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Center for Historic Houses: New Advocacy for Historic House Owners

Historic Huntsville Foundation

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Center for Historic Houses

New Advocacy for Historic House Owners

[From **Preservation News**, October 1985, the monthly newspaper of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.]

From the ladies who saved Mount Vernon in the 1840's to young couples restoring "starter homes" today, owners and lovers of historic houses have long been the backbone of preservation. In fact, it was a group of history and architecture enthusiasts who helped create the National Trust in 1949 and now comprise much of its current membership of 160,000. [175,000 as of October 1986.]

These enthusiasts may be architects who insist on high restoration standards, educators who bring history alive and open eyes to fine craftsmanship, and artisans who invent sensitive methods to fight time's ravages. But often they are house owners who must develop these skills simply to survive in a world that can be hostile to historic houses.

For example, historic house owners face problems ranging from high maintenance costs to the difficulty of obtaining insurance. Building codes, fire codes, zoning

and taxation frequently are stacked against them. There are no government grants to ease these burdens and until now no leadership to lobby for the interests of historic house owners.

That could well change with creation of the National Trust's Center for Historic Houses. You may already know the Center through the group from which it evolved, the Historic House Association of America (HHAA). Formed in 1978 as an independent membership organization, the HHAA this year became a program of the National Trust. Now the Center for Historic Houses will forever keep historic houses a top priority of the National Trust.

To inaugurate this first year the Center has planned national and international programs:

*** The Center will find National Trust members who own homes at least 50 years old and work to attract other historic house owners to the National Trust.



*** The Center will investigate the potential of a national historic house owner's insurance program and is already researching estate tax laws to see where they might be refined to ease the current heavy burden on such owners.

*** At our Seattle conference this month [October

realtors. Many other "information exchanges" are planned for 1986.

You can assist this burgeoning historic house movement by participating... And if you own an old house, please contact: Susan Shaw, director, Center for Historic Houses, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785

There are no government grants to ease the burdens of historic house owners.

1985], ... the Center presents a lecture series on "The Old House in Private Ownership." In 1986 the Center will follow-up this series with one-day workshops and evening lectures in various cities....

*** Finally, the Center is discussing cooperative efforts with the National Association of Realtors (NAR). The National Trust already provides expertise for NAR's rehabilitation course for

Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 673-4025.

The historic house owner generally is a hardy breed who can survive in the face of prodigious odds. Unfortunately, there seem to be more historic houses that need repair and restoration than there are ready and able buyers and owners. We think our Center for Historic Houses can right this imbalance considerably.

/s/ J. Jackson Walter
National Trust President