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Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirements of the Degree of Master of Science in Historic Preservation 2005.

Advisor: Randall F. Mason

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Comments

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Advisor: Randall F. Mason

**INTERPRETATION & DESIGN: THE LAST RESIDENCE OF
AFRICAN-AMERICAN ACTIVIST PAUL ROBESON**

Kelli Racine Coles

A THESIS

in

Historic Preservation

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION

2005

Advisor

Randall F. Mason

Associate Professor of Architecture

Reader

Gail Winkler

Lecturer in Historic Preservation

Program Chair

Frank G. Matero

Associate Professor of Architecture

DEDICATION

I'd like to dedicate this to my family and friends. Thank you for all the support.
I love you all!

This is just the beginning of my journey into learning about and educating others
on the connection of African-American historic interiors to history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To Randy Mason- Thank you for being an “advisor” and all that it entails, all the hours spent reading draft after draft and the constructive criticism when the writing was just not quite right.

To Gail Winkler- I am especially grateful for you meticulously editing my writing (especially my grammar!) I really needed your eyes. Thank you for all your suggestions and assistance, not just in writing my thesis, but in the career opportunities I have with my particular interests. I knew there was a reason why I came to University of Pennsylvania although it was unclear to me at first, I am so glad to have made your acquaintance.

To Ms. Frances Aulston, Professor Charles Blockson, Mark Ueland, Emanuel Kelly, Park Ranger Leo Blake, and Park Ranger Joanne Schillizzi- Thank you all for granting me an opportunity to speak with you. I hope this is will be of some assistance to the future decision-making process of the Paul Robeson House.

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Introduction

The interpretation of an African-American cultural site requires sensitivity to both the subject and the visitors when telling the story of an often tumultuous journey through pain, tribulation, and finally on some occasions, victory. The Paul Robeson House in the Walnut Hill section of Philadelphia, seeks to tell the story of this Renaissance man, while inspiring adults and children through interpretation. The cultural significance of the Paul Robeson House is what makes it such a powerful site for African-Americans and all people who hold the right for freedom and equality as dear to their hearts as they do their own freedom. The purpose of this study is to give suggestions so that all the possibilities of interpretation of Paul Robeson and the Robeson-Forsythe House can be fully exhausted and an evocative interpretive plan be developed.

The attempt to comprehensively study and interpret African-American history is a recent development in the field of preservation. With new scholarship, historians, teachers, and members of grassroots organizations, are bringing to the light the myriad of ways African-American history is an intrinsic part of general American history. Today at historic sites around the country, interpretation, defined as "...the translation of the technical or unfamiliar language of the environment into lay language, with no loss in accuracy, in order

to create and enhance sensitivity, awareness, understanding, appreciation, and commitment..."¹ is the way by which this history is being told. Interpretation is at the center of a site management plan at an historic site, determining the outcome of many aspects of a plan, including the interior and exhibit designs. Interpretation works hand-in-hand with design in historic places to achieve the goal of making history thought provoking and of value for the stakeholders of the site.

This thesis will analyze the April 2004 proposed restoration and interpretive plans for the Paul Robeson House, comparing them to three other historic house museums for further insight into the interpretive plans.²

Following Tilden's suggestions, this thesis will analyze how successfully the plans "...reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information."³

¹ Paul H. Risk, "Interpretation: A Road to Creative Enlightenment," *Cultural Resource Management*, Volume 17, No.2 (date unknown), 37-40.

² This thesis is a continuation of a paper by a fellow student at the University of Pennsylvania on the current exhibition panels and tour at the Paul Robeson House. In this report, the exhibition panels and tour were found to be, "informative...not interpretive" and also "inflexible and generic." For these reasons, this thesis is looking at the proposed rehabilitation and interpretive plans of the site. (Han Li, *Interpretation of the Paul Robeson House Museum*, HSPV 606- Historic Site Management, Spring 2004, Professor Randall Mason, Personal Communication, 6 May 2004, 6.)

³ Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977, 8.

The three other sites used for comparison in this study were chosen because of their distinctive interpretive plans. The Edgar Allen Poe House in Philadelphia, owned by the National Park Service, has an interpretive plan unlike many other historic house museums due to our lack of knowledge on how Edgar and Sarah Allen Poe lived in the 18th century. The second site, The Dr. Martin Luther King House in Atlanta, Georgia, has a historic furnishings plan included in its interpretive plan, and contains many artifacts present in the house that would have been there when Dr. King resided there as a child. This site is under the auspices of the King Center, began in 1964 by Coretta Scott King to commemorate the life and legacy of her husband. Lastly, the Walt Whitman House, owned by the New Jersey State Parks and Forestry Division, is a small historic house museum with several historical documents to assist in interpreting the interior and an involved friends organization. These three sites have very different issues, concerns and ways of problem solving, presenting the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance with various solutions for managing the interpretation of the Paul Robeson House.

Chapter One of this Thesis is a short biography of Paul Robeson. The significance of the house lies in the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance's desire to educate the world community on the symbolic importance of Paul Robeson's

life and legacy. Chapter Two addresses the history of the house and the acquisition of the house by its current owners, the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance. The mission and goals of the WPCA will be mentioned as part of the house's significance in contemporary society. Chapter Three will describe and analyze the Master Plan for the Paul Robeson House. The chapter will include the planning process for the master plan, the plan for rehabilitation and interpretation, and the staffing issue and desired positions for the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance. Chapter Four will be an analysis and comparison of the three case studies to the current issues at the Paul Robeson House. In conclusion, Chapter Five will begin the process of writing a conservation plan for the Paul Robeson House. The process by which the Burra Charter states to implement a conservation plan for a cultural heritage site is used to begin the plan by identifying potential values for the site, identifying stakeholders, gathering sources and people to contact, and in drafting a statement of significance. The "SWOT" -strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats - analysis, development of potential policies for the site, identifying of specific actions for the future, implementing those actions, and then monitoring and reviewing the plan and their actions periodically, will also be explained for the site. The West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance does write a Strategic Plan for their

organization, now they must also consider the mission, goals, and future of their project- the Paul Robeson Historic House Museum and Cultural Center.

Chapter One: The Man

Scholar, athlete, artist, and activist Paul Leroy Robeson was born in 1896 in Princeton, New Jersey, to former slave and AME preacher William Drew Robeson and his wife, Maria Louise Bustill Robeson. He was the youngest of seven children, two of whom died in infancy. Paul Robeson attended Rutgers College, now Rutgers University, on scholarship, became a debating champion, and played on the football, baseball, basketball and track teams. By the time of his graduation in 1919 as valedictorian of his class, he had earned fifteen varsity letters, was twice honored as an All-American in football, and had been elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He went on to earn his law degree from Columbia University, and later honorary degrees from Rutgers University, Hamilton College, Morehouse College, Howard University, Moscow Conservatory for Music, and Humboldt University in Berlin. While in New York City attending Columbia University Law School and experiencing Harlem firsthand, Paul met and married Eslanda Cardozo Goode of Washington, DC. She was head histological chemist in the Surgical Pathological Laboratory of Presbyterian Hospital, and the first Black person to hold such a high position in the hospital.

