TO REPAIR OR REPLACE?

How to make decisions about features in an historic landscape....

While we commonly think of historic properties as a building or a collection of buildings, like a farm and its outbuildings, historic properties may include a wide range of significant features in addition to buildings. For example, contributing components of a property might be topography (the height, depth or shape of natural or human-made ground features), vegetation (hedges, fields, wooded areas), circulation features (roads, paths, trails, parking areas, navigable waterways), natural and human-made water features, and structures, site furnishings and objects. These features are often encountered in a variety of state or federal undertakings and their extent and condition can vary widely.

Below is a listing of options that should be considered to ensure conformance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and the corollary Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes. It is important to remember that:

----because the Standards view the environment as a cohesive whole containing multiple layers of history representing continuous use and occupation, new features in the environment should be either based on documented historic examples or be compatible with the property but contemporary in nature; however, your work should never create a false sense of history or historic development.

----because the Standards emphasize retention of actual historic material over appearance (the "real McCoy"), repairing and retaining an historic but deteriorated feature will always be recommended over replacement, even where that replacement is exact and in kind.

----because the Standards acknowledge that changes over time reflect patterns of growth and social trends, repairing a later-but-historic feature will generally be recommended over replacement, even where that replacement will match an earlier documented appearance.

Where there is an original historic light, sign, fence, etc., you should:

a) Repair the original feature, thereby retaining it in its historic location, its contribution to the property and its relationship to the property's other historic features. This may require replacing those components that are missing, damaged or deteriorated beyond repair by matching the original as closely as possible. The inability to procure materials that match the historic exactly is never a good reason to remove an otherwise intact historic feature. In fact, if what has happened over time is discernible under scrutiny ("This is an historic brick sidewalk, and this area is new or was patched recently") you're actually telling a true story—and that is a good thing.
2. Where the original feature has been removed but there is a later contributing (historic) light, sign, fence, etc., you should:

a) Repair the later contributing feature, thereby retaining its location, its contribution to the property and its relationship to the property’s other historic features, even where there is good documentation of the earlier feature or condition. This may require replacing those components that are missing or deteriorated beyond repair by matching their historic counterparts as closely as possible.

3. Where all original and later historic features have been removed but there is a contemporary non-historic light, sign, fence, etc., you should (in preferred order):

a) Remove the non-historic feature and replace it with a new feature whose material, color/finish, design, appearance and location/spacing exactly match the historic conditions based on conclusive historic or photographic documentation or physical evidence.

b) Remove the non-historic feature and replace it with a new contemporary feature whose material, color/finish, design, general appearance and location/spacing are compatible with, but do not match, historic conditions based on conclusive historic or photographic documentation or physical evidence.

c) Retain the non-historic feature. (This may call for very limited replacement, e.g. the in-kind replacement of one modern cobra-head fixture in a row of similar fixtures.) However, if your program calls for the replacement of all of the modern cobra-heads, options “a” and “b” above should be considered.

4. Where there never were historic features like lights, signs, fences, etc. but they are required as part of the historic property today, it is appropriate to install a new contemporary feature:

a) whose material, finish, color, design, general appearance, location and spacing are compatible with the historic property, its setting and its period of significance;

b) whose presence in the landscape is clearly secondary to the extant historic features; and

c) whose appearance will not produce a false historic appearance or sense of development.

Installing historic-appearing features where similar features never existed historically is not appropriate.