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National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of our country's cultural resources worth preserving. It was authorized by Congress in 1966 with the National Historic Preservation Act. This act directed the Secretary of the Interior to compile an official list of cultural resources in the United States worth preserving, including "sites, buildings, objects, districts, and structures significant in American history, architecture, archaeology and culture" and to include those which are significant to the nation, states, or local communities.

After the Act was passed, the Secretary of the Interior chose to decentralize the responsibilities given him by writing to each of the governors of the respective states and territories, and asking them to appoint an individual within the state government who could carry out these responsibilities. Thus, each state has an appointed State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). In Illinois, the program is administered by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA).

Philosophically, the National Register is an attempt on the part of Congress to bring the voice of American citizens interested in the preservation of the national patrimony into the dialogue of change at the planning table before Federal tax dollars are spent and Federal licenses issued which would affect such resources.



The Virginia Theatre, 203 W. Park, Champaign, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on November 28, 2003. To date, forty-six individual buildings and one district in Champaign County are on the National Register. Four listed buildings have been demolished.

Prior to 1966, Americans interested in the physical evidences of their history, whether at the local, state or national levels, had no legal voice in how their tax dollars were spent on projects which would affect the existing built environment. At that time, the urban renewal program of the Department of Housing and Urban Development was demolishing vast areas of American cities, and the new Department of Transportation was plowing through built resources of past generations to put into place the interstate highway program.

The National Register is a restriction on the Federal government—not the private citizen—on how it affects private citizens and their property with the use of Federal tax dollars and/or Federal licenses. It is a common misconception that placement of private property on the National Register pre-

vents an owner from changing his property. This is not true. There is no restriction in this law that prevents property owners from doing what they want with their own property, with their own money. There is also no obligation on the part of the private citizen to give the public access to his house unless he has received grant money through this program which he has spent on the interior or elsewhere which cannot be readily seen from the public right-of-way. In that case, he has an obligation to show how he spent taxpayers' money by agreeing to open his house 12 days a year if requested by the SHPO's office.

Levels of Significance

Placing a building on the National Register is a recognition that it has value and significance to either the whole nation or the state or the