While in Law School, Robeson made his theatrical debut at the urging of a friend, Dora Cole Norman, in the lead role of *Simon the Cyrenian* staged by Amateur Players at the Harlem YMCA. Norman was enthralled by Robeson's deep bass voice and his natural presence, while Robeson was flattered by the offer.⁴ Two years later, Dora Norman requested Robeson again; this time for a play she was producing entitled *Taboo*. Eslanda Robeson encouraged him to take the part, and suggested he quit his part-time job as postal clerk and defer his law studies to the summer. This began his career onstage and his fame in Europe. Regardless of his nascent fame, Robeson still finished his law degree. After graduation in 1923, he began working at a major Wall Street law firm only to be disappointed after several encounters with racism. Within the first year, Robeson decided to quit and pursue singing and acting with the full support of his wife.

It was Robeson who introduced spirituals to the concert stage and was acclaimed in America and England for his rendition of "Ol' Man River" in *Showboat*. He starred in twelve films in Hollywood and London and was praised for his role as Othello in England and in America where he was the first Black man to play Othello on Broadway. Robeson also mastered twenty languages and received much recognition for speaking out against racism,

⁴ Paul Robeson Jr., *The Undiscovered Paul Robeson: An Artist Journey, 1898-1939*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2001, 55.

fascism, lynchings, and unjust acts by people and governments around the world. In the end, Robeson was acknowledged and honored around the world but not in his own country where for many years his name was not mentioned in the curriculum of most schools. W.E.B. Dubois wrote of Robeson, "His voice is known in Europe, Asia, and Africa, in the West Indies and South America and in the islands of the seas. Children on the streets of Peking and Moscow, Calcutta and Jakarta greet him and send him their love. Only in his native land is he without honor and rights." ⁵

There are various explanations for why Robeson is rarely acknowledged in his own country. Some believe the United States House Committee on Un-American Activities targeted Robeson during the McCarthy era because he was an African American man who spoke out against racism and the treatment of African American people in America. Others believe it had nothing to do with his race, but with his outward acceptance and approval of Communism as the kind of government people of color needed to receive justice and social equality. When questioned by the Committee on why he did not stay in Russia, where he and his family lived for only two years, Robeson famously replied, "Because my father was a slave and my people died to build this country, and I am going to

⁵ Paul Robeson, *Here I Stand*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1958, xxvi.

stay right here and have a part of it, just like you. And no fascist-minded people will drive me from it. Is that clear?"⁶ When he was questioned on his comments at the World Peace Conference in Paris in 1949, Robeson attempted to clear up his statement on African American people's involvement in America's war against the Soviet Union by stating:

I did say, in passing, that it was unthinkable to me that a people would take up arms in the name of an Eastland⁷ to go against anybody, and gentlemen, I still say that. I thought it was healthy for Americans to consider whether or not Negroes should fight for people who kick them around...I stand here struggling for the rights of my people to be full citizens in this country. They are not in Mississippi. They are not in Montgomery. That is why I am here today...You want to shut up every colored person who wants to fight for the rights of his people!⁸

Following his appearance before the House Committee on Un-American Activities Robeson was unable to earn a living within the United States or, with his passport revoked for six years, to work abroad. Lloyd Brown, his biographer, summed the situation as follows:

Though he was banished as a performing artist and denied his rights as a citizen, Robeson was never charged with any illegal action; he was never arrested or put on trial. But his persecutors made no bones about why he was being punished; Robeson, they said, was a dangerous Red. Robeson, they said, was a dangerous Black. That made him twice as bad as anyone else in the 'Fearful

⁶ Robeson, *Here I Stand*, 48.

⁷ Eastland is another name Robeson used for the United States in this passage.

⁸ Robeson, *Here I Stand*, 42.

Fifties,' when Communism at home and abroad was said to be a clear and present danger to the American Way of Life. ⁹

When in July of 1958, Robeson was granted his passport and the right to travel he resumed his career abroad. Due to his struggle with acute depressive symptoms and a recent diagnosis of having a heart "insufficiency," a slightly enlarged liver, secondary colitis with incipient ulceration, and Paget's disease, ¹⁰ he temporarily retired in 1963 and returned to his home in New York City.

When his wife, Eslanda, died in 1966, Robeson began staying with his son Paul Robeson, Jr. and his family. During that summer, Robeson visited his sister, Marian Robeson Forsythe and her daughter, Paulina in Philadelphia. His son brought him back to New York at the end of the summer, but during the fall of 1966, Robeson returned to Philadelphia to live with his sister. "Paul had missed her and the warm, happy surroundings of her home," explained Charlotte Turner Bell, Robeson's piano accompanist, in her book, *Paul Robeson's Last Days in Philadelphia*. ¹¹ This is the home being restored today as the home where Paul Robeson, athlete, lawyer, singer, linguist, social activist, and misunderstood but genuine American hero, spent the last ten years of his life.

⁹ Robeson, *Here I Stand*, xxvi.

¹⁰ Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson: A Biography*, New York: Knopf Press, 1988, 517.

Paget's disease is further described in the book as a condition of unknown etiology and no psychiatric import, involving an abnormal amount of bone deformation and known to be fairly commonplace. The slightly enlarged liver and secondary colitis with incipient ulceration is stated to be possible reactions to anti-depression drugs Robeson was prescribed and taken off of soon after the diagnosis.

¹¹ Charlotte Turner Bell, *Paul Robeson's Last Days in Philadelphia*, Dorrance Publishing Co., 1986, 4.

Chapter Two: The Historic House Museum

The Paul Robeson House was built by E. Allen Wilson at 4951 Walnut Street in the Walnut Hill section of West Philadelphia in 1911.¹² It is where Robeson spent the last ten years of his life when he retired to Philadelphia to live with his sister, Marian Robeson Forsythe, and his niece, Paulina, who took care of him. He spent much of his retirement enjoying Philadelphia while also entertaining and counseling friends who would visit him from time to time. Robeson died in 1976, followed by his sister in 1977, who left 4951 Walnut Street to her daughter. Paulina Forsythe owned the house until 1994 when she decided to sell the property.¹³ There were several organizations that were interested in the house, but only one would acquire the house where Paul Robeson spent the last ten years of his life.

The West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance (WPCA) had been established in 1984, "to stimulate community participation in the arts by cultivating an interest in, understanding of, and appreciation for the arts in the greater Philadelphia

¹² Frances Aulston, Personal Interview, 24 July 2004 and 4 February 2005.

¹³ Department of Records - City of Philadelphia, *Philadox*, Accessed on March 30, 2005.

region” and was the organization that acquired the site.¹⁴ The WPCA was at the time looking for administrative space as it was outgrowing a small office in the basement of the Community Education Center. Tyree Johnson, writer for the *West Side Weekly* and friend of Frances Aulston, the director, knew of the organization’s desire to move and informed the WPCA the 4951 Walnut Street property was for sale. The WPCA had a focus study conducted, speaking to colleagues, neighbors, and artists in the area about the possibility of buying and managing the site. The study determined there was a great interest in the WPCA acquiring the site and turning it into an “arts mecca,” a cultural destination, a place to have “artists empowered, the community engaged, and arts foster,” as Ms. Aulston so eloquently explained it.¹⁵ It appeared a perfect match to blend an organization that aimed to increase the visibility of cultural institutions, advocate for the arts, and bring arts into the community of West Philadelphia, with the home of one the most highly acclaimed singer, actor, and Civil Rights Activist. Ms. Aulston used her life savings of \$7,000 and, with the assistance of \$30,000 in creative fundraising by the WPCA, put the down payment on the house in 1994. In the same year, the elderly woman who owned 4949 Walnut Street, Ms. Evelyn Bennett, died leaving the first right of refusal on the house to the WPCA, which humbly accepted the offer by her two sons. The WPCA took out a bridge loan

¹⁴ West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, *The Robeson House*, <http://www.wpcalliance.org>.

