

Dorothy “Dot” Phillips, a 76-year-old resident of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, is the consummate hostess, even while entertaining in a place that is not, strictly speaking, her home. On a fiercely hot June afternoon she’s serving coffee and cookies to a small group that includes Marty Hylton, the World Monuments Fund Initiatives Manager, who’s come to visit Dot at her temporary quarters at 115 Carroll Avenue. Until Hurricane Katrina hit, Dot entertained visitors a few blocks away, at 222 North Beach Boulevard, a two-story Americanized version of the Creole Cottage constructed ca. 1840 that was a fixture in one of Bay St. Louis’ many historic districts.

But Katrina’s ten-meter storm surge devastated Dot’s home, leaving her in a quandary: demolish the historic structure that’s been in the family for six generations and start over, or invest the enormous amounts of time and energy needed to restore the house. She’s decided on the latter course, thanks in no small measure to the efforts of WMF.

A month after Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, WMF and its partners, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Preservation Trades Network (PTN), and the University of Florida College of Design, Construction, and Planning launched a program

In Katrina’s Wake

WMF helps two communities devastated by the storm restore a sense of place

by ERIC POWELL

to assist historic districts affected by the storm. Recovery has been slow, thwarted by a number of issues—including loss of infrastructure, lack of resources, and lingering questions about rebuilding—but WMF and its partners are successfully working with local groups, with a focus on Bay St. Louis and New Orleans’ Holy Cross neighborhood in the Lower Ninth Ward, to stabilize landmark properties, prepare buildings or properties for reoccupation, and plan for long-term restoration.

“We bring decades of international experience in preserving the historic fabric of communities ravaged by man-made or natural disaster,” says Hylton. “From Venice following the flood of 1966 to Mostar in Bosnia-Herzegovnia following the Balkan conflict in the 1990s. We can use this experience to assist with recovery from the largest natural disaster in US history.”

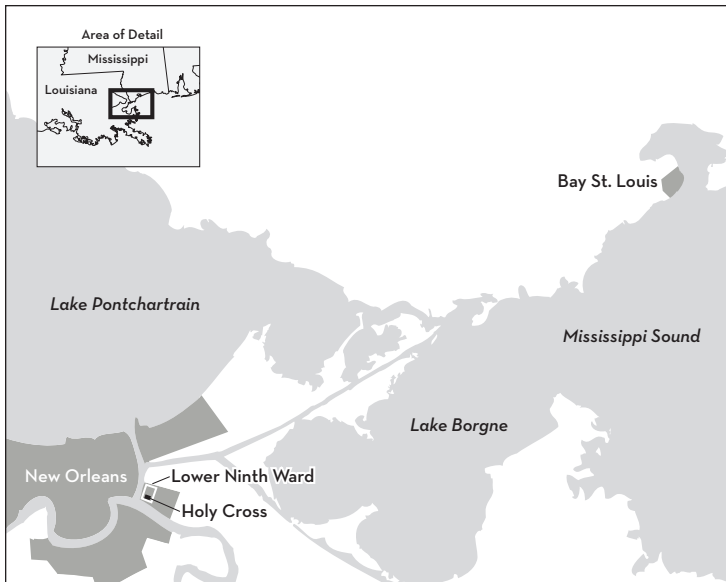
WMF is now a household name in Holy Cross and Bay St. Louis and Hylton is a familiar and welcome face in places as different as the Hancock County Historical Society and Holy Cross’ Greater Little Zion Missionary Baptist Church, one of only two churches now active in the Lower Ninth Ward. As WMF’s liaison to the impacted communities, Hylton has heard story after story about the storm. Dot, who weathered the hurricane with her brother Russell at 222 North Beach Boulevard, has one of the most harrowing.

“I don’t know what I was thinking, but as the water started to come in I got a mop and bucket and started to try to get the front of the house dry,” says Dot. “We were far from realizing the scope of this thing. The water kept coming and the wind finally blew the door open and I could see the gulf, with its white caps, coming up to





BAY ST. LOUIS, MISSISSIPPI, RESIDENT DOROTHY PHILLIPS STANDS IN FRONT OF THE REMAINS OF HER CA. 1840 HOME. A WMF-SPONSORED RESTORATION PROJECT HAS SINCE STABILIZED THE STRUCTURE.



the house. Russell and I ran to the back of the house. I wouldn't leave, but Russell kept running through the side door to check on the house. He would come back and say 'the front porch is gone,' 'the breakfast nook is gone.'" The two spent the next eight hours waiting for Katrina to pass. "It left an awful black sludge, a black mud that was so thick, we couldn't leave to check to see who else was alive."

