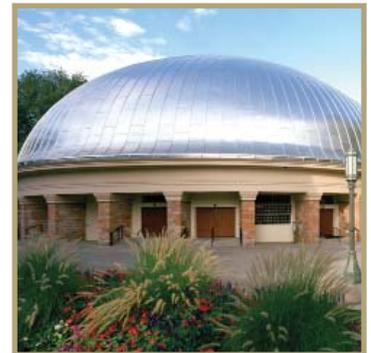
*Bim Oliver is a consultant in historic preservation and managed the Utah State Main Street/Pioneer Communities Program for ten years. Utah Heritage Foundation agrees with his point of view in this article that preservationists statewide should be nominating Ranch houses to the National Register of Historic Places.*

# PROFITS THROUGH PRESERVATION

## The Economic Impact of Historic Preservation in Utah

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Jobs and Income  
Fiscal Responsibility  
Property Values  
Heritage Tourism  
Downtown Revitalization  
Sustainability



Historic preservation in Utah is not about putting a fence around monuments. The historic resources of Utah are part of the daily lives of its citizens. However, the historic resources of Utah are also providing a broad, significant contribution to the economic health of this state.

## JOBS AND INCOME

Rehabilitating a historic building in Utah reclaims an asset and is also a powerful act of economic development that creates jobs, household income, and property value.

Because of the labor intensity of rehabilitation and the relatively high wages for workers, very few industries create more jobs and household income for Utah workers per \$1 million of economic activity than historic preservation.

\$1,000,000 INVESTED IN REHABILITATING A HISTORIC BUILDING IN UTAH MEANS:	
Direct Jobs	10.2
Indirect Jobs	7.5
Direct Salary & Wages	\$536,894
Indirect Salary & Wages	\$310,660
Economic Activity Elsewhere in the Economy	\$998,772
Indirect Business Tax	\$12,127
State Sales Tax	\$22,090

## FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Fiscal responsibility means being prudent with taxpayers' dollars. That is exactly what the Utah State Historic Preservation Tax Credit program does. Since it was adopted by the Legislature in 1994, over 1,100 projects have used this credit as the catalyst for more than \$119 million of private-sector investment. Every dollar of state tax credit generates a minimum of \$4 of private investment. This has resulted in stabilized neighborhoods, revitalized downtowns, sales taxes, property taxes, income taxes, and infrastructure savings — not just restored historic buildings.

The Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit has also been used on projects throughout the state. Since 1990, this credit has kept more than \$35 million in Utah, creating jobs and income here, instead of leaving the state for Washington to invest elsewhere.



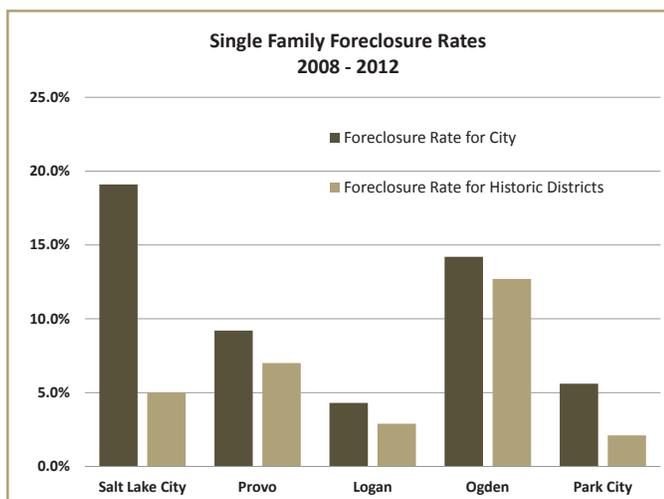
▲ before

▼ after



## PROPERTY VALUES – IN GOOD TIMES AND BAD

Utah citizens appreciate their built heritage, and many of them choose to live in landmark buildings and historic districts. They choose these houses for many reasons — quality of construction, architectural character, convenience of the neighborhood, and others. And the admiration they hold for historic houses is repaid with



higher rates of appreciation in value. National and local historic districts were analyzed in five cities: Logan, Ogden, Park City, Provo, and Salt Lake City. In every instance, the rates of appreciation of homes in historic districts were greater than those in the city as a whole.