¹⁵ Aulston, Personal Interview, 24 July 2004 and 4 February 2005.

from CoreStates Bank in 1994 to pay for the homes. However when the bank merged with two other banks, the loan was sold to a loan company at 11.5 % interest rates. Fortunately, the WPCA was able to refinance with the bank and now holds a mortgage at 7% interest. Today the organization struggles to pay the loan and utilities on both homes, that averages \$3,000 a month, but remains grateful for the opportunity to own such a culturally significant site in West Philadelphia. ¹⁶

When the WPCA acquired the houses, the interior walls, floors, and windows, and the exteriors were stabilized so that the WPCA could occupy the structures. When the WPCA acquired the houses in 1994, the mission for the organization was to use the Robeson House to “educate the American people and international audience about the importance and value of historic preservation for the benefit of future generations, using the life and legacy of Paul Robeson as the focal point.” ¹⁷ The WPCA believes the Paul Robeson House fits its own corporate mission by 1) promoting increased ethnic/cultural tolerance among multi-cultural, racial and ethnic residents of the community; 2) supporting the development and marketing of local artists; and 3) serving as an

¹⁶ Aulston, Personal Interview, 24 July 2004 and 4 February 2005.

¹⁷ West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, *Keeper of Culture*, handout, 2005.

advocate for the power of the arts to promote social change and economic development.¹⁸

Since 1994, the WPCA has struggled to meet its mission because of the lack of professional knowledge in development, education, and curatorial services. However, there have been small successes. The WPCA did have a state historic marker placed outside the home by the Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission in 1991. It received funding from the Delaware River Port Authority, the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, and the William Penn Foundation for an organizational plan. The WPCA received funding for an historical assessment from the Preservation Alliance. They received funding from the Cultural Facilities Fund and Samuel S. Fels Fund for Facilities/Museum Plan/RFP for Architects. Finally, in 1998, the WPCA received funding from the Philadelphia Foundation to design a strategic plan for the organization.

In 1998, several architecture firms including Kelly/Maiello and Ueland Junker McCauley Nicholson (UJMN) sent in responses to the request for

¹⁸ West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, *Keeper of Culture*.

proposals sent out by WPCA. Kelly/Maiello Architects, the largest minority-owned firm in Philadelphia, won the bid. However, recognizing that the house lacked an interpretive plan and that there was no mention of one in the RFP, UJMN had included an interpretive plan in their proposal. Mark Ueland saw this as an excellent opportunity to tell the story of a man that few know much about. While, the existing exhibition was informative, it left much to be desired in the way of interpretation. He adds that the house looks like any other row house in West Philadelphia, but what makes this house unique, Ueland believes, is its connection to Paul Robeson whose story should be told.¹⁹ Therefore UJMN added a proposal for exhibit design to their response; Fran Aulston of WPCA was intrigued by the idea of a new exhibit design and contacted UJMN.

The house received a *Save America's Treasure* grant for restoration in 1999 with the help of Congressman Chaka Fattah and Senators Arlen Specter and Rick Santorum. With this grant they were able to hire Kelly/Maiello Architects and Ueland Junker McCauley Nicholson to prepare a master plan for both architectural restoration and interpretive planning in the fall of 2003. The firms are individually contracted with WPCA, but have agreed to work in close coordination throughout the planning process to “insure that the products of

¹⁹ Mark Ueland, Personal Interview, 31 January 2005.

their respective design efforts will mesh seamlessly as the client intends.”²⁰ The master plan that is being analyzed in this thesis combines the work of both firms.

In 2002, the house was placed on the National Register of Historic Places and is currently eligible for National Landmark status. It was added to the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s 2004-2005 list of *Restore America* sites, with the added bonus of a \$100,000 grant, a commercial on the *House and Garden* network to be aired in the Spring of 2005, and story on the *House and Garden* website.

Currently the Paul Robeson House Museum is open for tours which include a ten panel exhibition designed by Frank Stephens with historian Charles Blockson serving as curator, giving a narrative of Robeson’s life story and a collage of photos of Robeson as a child, athlete, scholar, actor, singer, and social activist.²¹ The exhibit boards are informative but have been found to be “inflexible and generic...honestly representing Robeson’s life but without an

²⁰ Kelly/Maiello & Ueland Junker McCauley Nicholson, *Master Plan: The Rehabilitation Plan for the Paul Robeson House*, April 2004, 5.

²¹ Charles Blockson holds a large collection of African and Caribbean American historical photos, documents, books, and memorabilia now at Temple University in Philadelphia. He also befriended Paul Robeson while he was in Philadelphia.

attempt to provoke the interests of visitors of various backgrounds and agendas when visiting the site.”²² (See Figures 13 - 18)

Since acquiring the Robeson House in 1994, the WPCA has been unable to devote a substantial amount of time to interpretation due to a lack of knowledge and the preoccupation with funding to maintain the houses. This is evident in the ten-panel exhibit that is didactic, but leaves little room for provocation. A cultural heritage site honoring a man with great accomplishments must be interpreted to educate, but also to move people of all ages to consider the impact his achievements have had on the opportunities and privileges we have today. The WPCA does see the importance in designing an attractive exhibit space for the historic house museum by hiring UJMN. However, as it will be discussed in a later chapter, the WPCA has not considered the near future. Neither an interpretive plan based on thorough background research for the Robeson House nor the conservation of the historic house museum once the structure is rehabilitated has been addressed in the April 2004 plans.

²² Han Li, *Interpretation of the Paul Robeson House Museum*. Personal Communication.

Chapter Three: The Rehabilitation Plan of the Paul Robeson House

In 1998, the Paul Robeson House was awarded a *Save America's Treasures* grant to engage an architect for the restoration of 4949 and 4951 Walnut Street. With the grant, the WPCA retained Kelly/Maiello Architects and Ueland Junker McCauley Nicholson, an exhibit design firm, to create an historic house museum, gallery, visitor center, and cultural center in an effort to fulfill the fundamental purpose of the organization. The firms consulted with the WPCA and other stakeholders including Paul Robeson Jr., Charles Blockson, and historian Claude Lewis²³ to develop the program for the Paul Robeson House and 4949 Walnut Street. The Master Plan was submitted in April 2004 containing ten sections addressing the components that shape the plan including: "Plan for the Rehabilitation of the Paul Robeson House" which includes the description of the plan and architectural drawings; "Restoring the House Interior," "The Visitor Experience," the "New Exhibits," and "Staffing" which explains the areas in which the WPCA is lacking professional expertise.

The Master Plan attempts to address the significance of the Paul Robeson House and provide an interpretive plan but falls short by not first identifying

²³ Claude Lewis is an historian and journalist for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. He was asked by the WPCA to write the "Understanding Paul Robeson" piece for the Master Plan.

stakeholders and the values they hold for the house.²⁴ These steps are first taken in a values-based conservation plan.²⁵ Consequently, the plan provides insufficient information to interpret the life of Paul Robeson, as the organization desires to do. For example, most of the original contents of the home have disappeared and research is needed to interpret the home shared by Marian Robeson Forsythe and her daughter, during the last ten years of Paul Robeson's life. The April 2004 Master Plan acknowledges that only preliminary research has been done but as of February 2005, oral histories had still not been conducted.²⁶ One also wonders about the impact Robeson had on his predominantly African American neighborhood; there have not been any documented interviews with Robeson's neighbors. Frances Aulston, of the WPCA has spoken to several of the neighbors about their encounters with Robeson but nothing has been formally documented. Very little of the interpretative plan contained in the Master Plan addresses either the site as a whole or its context in West Philadelphia.