Her neighbor Kevin Guillory's house was simply washed out to sea. He survived by clinging to a tree. The late eighteenth-century shotgun belonging to Charles Hecker right next door to the Phillips house was left in almost complete ruins. North Beach Boulevard as a thoroughfare has ceased to exist.

When they did emerge to inspect the damage, an eerie sight greeted them. "There was Uncle Sam's head," says Dot, who stored the costumes for her *krewe* (or Mardi Gras parade group) the "Marching Fools from Istanbul" upstairs. "The storm somehow swept them out too. There were frog heads, dog heads, all our costumes from years past, scattered on the ground." She shakes her head at the memory. "You had to laugh," says Dot. "We were

lucky to be alive."

Katrina destroyed more than 60,000 buildings in Mississippi; as many as 1,000 of these were National Register landmarks, including most of the structures that made up the Shearwater Pottery Compound in Ocean Springs, Mississippi (see page 35). The Mississippi Heritage Trust, a partner of WMF's on the Gulf Coast, has estimated that 2,000 historic properties, the majority private residences, remain vulnerable to demolition as owners lack the understanding, funding, or fortitude to stabilize and restore their homes.

Over the past year, WMF has worked with national partners to present alternatives to demolition along the Mississippi Gulf Coast by sponsoring demonstration restoration projects on building types common to the area, such as the American Creole cottage, and typical post-disaster conditions, such as a house washed from its foundation by the storm surge. Two of the demonstration projects are in Bay St. Louis: Dot's home, also known as the "Trawick-Phillips House," and the Hecker House next door.

The first project was to document and salvage what remained of the Hecker House, one of the oldest structures in Bay St. Louis. Access to the site proved so difficult that special measures were taken to move in the heavy equipment needed to assist with the operation. Working with the

WMF'S MARTY HYLTON ASSESSES THE PHILLIPS HOUSE WITH SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS STUDENT KIMBERLY MERCHANT, WHOSE DESIGN FOR THE INTERIOR OF THE HOUSE WON HER A PRESTIGIOUS DONGHIA SCHOLARSHIP.



Saving An Artist's Home

It's like you've lost people," says Leaf Anderson as she surveys what remains of Ocean Springs, Mississippi's fabled Shearwater Pottery compound. A ten-hectare site overlooking the Gulf of Mexico, the compound, a National Register Historic District, has been the home of the artistic Anderson clan for three generations. Just three of the 15 buildings in the property were left undamaged by Katrina. Thousands of paintings, works of pottery, and woodcuts were destroyed or heavily damaged in the storm.

Leaf's voice trembles as she points to a small cottage, "Daddy's house was washed off its foundations. But it's still here." The small house, once the home of Walter Anderson, posthumously recognized as one of the great Southern contemporary artists, was built around 1850. For the Andersons today, the cottage is the compound's spiritual center.

A demonstration project sponsored by World Monuments Fund and the Mississippi Heritage Trust got the cottage back on its foundations, but work remains to be done. Inside are a group of eclectic, acrylic murals painted by Walter Anderson. Birds, cows, and other animals cavort on the walls of the kitchen and bathroom. A WMF grant has allowed conservator Rosa Lowinger to visit the site, most recently in August, to assess the murals and develop a strategy for their restoration.

"The murals are very vulnerable," says Lowinger. "There has been heavy water damage, but we can save them." WMF hopes to raise the funds to assist in the murals conservation. A historic preservation easement placed on the property as part of the demonstration restoration project will hopefully ensure that the murals are enjoyed by the public for generations to come.



Hancock County Historical Society, the house was dismantled and what remained of the original materials was put in nearby storage. The Society hopes to reconstruct the house and use it as an interpretive center documenting what was lost and describing how Bay St. Louis physically changed as the result of the storm.

One of the most active societies on Mississippi's Gulf Coast, the Hancock County Historical Society's mission to record the town's past has taken on a new sense of urgency. "We had 576 landmarks structures in town," says society president Charles Grey. "Half of those are now lost. And I mean they are gone—including my own."

