

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

NATIONAL REGISTER GUIDELINES FOR PROPERTY EVALUATION

Number 883

1988

National Register guidelines (Bulletin 32) for evaluating properties associated with prominent individuals are plausible when applied positively, but they create problems that make them unacceptable when applied negatively. Our difficulty arises from their inconsistency with statutory objectives of historic preservation legislation of 1966 that was designed to protect local cultural resources from destructive actions of irresponsible federal agencies.

As is recognized in this bulletin, National Register identification was provided to serve local properties rather than National Historic Landmarks that already were recognized by previous legislation. In attempting to select properties most appropriate for prominent individuals, these guidelines disregard and tend to exclude some properties that may represent our primary cultural resources for one locality because something more suitable for recognition has survived somewhere else. A calamity to a superior property in another locality might suddenly make a local property eligible--and for National Historic Landmarks such an approach is appropriate--but extension of that system to recognition of local resources has to be rejected as absurd.

Additional information concerning William Blair (p. 7-8) or R. E. Pattison (p. 29) would be helpful, but even if those properties should turn out to be associated with less consequential aspects of their careers, they might easily represent superior resources (because of such associations) for those localities, regardless of what might be available someplace else.

We have generally avoided justifying our nominations with individual association, although association ought to be noted where applicable even though it might be minimal or minor. But we still anticipate problems. We ought, for example, to grind out a twenty-first century nomination for Ernest Hemingway's house in Ketchum because of its local importance there, but I have not suggested it for National Historic Landmark consideration. For that property, this bulletin is clearly unacceptable, and we shall need to get inappropriate elements in it struck down. Another rather interesting example is provided by Mount Vernon, which some people in Virginia regard as of at least local interest. It might easily be smuggled in as a good example of a plantation of its time, but under Bulletin 32 its association with George Washington fails to qualify it even for local recognition. They might make some kind of a local association for Martha Washington, though.

Publications--450 N. 4th Street, Boise, ID 83702--208-334-3428