24 A stakeholder is any person or entity that stands to gain or lose from the success or failure of an historic site. (Jonathan Boutelle, "Understanding Organizational Stakeholders for Design Success," *Boxes and Arrows*, 6 May 2004, http://www.boxesandarrows.com/archives/understanding_organizational_stakeholders_for_design_success.php)

25 Values-based planning takes a holistic view of a site, and its objective is always the conservation and communication of those values that make the site significant. The management process begins with an examination of the values attributed to the site and is carried out through consultations with the stakeholders at the site. Once the values are identified—and thus the significance of the site is established—the aim of management becomes their conservation through policy and action. (Marta De La Torre, "Values and Site Management: New Case Studies," *Getty Conservation Institute, Newsletter 16.2, Summer 2001*, http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications/newsletters/16_2/news_in_cons2.html.)

²⁶ Oral histories will be addressed in further detail in Chapter Four.

Plan for Rehabilitation

Kelly/Maiello was retained to provide the architectural and engineering services and was responsible for the project management for the rehabilitation of the houses. Kelly/Maiello began the restoration process by surveying the site and preparing existing conditions drawings for the site. (See Figures 11 – 12.) The firm met with WPCA to discuss current programming needs for the organization, the previous conceptual plan for the houses prepared in 1999, and what they desired for the historic house museum. Kelly/Maiello and WPCA then had a walk through meeting with staff from the Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission (PHMC), to determine whether access from 4949 to 4951 Walnut Street was physically possible and sensitive to the historic fabric. For handicapped-accessibility an elevator is to be added at the rear of 4949 Walnut Street and the porch floors will be raised to allow access from house to house via the front door. Emergency lights and signs that are non-obtrusive to the interior of the house also must be found for both houses.²⁷

The plan explains that because the 4951 Walnut Street is on the National Register of Historic Places the work being done must comply with *The Secretary*

²⁷ Emanuel Kelly, Personal Interview, 16 February 2005.

of Interior Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties. The plan lastly notes that this applies only to 4951 Walnut Street and not 4949 Walnut Street.

The buildings have remained essentially unchanged since the time that Robeson lived in the house with his sister and niece. The rehabilitation plan for the houses consists of interior and exterior repair work, including repairing the front porches, reconstruction of the slate mansard roof, restoring the existing doors, rehabilitating the windows and adding a new stair and elevator to the back of 4949 to provide a second means of egress to all floors as required by law and handicapped accessibility to both buildings. A paint analysis was not conducted on the house, but has been scheduled to provide a match to the existing color. However, in interpreting the site, the color of interior and exterior of the house when Robeson lived there would be more accurate a match. There were patches of original wallpaper in the house and this has been scheduled to match the original as closely as possible. "As closely as possible" was not clearly defined, therefore it may mean they are going to reproduce it exactly or find a pattern "off the shelf" that is close to the original, then document and archive the original pattern. According to the plan the first two floors of 4951 Walnut will be restored to the period 1965-1976 when Robeson lived in the house. The first floor of 4949 will be made into a reception area, gallery, and gift shop. The second

floor of 4949 will be for lectures, exhibits, and other WPCA events. Public restrooms will be placed in the basement of 4949 Walnut Street, along with conventional and archival storage space. The third floor of 4951 Walnut will remain a separate residence, as it was when Robeson lived there and is currently for an artist in residence. The WPCA offices will be located on the second and third floors of 4949 Walnut Street. (See Figures 21 - 24)

Plan for Interpretation/Exhibit

Ueland Junker McCauley Nicholson was retained to prepare a conceptual plan for the new permanent exhibition space. UJMN began the project by conducting several meetings with the WPCA, Charles Blockson, Paul Robeson Jr. and his wife Marilyn, and Henry Forner, Chairman of the Board for the Paul Robeson Foundation.²⁸ Preliminary research by the firm was conducted by reading four books on Paul Robeson, including Paul Robeson's autobiography, *Here I Stand*; *The Undiscovered Paul Robeson: An Artist's Journey 1898-1939* by Paul Robeson, Jr.; *Paul Robeson's Last Days in Philadelphia* by Charlotte Turner Bell; and *Paul Robeson: The Great Forerunner* by The Editors of Freedomways. The

²⁸ The Paul Robeson Foundation, located in New York City, was established in 1996 as a not-for-profit tax exempt organization with a mission to preserve and extend Robeson's rich legacy of humanism, civil rights activism, and excellence in scholarship, athletics and the arts. The Foundation supports and encourages academic, cultural and social initiatives that promote his profound human values in the United States and abroad. (The Paul Robeson Foundation, *About the Foundation*, http://peacehawks.com/robeson_site)

interpretive or exhibit design plan for the Paul Robeson House is not complete, due to time constraints and limited resources, people, or finance, nothing of any substance has been accomplished to date other than what is briefly outlined in the plan.

The WPCA's mission is to preserve the house for the future and to educate the public on the life works of Paul Robeson by "engaging the minds and hearts" of visitors. UJMN hopes to fulfill the mission by employing a variety of media; while the firm assumes that many visitors know little about Robeson, it acknowledges a few visitors may be familiar with Robeson.

UJMN plans to use the existing exhibit panels, designed by Frank Stephens²⁹ and curator, Charles Blockson, as a traveling exhibit on Robeson as originally intended. Presumably, when more information has been gathered on Robeson, these boards will have to be updated. A new exhibit on the first floor of the house will be an introduction to Robeson. UJMN reveals the purpose of the reinterpretation of the house is to allow visitors to experience the house as Robeson would have. UJMN plans to restore the interior to how it looked when Robeson lived in the house based on the collective memories of friends and

²⁹ Frank Stephens is Philadelphia artist. In the past, he has worked with Charles Blockson and Frances Aulston designing exhibits for the Free Library of Philadelphia.

family who visited and a couple photographs known to exist. The original furnishings of the house have been lost; therefore oral history will have to be relied on for interior interpretation.

Frances Aulston, of the WPCA has spoken to a few people and has been told Strawbridge & Clothier's mahogany furniture popular in the 1960's and 1970's, Oriental rugs, crystal chandeliers, and a rocking chair was present in the first floor of the house.³⁰ It is unclear whether all the furniture was from Strawbridge & Clothier. Furthermore, in the interview with Mark Ueland from UJMN, there was no mention of further research into this furniture, such as attempting to identify items in advertisements from the time period. This would be one of the next steps for UJMN, if it has not been done to date. Where there are still missing pieces in the interpretation, furnishings and finishes will be chosen based on what was found at the time in middle class, African-American homes. Further details were not given on how this determination would be made, leaving one to hope UJMN plans to extensively research or rely on past research, if there is any, on how middle class African American homes in Philadelphia or a very similar city looked in the 1960's and 1970's. The visitor experience in the house is very important for interpretation. The intent is to have

³⁰ Aulston, Personal Interview, 24 July 2004 and 4 February 2005.

visitors feel as if they were guests in the Robeson-Forsythe house. The interpretation of Robeson's legendary achievements is intended to be central to the plan and the visitor experience.