When everyone's property is going up in value, perhaps a percentage point or two in higher annual appreciation rates isn't surprising. But what happens to historic houses in times of declining property values? Foreclosure rates over the last five years of real estate chaos were examined in those same five cities.

Both homeowners and their bankers should be happy the decision was made to live in a historic district. In each city, the rate of foreclosure of single family houses in historic districts was lower than that in the city as a whole.

## HERITAGE TOURISM

In some states, “heritage tourism” is a discrete set of activities. In Utah, heritage is incorporated in a wide range of visitor experiences. The 4 million people who visit Temple Square each year come for religious, business, or genealogical reasons, but they are visiting a National Historic Landmark. The 500,000 movie-goers who attend the Sundance Film Festival do so in one of the great historic towns in the West. Nearly 5.5 million visitors travel to Bryce Canyon and Zion national parks for their incredible scenery and unique geology, but they get there by traveling through the Mormon Pioneer Heritage Area, one of 49 National Heritage Areas in the country.

For this study, only the visitation to 62 heritage sites and events were measured. Even so, that represented over 7.2 million visitors with direct expenditures of nearly \$400 million.

## DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Not so long ago, downtowns were written off as a relic of the past. But many Utah towns and cities decided that the historic built environment of the past could be brought back to life, and that downtown could reclaim its rightful place as the heart of the community. In almost every example of successful, sustained downtown revitalization in Utah, the rehabilitation and reuse of historic buildings has been a key component.

Historic downtowns provide a natural incubator for local entrepreneurs. These businesses are central to local economic stability. Historic downtowns communicate the identity of the community. Focusing on historic downtowns provides the means for effectively and efficiently managing growth in a fiscally responsible manner.

## SUSTAINABILITY

The 19th century pioneers who settled in Utah were good stewards because they had to be. Neither land nor resources could be wasted, so when they built buildings, those buildings were built to last. And many of them are still standing today. In the 21st century Utahns are good stewards because they have learned to be. From the restoration of the Tabernacle in Provo to a new roof on a bungalow in the Avenues to the pioneer courthouse in St. George, institutions, governments and individuals are reinvesting in the resources of yesterday for use tomorrow. They are doing so for economic reasons, but also for environmental reasons. In Utah, building an identical house in another location or demolishing and replicating a house on the existing site would mean 4 to 7 times more materials produced, transported and disposed of than rehabilitating an existing historic house in its current location. Historic preservation has appropriately been called the ultimate in recycling.



# BY THE NUMBERS

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN UTAH

- \$717,811,000** Direct and indirect spending by visitors to Utah heritage sites and special events
- \$198,379,272** Salaries and wages paid as a result of historic preservation projects using Federal or State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits
- \$177,276,340** Amount of private investment in historic buildings using the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit
- \$119,273,302** Amount of private investment in historic buildings using the Utah State Historic Preservation Tax Credit
- \$35,455,268** Investment that stayed in Utah rather than sent to Washington because of the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit
- 7,300,000** Number of visitors to Utah heritage sites and special events each year
- \$4,374,000** Additional statewide annual property tax revenues from investment in historic preservation projects
- 7,313** Direct and indirect jobs generated by the heritage portion of Utah’s tourism industry
- 4,969** Jobs from historic preservation projects using Federal or State Historic Tax Credits
- 2,470** Housing units rehabilitated using the State Historic Tax Credit
- 1,128** Number of projects using the State Historic Tax Credit
- 350** Tons of raw and waste materials generated when an older house is demolished and replaced with a new one. Rehabilitating the same older house generates *only 50 tons* of materials.
- 100%** Cities where foreclosure rate was lower in historic districts than the rest of the city
- 68** Average “Walk Score” for historic preservation projects in Salt Lake City, as compared to an overall city score of 58
- 33%** Increase in downtown sales volume in Mt. Pleasant in the decade after it became a Main Street community
- 15%** Tourists in Utah who visited a historic site during their stay

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Utah Heritage Foundation commissioned this study. This study was funded in part by the following: Cedar City Brian Head Tourism Bureau, George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Salt Lake City Corporation, Southern Utah University Regional Services, Utah Division of State History, Utah State Parks, Utah Transit Authority, and Zions Bank. The report was prepared and written by Donovan D. Rypkema, principal of PlaceEconomics, a Washington, D.C.-based real estate and economic development consulting firm. The report was designed by Stefanie Borys, Utah State Parks.