One of those landmark structures, Dot's house has been stabilized, and a temporary roof installed. As a means of conveying appropriate preservation planning to local homeowners, WMF has supported the completion of a historic structures report that documents the Phillips House's past and existing conditions and lays out plans for its restoration. Dot and her family are comforted by the idea that their choice to restore the house is being supported. "This house is my link to the past," says Dot's daughter, Noel Fell. "Six generations have lived here. My heart and my hope is that we can see the house as it originally was. We want the warmth of the house back."

Approximately half of the 8,000 pre-Katrina (or pre-K, as some residents wryly describe it) population has returned to Bay St. Louis. The Aiklen family is just one. "There was never any question that we would come back," says Kathleen Aiklen, who evacuated to California with her husband and three daughters and has been back since June. "But when you walk down the beach road it's the strangest, oddest experience. It's as if you were looking at dollhouses, because houses are just split open."

The impulse to stroll down what used to be North Beach Boulevard and survey the damage is irresistible. While the sight of missing houses, devastated buildings, and dying live oaks is dispirit-



In Katrina's Wake Restoring a Sense of Place

An exhibition of photographs by

STEPHEN WILKES
through December 1, 2006

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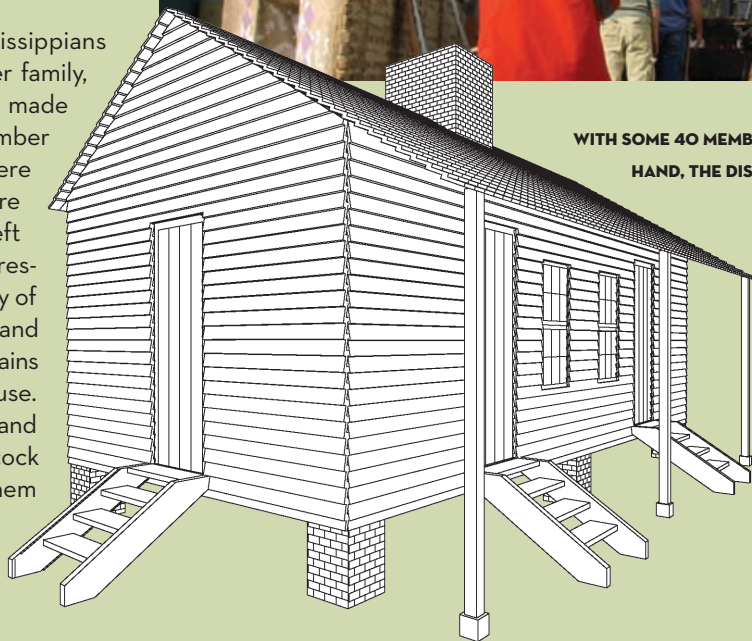
Admission is free

Alternative to Demolition

The late eighteenth-century Hecker House was once among the oldest homes in town. Facing the Gulf of Mexico along Bay St. Louis' elegant North Beach Boulevard, the house was originally a two-room cottage. Over the years it was modified until it resembled a shotgun house with a side "gallery" or porch. The small home was an important contributing structure to the Beach Boulevard National Register Historic District. Then Hurricane Katrina hit.

During the storm, a live oak tree fell on the house, demolishing the roof and front porch and revealing a hand-hewn timber frame, original plaster walls, and finishes concealed by later paneling and modifications. The house was re-discovered by timber framer Rudy Christian, vice president of the Preservation Trades Network, and WMF representative Marty Hylton during their first mission to the Gulf Coast a few weeks after Katrina.

Like tens of thousands of other Mississippians faced with their home in ruins, the Hecker family, who has owned the property since 1956, made the tough decision not to rebuild. In December 2005, in an effort to demonstrate that there are alternatives to the demolition of the more than 2,500 landmark properties Katrina left in partial ruin, WMF and its partners the Preservation Trades Network and the University of Florida College of Design, Construction and Planning documented and salvaged the remains of the original two-room portion of the house. Antique timber frames, plaster walls, doors, and windows were all put in storage. The Hancock County Historical Society intends to use them to reconstruct the house, which will serve as an interpretative center dedicated to documenting the more than 250 historic properties lost in Bay St. Louis.