Staffing

The WPCA desires to increase the paid and volunteer staff at the Robeson House. Currently, the staff includes a director, an accountant, a receptionist, a custodian, two clerical trainees and five volunteers from the National Caucus of the Black Aged. The WPCA hopes to add a development position and a curator/educator position as soon as financially possible. They consider it "critical to the vitality of WPCA," according to the plan, to hire full time staff persons to fill these positions immediately. In the plan, the positions, Director of Development & Outreach and Educator/Curator, would be paid by including in the current capital campaign additional funding for operating costs to create an operating endowment fund, the income from which will be applied to increase staff costs.

Chapter Four: Interpreting Paul Robeson in the House Museum

The management of a cultural heritage site can be an onerous task when there is not a conservation plan to follow. The conservation plan identifies the place, its associations, and information about the place sufficient to understand significance, assesses the significance, identifies obligations arising from significance, develops policies, develops a management plan in accordance with policies, and lastly, advises to monitor and review the plan periodically. The plan for a cultural heritage site must consider its resources, its stakeholders, and the values it holds for people, as described in the Burra Charter ³¹ and explained in the *Comprehensive Interpretive Planning* ³² guidelines by the National Park Service, and many other recent publications on interpretation.

³¹ The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) adopted the recently revised Burra Charter in 1999. The 1999 Burra Charter is to provide guidance for the management and conservation of cultural heritage sites, so as to involve all people in the decision-making process. Australia, one of the leaders in conservation came to terms with their past of denying minority groups the right to hold a stake and a voice in the conservation of cultural heritage sites in the country. In this Charter they recognize the need to involve all people and consider all values, even the less tangible aspects of cultural significance including those embodied in the use of the heritage places, association with the place, and the meanings that places have for people. (Australia ICOMOS. *The Burra Charter*. <http://www.icomos.org/australia/burra.html>.)

³² The *Comprehensive Interpretive Planning* guidelines by the National Park Service is a tool to guide management decisions at cultural heritage sites. For the past forty-five years the National Park Service has continuously revised interpretive programs to provide the visitor with the best experience. The CIP, as it is called, is a tool for making choices at sites that are part of the National Park Service. It helps sites determine their objectives, describe their audiences, and decide what mix of media and personal services to use. The end product an effective and efficient interpretive program that achieves management goals, provides appropriate services for the visitors, and promotes visitor experiences. The CIP is not considered a recipe, but rather a guideline for efficient, effective, goal-driven planning. The planning process behind developing a CIP for a site is identical to the Burra Charter, but goes a step further by addressing the desired visitor experience, the visitor profiles for the site, actual and potential and their needs through

The Master Plan for the Paul Robeson Historic House Museum is a step towards preserving the house, however the proposed plan denies the house its opportunity to interpret the life of Paul Robeson and the cultural impact it could have on its visitors. All of the resources available to interpret Paul Robeson in this West Philadelphia house have not been identified, nor all stakeholders and the values they hold for the house. The WPCA's intentions are admirable in desiring to transform the Paul Robeson Historic House Museum, however the question must be raised on whether or not the WPCA and an historic house museum is a proper fit. Would the site be better off in the hands of the National Park Service or another entity more familiar with historic sites? Conversely, there are many small non-profit organizations and Friends Groups who acquire and manage historic house museums and therefore perhaps all that is needed is a conservation plan to be drafted for the site by the WPCA. Before a conservation plan for the Paul Robeson House can be developed to fully benefit the site these issues must be addressed.

analysis and conducting systematic surveys, existing interpretive conditions for future comparison, and describing the desired future interpretive process. (Harper's Ferry Center. *Comprehensive Interpretive Planning*. Division of Interpretive Planning, National Park Service, Fall 2000.)

The planning and interpretation issues faced by the Paul Robeson House are not unique to this site. Looking to the experience of other comparable sites can help an institution like the WPCA clarify issues and weigh a broader range of solutions. Three historic house museums in the United States were visited and researched as sites that might help direct the work at the Paul Robeson House. The Dr. Martin Luther King National Historic Site in Atlanta, Georgia, the Edgar Allen Poe National Historic Site in Philadelphia, PA, and the Walt Whitman Historic House Museum in Camden, New Jersey were studied and will be used in the following pages to reveal how each site's problems and solutions might be used to inform decisions to be made at the Paul Robeson House by the WPCA.

*The Dr. Martin Luther King National Historic Site- The House
Atlanta, Georgia*

The Martin Luther King Jr. House, located in the historic African American section of Atlanta, Georgia known as Sweet Auburn, is the childhood home of Dr. King and his siblings. He was born in this house on January 15, 1929 and lived with his grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, and the occasional boarders who came to stay, until the time he went off to college. The house was acquired by the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Change in 1974, which describes itself as the "living memorial dedicated to the advancement of the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., leader of America's greatest nonviolent

movement for justice, equality, and peace.”³³ In the same year they began extensive work to restore it to its appearance at the time of Dr. King’s youth. In 1980, Dr. King’s childhood home, the Ebenezer Baptist Church, and the surrounding neighborhood of Sweet Auburn became a formal preservation district and National Historic Site. The National Park Service (NPS) leases the home from the King Center (income previously derived from donations made from the tours) for the “long-term preservation and interpretation of the structure.”³⁴

The house has twice been restored to help interpret the life of Dr. King. In the early 1970’s, the King Center, specifically Coretta Scott King and King’s sister, Christine King Ferris, searched for items in antiques stores based on their memories of being in the house. Then in 1992 the National Park Service developed an historic furnishings report that included interviews with Coretta Scott King, Christine King Ferris, and Joel King, King’s uncle, on their memories of the house. Unfortunately, there are no known photographs of the interior of the house. From the interviews, the NPS gleaned a general idea of the interior and were able to obtain additional appropriate furnishings. Park guides take care to point out King family furnishings. One is the piano where Dr. King or his brother broke a piano key; another is the bedroom where Dr. King slept with his

³³ *The King Center*, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/tkc/index.asp>.

³⁴ *Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site General Management Plan, Development Concept Plan & Environmental Assessment, 1985*, http://www.nps.gov/malu/documents/gmp1985/gmp_1985.htm.

brother and Uncle Joel and which is furnished with the toys they used to play with; and a third is the table in the dining room where the family ate and conversed in the evenings. The house is an accurate representation of how the interiors may have been furnished with during Dr. King's lifetime.

The Dr. King House and the Paul Robeson House have one common denominator; no photographs or very few photographs are available to help in interpreting the historic interiors, but there are people still living that lived in or visited the houses during the periods of significance. The next step for the WPCA would have to be to conduct further research into how the interior of the house appeared at the time Paul Robeson resided there, similar to the background research performed by the NPS. The NPS conducted interviews with some of Dr. King's relatives and developed an historic furnishings report, a part of the interpretive design plan for the house, to begin the process of interpretation. In-depth interviews with Paul Robeson, Jr., Harry Belafonte, historian Charles Blockson, and the few other people who were allowed to visit Paul Robeson in his sister's home is essential for recreating the interior of the Robeson House. Allowing them to walk around the house as they reminisce about visiting Robeson might offer great insight into how the house was furnished and decorated by Marian Robeson Forsythe. In a single interview with Charles Blockson for this thesis, while sitting in his own office Blockson began to

remember little things about the house, such as the white Venetian blinds at the windows that Marian Forsythe or her daughter, Paulina, would peek through before answering the front door.³⁵ Given the opportunity to stand in the house again, much specific information might be gleaned from Blockson and others who knew Robeson well.