The activity that is the subject of this report has been financed in part with federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior, and administered by the State Historic Preservation Office of Utah. The contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior or the Utah State Historic Preservation Office, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of Interior or the Utah State Historic Preservation Office.

This program receives federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability or age in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or if you desire further information, please write to: Office for Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.

# Preservation Issues

## Tremonton SDAT

Tremonton City has been awarded one of seven grants awarded nationally to contact an SDAT (Sustainable Design Assessment Team) program. The SDAT program is a community assistance program that focuses on the principles of sustainability. SDATs bring teams of volunteer professionals (such as architects, urban designers, landscape architects, planners, hydrologists, economists, attorneys, and others) to work with community decision-makers and stakeholders to help them develop a vision and framework for a sustainable future.

The SDAT program is based on the American Institute of Architect's goal of helping communities create a sustainable relationship between humans, the natural environment, and place. By achieving a balance between cultural, environmental, and economic systems, communities can sustain a place for human settlement. In the end, the SDAT program provides a broad assessment to help frame any future policies or design solutions in the context of sustainability. The participation of Utah Heritage Foundation was requested to provide expertise to the assessment team in historic preservation during their meetings in August and will be assisting in the implementation of recommendations for the historic Main Street area.



*Downtown Tremonton's Main Street features early twentieth century commercial architecture that the community would like to utilize as the centerpiece for revitalization.*



*Main Street in Tremonton, c. 1950.*

# Preservation Issues

## Save the Federal Rehab Tax Credit!

In June, Senators Orrin Hatch and Max Baucus (D-MT) in their leadership positions on the Senate Finance Committee, requested input from their colleagues on which elements of the tax code should be retained as part of tax reform. According to reports, they did not receive much from the other Senators who were hesitant to put anything in writing. However, we have heard that they received a lot of input from individuals, companies, and organizations. Many preservationists and historic preservation organizations nationwide have raised their voices asking to retain the Federal Investment Tax Credit, otherwise known as the federal rehab tax credit.

Between 2001 and 2011, this tax incentive has worked to transform 63 formerly vacant or underutilized historic buildings in Utah, totaling nearly \$200 million in project costs, at a cost of only \$31.5 million to federal taxpayers. It is the single greatest preservation tool available today to get preservation work happening. And just look at our recent study to see the amount of private investment it leverages. Without the federal rehab tax credit, projects just wouldn't happen because there would be an unfillable financial gap and our cities and towns would decay.

The Congressional tax reform debate will be happening throughout September and we need your help to communicate the importance of the tax credit to all of Utah's delegation, particularly Senator Orrin Hatch. We need them to understand the how this program helps preserve our heritage, creates jobs, attracts investment and turns the places we live into places we love, while also paying for itself many times over. Ask Senator Hatch to stand up for the federal historic tax credit.

Sen. Orrin Hatch	8402 Federal Building
104 Hart Office Building	125 South State Street
Washington, DC 20510	Salt Lake City, UT 84138
(202) 224-5251	(801) 524-4380

For additional contact options, please visit Orrin Hatch's website. For more information and talking points on the preserving the tax credit, visit [www.utahheritagefoundation.org](http://www.utahheritagefoundation.org).



*The Bissinger Co. Hides Warehouse (left) in Salt Lake City's Granary District is one of many historic buildings that need the federal historic rehab tax credit to make it financially feasible.*



*The federal historic rehab tax credit was instrumental in getting the First Security Bank Building rehabilitated.*

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**Saturday, October 5th  
4:00 - 8:00 p.m.**

An evening experiencing six historic drinking establishments. Learn about the architecture, the history of beer in Utah, and what could be Utah's first "buy local" movement!

TICKETS AVAILABLE ONLINE

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