WITH SOME 40 MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY ON HAND, THE DISMANTLING OF THE HISTORIC HECKER HOUSE FOR FUTURE RECONSTRUCTION SERVED AS A RALLYING POINT FOR THE SMALL TOWN OF BAY ST. LOUIS.

ing, anyone passing Dot's house can't miss the signs of stabilization and repair. Graffiti on the side of the house reads: "222 North Beach Blvd. is being restored!"

Some 100 kilometers to the west, New Orleans' historic Holy Cross presents a stark contrast to Bay St. Louis. Some of its 2,000 properties—mid-to late-nineteenth-century shotguns, Creole Cottages, and postwar suburban ranch houses—were badly damaged by the one to two meters of water that poured into the area from the nearby Industrial Canal levee break. But the houses, while damaged, are largely intact. There are none of the ruins that make driving through Bay St. Louis or the neighboring Lower Ninth Ward such a painful experience.

Still, Holy Cross Neighborhood Association president Pam Dasilell puts the number of residents back at less than 300 out of the more than 5,500 who lived in the area before Katrina. Utilities have yet to be restored to some parts of the neighborhood, and there is virtually no infrastructure. Less than a dozen businesses are open in the general vicinity. The population of New Orleans as a whole is estimated to be only one-third its pre-Katrina total of 480,000.

This means the neighborhood is a virtual ghost town. Here and there a visitor can spot a moving van, or cars full of volunteers from out of state on their way to gut a home. But for the most part, there are only empty streets and the inevitable sound of cicadas.

On a recent week in June, though, there is at least one block in Holy Cross that is an exception. The corner of Lizardi and Chartres streets, the home of the Greater Little Zion Missionary Baptist Church, is filled with the sound of hammers and saws coming from all directions. Behind the church, Derrick Rattler is back repairing his 1863 shotgun. Up Lizardi, Charles Banks, a carpenter who has made pews for many of the churches in the Lower Ninth Ward, is hard at work fixing up his daughter's house. For him the job is a kind of memorial—he lost his daughter in Katrina. Hazzlette Gillette, who lives across the street from Banks and is a deacon at Greater Little Zion, never left. He stayed in his house right through the flooding and its aftermath, even attaining a modicum of celebrity by virtue of his televised encounters with relief workers trying to force him to leave. Today he isn't home, though. Gillette is at the church hauling lumber, sistering joints, and cutting wood.

A WMF/PTN Demonstration Restoration Project and Workshop is underway at Greater Little Zion, aimed at reconstructing the church floor using traditional methods sympathetic to the structure's original architecture. PTN members Bill Hole of Eureka, California, and David Gibney of Smithsburg, Maryland are leading the workshop, assisted by Hylton, the Reverend Gilbert Scie, and Deacon Gillette.

Before Katrina devastated New Orleans, 72 churches were active in the Ninth Ward. The congregations were not just anchors and centers of activity for the local community, but also served a large network of former residents who returned to the neighborhood every Sunday. The recovery of Holy Cross and the Ninth Ward will hinge in part on the return of the churches, perhaps the area's most vital institutions.

"There's a need for churches in this neighborhood," says Scie. "And we want to be there for those whose churches aren't coming back." Though his congregation is not yet back to its



REVEREND GILBERT SCIE OF THE GREATER LITTLE ZION MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH AT WORK RESTORING THE CHURCH FLOOR DURING A RECENT WMF/PTN DEMONSTRATION PROJECT. WHILE IT HAS NOT REACHED ITS PRE-KATRINA LEVELS, THE CONGREGATION, BELOW, MEETS EVERY SUNDAY WITHOUT FAIL.





A CARPENTER BY TRADE, HOLY CROSS RESIDENT CHARLES BANKS LOST HIS DAUGHTER IN KATRINA, AND IS NOW RESTORING HER HOME A FEW DOORS DOWN FROM GREATER LITTLE ZION. WHIMSICAL "STEAMBOAT GOTHIC" HOUSES BUILT BY TWO RIVERBOAT CAPTAINS IN 1912, AROUND THE SAME TIME GREATER LITTLE ZION WAS ESTABLISHED, ARE THE NEIGHBORHOOD'S SIGNATURE BUILDINGS.

pre-Katrina level of some 200, dozens of parishioners make the trip to Holy Cross for services each Sunday, some driving as many three hours one way. "It's hard not to focus a sermon on Katrina. You'd think after a year... But no matter what the subject matter is, the devastation of Katrina will always play a part in what you're talking about. You just can't get away from it. It affects you mentally, financially, and spiritually."