Another issue at the Robeson House pertains to the interpretation of Paul Robeson and his connection to the neighborhood during the ten years he lived in his sister's home. A small section in the interpretive plan untitled, "Last Ten Years- A Haven in Philadelphia," addresses this topic; however several aspects of Robeson's life in Philadelphia have not been considered. Unlike at the house of Dr. King, there is no mention of Paul Robeson or his sister's relationship with the surrounding community. By reading and interviewing several people, it's been found that Robeson would sit on the porch in his rocking chair speaking to people as they walked by; he enjoyed visiting Rittenhouse Square, spending many evenings there reading, and he loved taking drives to Atlantic City for seafood.³⁶ Marian Robeson Forsythe was a teacher for the Philadelphia School District, went to church in the Walnut Hill neighborhood, owned a vacation home in Cape May, and often ordered and had food delivered from a nearby corner store owned by a Jewish family, who remembers Marian Forsythe and

³⁵ Charles Blockson, Personal Interview, 18 February 2005 and 22 March 2005.

³⁶ Aulston, Personal Interview, 24 July 2004 and 4 February 2005; Blockson, Personal Interview, 18 February 2005 and 22 March 2005; Turner Bell, *Paul Robeson's Last Days in Philadelphia*, 2-3.

Paul Robeson to this day.³⁷ However, none of these things have been documented or have been considered yet for the interpretive/exhibit design plan for the house. In comparison, Dr. King's presence in the Sweet Auburn neighborhood is felt in the interpretation of the house. During the tour of Dr. King's house the guide mentions Dr. King visiting the corner store near the house, playing with the children in the neighborhood as a child, and attending, then preaching at Ebenezer Baptist Church. It is important that this information be garnered from the community and friends of Paul Robeson, documented as a part of the history of his last ten years in Philadelphia.

*The Edgar Allen Poe National Historic Site
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

The Edgar Allen Poe House, located at 7th & Spring Garden Streets in Philadelphia, is a memorial to this outstanding, creative writer of the 19th century. Edgar Allen Poe, his wife Virginia, mother-in-law Maria Clemm, and their cat, Catterina, lived in several Philadelphia houses, of which only this one survives today. During the time he lived in Philadelphia, Poe wrote some of his most legendary works, including "The Golden Bug," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Tell-Tale Heart," and "The Murders of Rue Morgue." The National

³⁷ Aulston, Personal Interview, 24 July 2004 and 4 February 2005.

Park Service acquired the house in 1979 but has had difficulty interpreting the interior because the furnishings that Poe and his family used in this house have long since disappeared and very little is known about the house. The interpretative plan for the house during the past five years has used the stories of Poe to interpret the unfurnished rooms. A furnishings plan is now being reconsidered but has resulted in discussion and controversy as to how to “correctly” interpret the life of Edgar Allen Poe in a house where he only lived for no more than two years and for which little or no period documentation is available.

The Poe House Museum is composed of the house Poe rented, situated facing Spring Garden and at one time called 234 Spring Garden, and two adjacent properties, 530 North 7th Street, and 532 North 7th Street- which is used as the entrance to the house museum. In the 1920’s, Richard Gimbel, a Poe scholar and collector, purchased and maintained the site with the help of a foundation. After his death, his wife inherited the site and upon her death the city bought the site with the help of the Free Library which acquired the Gimbel Collection consisting of Poe’s manuscripts and letters.³⁸ The National Park Service (NPS) took steps to acquire the site from the City of Philadelphia several years later. However, before purchase the NPS requested an emergency exit and

³⁸ Free Library of Philadelphia. *Resource Guides, Rare Book Department*. <http://www.library.phila.gov/rbd/resgdrbd.htm>.

fire stair to be placed on the site. The city complied and also plastered and painted the walls in the house, thereby destroying most evidence of the original finishes. The NPS acquired all three houses in 1978 and opened them in August 1980, calling the property the Edgar Allen Poe Historic Site, which is administered by the Independence National Historic Park. Subsequent extensive research has uncovered original architectural features of the home of Poe but has been unable to find primary evidence of how Poe and his family lived during the two years they lived in the house.

Early in the 1990's "ghost" furniture (furniture painted white to blend in with the white walls of the rooms) was placed in the house because some interpreters felt it presented a more realistic sense of living in the rooms. However this set up in the rooms left visitors confused, was not received well by the public, and was taken out in the late 1990's.³⁹ Today the house remains unfurnished and interpretations rest with the audio-visual program and Ranger-guided tours.

According to Joanne Schillizzi, the Edgar Allen Poe House has been unfurnished for approximately five of the eight years she has been at the house. The interpretive plan is again being reconsidered and a furnishings plan is currently being considered for the site. The controversy lies in whether the house

³⁹ Joanne Schillizzi, Park Ranger, Edgar Allen House, Personal Interview, 28 January 2005.

should be left as it is or whether furnishings based on styles popular during the period of 1842-44 should be incorporated as has been done at the majority of historic house museums in the country. One idea proposed by the committee is to furnish two of the rooms, as they may have appeared when Edgar Allen Poe lived there; only the architectural features would be emphasized in the remaining rooms.⁴⁰ This solution may be the best for a space that NPS knows very little about. One room that could be interpreted is Poe's writing room, based on research into how people of his family's status lived in the 1840's.⁴¹ Research could also be done on his writings, such as his essay, "The Philosophy on Furniture"; there may also be clues as to how his room appeared in his stories. Then the visitors are able to have a sense of the interior space, but still the interpretation of Edgar Allen Poe lies in interpreting his life through his works and through the experiences NPS has created to aid in interpreting Poe's life of mystery, discovery, unhurried inquiry, fear or uneasiness in a safe place, creative tension, and delight in the power of well-chosen words.⁴²

In 2003, a revised Long Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP) of the Comprehensive Interpretive Plan was devised by the National Park Service for the Edgar Allen Poe House. The 2003 plan addresses several issues at the Edgar

⁴⁰ Leo Blake, Park Ranger, Walt Whitman House, Personal Interview, 10 February 2005.

⁴¹ Schillizzi, Personal Interview, 28 January 2005.

⁴² National Park Service, *Edgar Allen Poe National Historic Site Long Range Interpretive Plan*, 14.

Allen Poe House and then recommends actions to be undertaken in the next five to seven years. These issues include:

- Identity & Expectations- The site is not well known to the public nor potential visitors; even many Philadelphians don't know where it is located.
- Neighborhood- The site needs to build better relationships with its residential neighbors.
- Space- The residential nature of site buildings means that available spaces are limited. There are limits to the size of guided groups. There is no group meeting space on site during normal operating hours. Convenient off-street parking is not always available.
- Interpretive Media- Existing exhibits are over 20 years old and beginning to show their age. There are questions about how well they reflect current themes and provide desired experiences.
- Accessibility- The residential nature of the park's structures poses physical and programmatic accessibility challenges to Rangers and visitors.⁴³

Several of the issues present at the Edgar Allen Poe House are also present at the Paul Robeson House. Identity and Expectations, Neighborhood, Space, and Accessibility are all issues the WPCA must address in the near future, but it is the Interpretive Media that is most important in this study. The proposed exhibition and the furnishings plan for the Paul Robeson House must reflect the thorough research and oral histories of Paul Robeson, his sister, Marian Robeson Forsythe, and the historic interior of the house. The NPS views the new interpretive exhibit design plan as an opportunity to explore new ways to

⁴³ National Park Service, *Edgar Allen Poe National Historic Site LRIP*, 17-18.

address themes and experiences, particularly those related to creativity.⁴⁴ They hope the new plan will also suggest new ways to present books sales and visitor orientation. By the WPCA taking a step back to exhaust the research of Paul Robeson, his sister, and the house, and to develop a conservation plan for the historic house museum all opportunities can be considered and weighed to ensure the success of the house.

The Walt Whitman House
Camden, New Jersey

The Walt Whitman House, at 328 Mickle Boulevard, is a National Historic Landmark dedicated to preserving the life, works, and legacy of one of America's first literary geniuses. This modest, two-story frame house is the only house Whitman ever owned. He purchased it in 1884 and lived there until his death in 1892. The house is significant as his home and where he wrote his best-known poem, *Leaves of Grass*. The house has been an "historic shrine," to Whitman according to curator Leo Blake, since the 1920s. When the New Jersey Parks and Forestry State Park Service, a division of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, acquired the site in 1947 from the Walt Whitman Association, friends of Whitman had already been contacted and furnishings had been returned to aid in the accurate interpretation of the house. In 1992 a Historic

⁴⁴ National Park Service, *Edgar Allen Poe National Historic Site LRIP*, 22.

Structure Report was commissioned and in 1998 the house was restored to the period of significance, although restoration continues at the site based on period photographs and Whitman's written descriptions. The interpretive plan currently used was written eight years ago and a long-range plan for the site has not been prepared.

Upon Whitman's death, Horace Traubel, another dear friend of Whitman immediately formed the Walt Whitman Association, which is still in existence today as the "friends" organization for the house. Annually, the friends group holds a birthday party for Whitman to raise money for acquisitions in the continued restoration of the interior. Included in the tour are photographs showing how the rooms once looked compared to what has been done so far to restore them and to read from Whitman's book *Leaves of Grass*.

There is one particular aspect of the Walt Whitman House that the WPCA can incorporate into their conservation plans. The reliance on historic photographs is an important aspect to interpreting an historic interior, as seen at Dr. King's House and again at the Walt Whitman House. Currently, there are one known black and white photograph of Paul Robeson sitting in his sister's living room. The photograph in Martin Duberman's book shows Marian Forsythe's living room sofa or loveseat in a dark fabric and covered in plastic, the walls were a light color, and at the windows are fabric window treatments and potted

plants.⁴⁵ (See Figure 24) There may be other photographs among Robeson's family and friends could be used, as photographs have been at the Walt Whitman House, to assist UJMN in the design of the historic interior of the Paul Robeson House. These photographs could also be used in the exhibit design interpreting Robeson's time spent in Philadelphia.

These three historic house museum models shed light on options the WPCA has in taking their next steps. Dr. King's House revealed the process in which the National Park Service garnered information on King to better interpret his childhood home and community. The Edgar Allen Poe House has a Long Range Interpretive Plan that guides the actions of interpreting an empty house rented by a man, with an incredible story to tell. Lastly, the Walt Whitman House is a testament to small historic house museums and their interpretive plan based on careful research and analysis of historic photographs of the interior of the house. Chapter Five, will build on this chapter and describe the conservation plan process for the Robeson House, so that this site can be another successful interpreted site.

⁴⁵ Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson: A Biography*, New York: Knopf Press, 1988, Figure 111.

Chapter Five: Developing a Conservation Plan

A conservation plan for the Paul Robeson House will aid in interpretation by identifying the site's many stakeholders, their values and what they see as significant about the house; in doing so "the cultivation of values as felt, conceived, and realized by actual groups concerned with the stewardship of the heritage site" are identified. These stakeholders could include "the community and other culture groups, the market, the state, conservators, other experts, property owners, and ordinary citizens...identifying stakeholders and then assessing their values is a matter of equity and accuracy to work toward wide participation and account for the views of all relevant values." It is also widely believed that widening the circle of stakeholders involved in a project improves both the process and the outcome.⁴⁶ The plan would also aid in collectively devising a statement of significance, addressing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis)⁴⁷ of the site, develop policies, ways to implement the policies, and monitor the overall management of the house museum. This chapter aims to begin the conservation plan process for the Paul Robeson Historic House Museum by identifying known stakeholders, values,

⁴⁶ Randall Mason, "Assessing Values in Conservation Planning: Methodological Issues and Choices," *Management Planning for Archaeological Sites: An International Workshop Organized by the Getty Conservation Institute and Loyola Marymount University, Corinth, Greece, 19-22 May 2000*, Los Angeles: J.Paul Getty Trust, 2003, 17.

⁴⁷ SWOT analysis is a process of addressing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats at an historic site. It is most commonly used in strategic planning and decision-making in business.

(including spiritual, political, national, other cultural values ⁴⁸). These values are defined as what makes an historic site culturally significant. The Burra Charter states, “cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, its setting, use, associations, meaning, records, related places, and related objects...places may have a range of values for different people and groups.” ⁴⁹ Since the Burra Charter was revised in 1999, other scholars have come up with additional values upon which to identify cultural significance, including the English Heritage’s list of values- cultural, educational and academic, economic, resource, recreational, and aesthetic. ⁵⁰ The values associated with the Robeson House would include historical, educational/academic, aesthetic, social, economic, cultural/symbolic, political value and possibly others once all of the stakeholders are identified.

- Historical- It is the last residence of an African American Renaissance man, virtually unknown to today’s society and it is the only historic house museum dedicated to his life and legacy.
- Educational/academic- Adults and children can learn from the accomplishments of Paul Robeson and his desire to stand up and fight for social justice in the world when many others would not.

⁴⁸ Mason, “Assessing Values in Conservation Planning: Methodological Issues and Choices,” *Management Planning for Archaeological Sites: An International Workshop Organized by the Getty Conservation Institute and Loyola Marymount University, Corinth, Greece, 19-22 May 2000*, 9.

⁴⁹ Australia ICOMOS, *The Burra Charter*, <http://www.icomos.org/australia/burra.html>.

⁵⁰ Mason, “Assessing Values in Conservation Planning: Methodological Issues and Choices,” *Management Planning for Archaeological Sites: An International Workshop Organized by the Getty Conservation Institute and Loyola Marymount University, Corinth, Greece, 19-22 May 2000*, 9.

and draft a statement of significance, and finally describe the subsequent steps in the Burra Charter process.

The first step in a conservation plan is to identify stakeholders and their values. In developing a conservation plan, some scholars believe the stakeholders should be identified first and others, the values. For this thesis they were identified simultaneously, due to time constraints. The stakeholders for the Paul Robeson Historic House Museum are its building owner, visitors, professionals, funders, interests groups, and affiliated groups, including:

- The West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance's Board; the WPCA members; neighbors; teachers; school children
- West Philadelphia neighborhood of Walnut Hill; 40th Street and 52nd Street Commercial District; The City of Philadelphia
- National Black Caucus for the Aged; The Paul Robeson Foundation; National Trust of Historic Preservation; House and Garden Network

In identifying values, the Burra Charter associates four values with historic sites- historic value, aesthetic value, scientific value, and social value

- Aesthetic- This house looks like many other West Philadelphia duplex row homes, however, the interior will be interpreted as the 1960-1970's home of a middle class African-American woman, Marian Robeson-Forsythe, and her family.
- Social- The house is owned by the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance and dedicated to a man who fought for the social justice and equality of all people around the world; also a part of the site will be a cultural center; and in the future the WPCA is also planning for a coffee house, artist residences, and bookstore.
- Economic- The visitors to the historic house museum will aid the WPCA in paying for the mortgage on the houses, the preservation of the houses, and many other programming needs. The site will also aid in promoting the Walnut Hill section of Philadelphia and it's surrounding residential neighborhoods and business corridors by bringing in new residents, visitors, and shoppers.
- Cultural/symbolic- Paul Robeson, and possibly the house while he resided there, was an exemplar of what African-Americans could accomplish in America in the 1920's-1970's. He was also an example of what could occur to an African-American for speaking up on national and international issues during the McCarthy era.