Greater Little Zion was the first congregation in the neighborhood to return, and began holding services in a tent in May. While the church was damaged by flooding, almost as much harm was done by well-meaning volunteers who gutted the building, stripping out its original wood floors, which likely could have been salvaged—an unanticipated threat to the flood-damaged buildings of post-Katrina New Orleans.

The historic houses of New Orleans that retained their original materials sustained considerably less damage than homes that had been renovated or buildings of more recent vintage. After flooding, houses with modern dry wall, which contains a paper coating, had more mold damage than those with traditional plaster walls. Original floors, millwork, windows, and doors made of cypress—harvested from the swamps drained to create many of the city's residential neighborhoods—tended to survive thanks to the wood's rot-resistant properties. A significant component of WMF's mission in Holy Cross is to educate homeowners and tradespeople about the benefits of using historic building materials and techniques in repairing their homes.

During the workshop, Bill Hole takes time out to talk with a group of high-school age volunteers from Richmond, Virginia, gutting a house down on Chartres Street. They discuss what materials should be saved and what should be discarded. The conversation results in the house's plaster walls staying intact.

In addition to the restoration of Greater Little Zion, as well as four other historic properties in Holy Cross this fall, this kind of in-the-field encounter is one of the main goals of the WMF and PTN's program in Holy Cross. PTN members rotating through the neighborhood offer free advice and hands-on consultations with property owners in the area seeking to restore their historic homes. Evelyn Stanley, an 80-year-old Holy Cross resident of French-German descent, was one of the first to have her house assessed. "I couldn't turn my back on the house and the neighborhood. I've never lived anywhere else," says Stanley, who still owns the 1898 shotgun her grandparents built. Stanley has seen the neighborhood's transition from a semi-rural suburb where the descendants of freed slaves and Irish and German immigrants who owned property to a largely African-American inner-city neighborhood. "One thing that's never changed is the friendliness of the neighborhood," says Stanley. "If anything, I've made more friends since Katrina."

To reach out to more residents like Stanley, WMF and PTN have launched a Mobile Preservation Unit—a recreational vehicle re-appropriated as a roaming field office—that is staffed by rotating teams of experts in building trades and preservation. To date, WMF and PTN have made hands-on assessments of more than 75 buildings in Holy Cross.





GREATER LITTLE ZION PARISHIONERS, JAZMINE MCKAIN, 6, AND BYRONIKA THOMAS, 15, STRIKE A POSE IN FRONT OF THE MOBILE PRESERVATION UNIT. THE RECREATIONAL VEHICLE WAS INTENDED TO SERVE AS A FIELD OFFICE FOR PRESERVATION TRADES NETWORK VOLUNTEERS AS THEY OFFERED FREE ASSESSMENTS TO NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS TRYING TO RESTORE HISTORIC HOMES.

Still another dimension of WMF's effort in Holy Cross involved working with students from the University of Florida College of Design, Construction and Planning to survey the more than 2,000 buildings in the area and update the records of the New Orleans Historic District Landmarks Commission. Eventually, the data collected by the students, along with other surveys done by the Army Corps of Engineers and others, will be put on a website for the neighborhood association. Information on every single property, including historic photos, will be available online for homeowners and anyone else involved in the reconstruction effort. Hylton hopes the site can be used as a public forum to connect those with a stake in revitalizing Holy Cross and the city as a whole.

"In New Orleans, preservation has never been about the singular monument, but rather the entire historic context," says Hylton. "It is the neighborhoods of close packed wooden shotguns and cottages that remain in danger. That's one of the reasons WMF developed a multifaceted program that addresses the need to preserve neighborhoods in their entirety."

Following up on the successful reinstallation of Greater Little Zion's floor, WMF is sponsoring an International Preservation Trades Workshop in October, which will focus on restoring three buildings in Holy Cross. The personal contacts established through the neighborhood association and Greater Little Zion will be key to the workshop's success.

"Preservation isn't just about buildings," says Hylton. "Buildings aren't anything without the people who they matter to." His time on the Gulf Coast, particularly the week spent on the demonstration project at Greater Little Zion, has been one of the highlights of his career. "It's a small thing, the floor of one building when there are 120,000 buildings that have been impacted. But we were getting our hands dirty. It was progress." ■