- Political- This is a site that honors a man who spoke for social justice and equality, but especially for African-Americans. This is a struggle that continues to this day in America and in many other parts of the world. This site could aid in educating and inspiring people to fight for their personal interpretation of equality and justice for all.

The next step in the Burra Charter process is to gather and record information about the place to understand its significance. Already stated in this thesis, much of the significance can be found by speaking to Robeson's family and friends, other people who were acquainted with him, and research photographs of the house. Oral histories and historic photographs are the keys to properly interpreting Paul Robeson, the Robeson-Forsythe home, and its context.

The statement of significance is the following step to gathering information on the site to assess significance. The statement of significance is what guides the policies and goals of the conservation plan. The Master Plan includes a "Project Summary Statement" including "Why We Honor Paul Robeson," from which a portion of the drafted statement of significance was taken. The statement of significance states,

The Paul Robeson Historic House Museum is dedicated to a legendary African-American artist and worldwide humanitarian who spent the last ten years of his life, between 1966-1976, living in Philadelphia in the home of his sister, Marian Robeson-Forsythe. The creation of the Paul Robeson House is a way “to celebrate Robeson’s massive accomplishments and to wrest his reputation from those who continue to spread spurious rumors that question his loyalty to the United States.”⁵¹ The site is meant to educate people on the works of Paul Robeson and to inspire them to continue his legacy of fighting for social justice and democracy for all.

The Robeson-Forsythe West Philadelphia twin row house, is akin to many others in this area, but stands alone for its cultural significance to African-Americans and the nation. The house is representative of a middle class African-American family’s home of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Today the house is owned by the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance who plans to make it a part of a cultural center and the beginnings of an “arts mecca” in the West Philadelphia community.⁵²

A SWOT analysis would follow the drafting of a statement of significance.

A strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis would be used to determine possible policies and goals for the historic house museum in the following five to seven years. This step could be very important for the WPCA organization in deciding whether they want to continue the management of a historic house museum or whether it be advantageous to consider seeking help from, partnering with, or relinquishing their rights to a knowledgeable entity. Next would be to develop policies and test them against the significance of the site, then draft policy statements, and consider implementations strategies for the

⁵¹ Kelly/Maiello & Ueland Junker McCauley Nicholson, *Master Plan: The Rehabilitation Plan for the Paul Robeson House*, 3-4.

⁵² Aulston, Personal Interview, 24 July 2004 and 4 February 2005.

policies. Lastly, it is very important to record the current state of the site, monitor the site during the implementation of policies, and revisit the whole plan from the beginning periodically.

Conclusion

Linenthal states, the best sites become forums where “diverse interpretations of complex historical events can be aired or taken home to contemplate.”⁵³ The life of Paul Robeson was a multifaceted one that ended in retirement in a twin row house in the Walnut Hill section of West Philadelphia in the 1970’s. Devising a values-based conservation plan, conducting a thorough investigation of Robeson’s life in West Philadelphia and the research of the historic interior of 4951 Walnut Street, the Paul Robeson Historic House Museum and Cultural Center could then have an interpretive plan to become one of the sites Linenthal was writing about. As Freeman Tilden stated, interpretation must “...reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information,”⁵⁴ this is in the end, the goal.

⁵³ Edward Linenthal, “Can Museums Achieve a Balance Between Memory and History,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 10 February 1995, B1-2.

⁵⁴ Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 8.

FIGURES



Figure 1: Posing as the character Jim Harris in the Eugene O'Neill play *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, Circa 1926.

Source: Robeson, Jr., The Undiscovered Paul Robeson.



Figure 2: Robeson as a member of the Rutgers College 1916 basketball team.

Source: Robeson, Jr., The Undiscovered Paul Robeson.

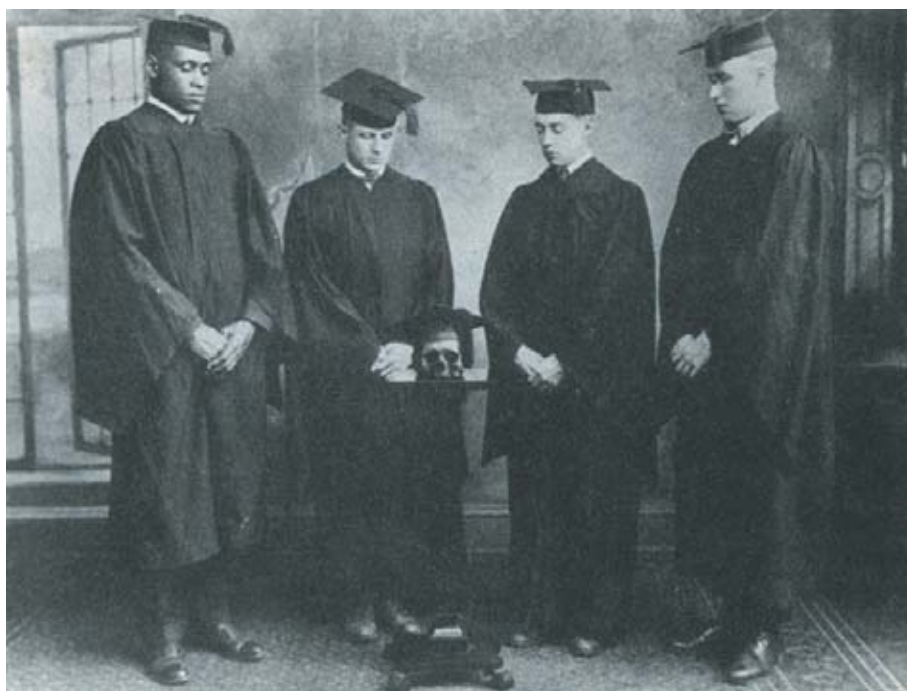


Figure 3: Robeson as a member of the Cap and Skull Honor Society at Rutgers College, 1919.

Source: Robeson, Jr., The Undiscovered Paul Robeson.



Figure 4: Paul and Eslanda embarking for New York from England in 1933 for the filming of *The Emperor Jones*.

Source: Robeson, Jr. The Undiscovered Paul Robeson.

HIS MASTER'S VOICE

PAUL ROBESON
AND HIS RECORDS

You can enjoy Robeson's singing whenever you wish from his extensive repertoire of "His Master's Voice" Records. He is, in particular, the acknowledged authority of the Negro Spiritual, of which there are many fine examples in the list overleaf.

EXCLUSIVE TO
"HIS MASTER'S VOICE"

RECORDED MUSIC - THE MUSIC YOU SELECT YOURSELF!

Figure 5: English flyer advertising Paul's recordings. Circa 1930s.

Source: Robeson, Jr., The Undiscovered Paul Robeson.

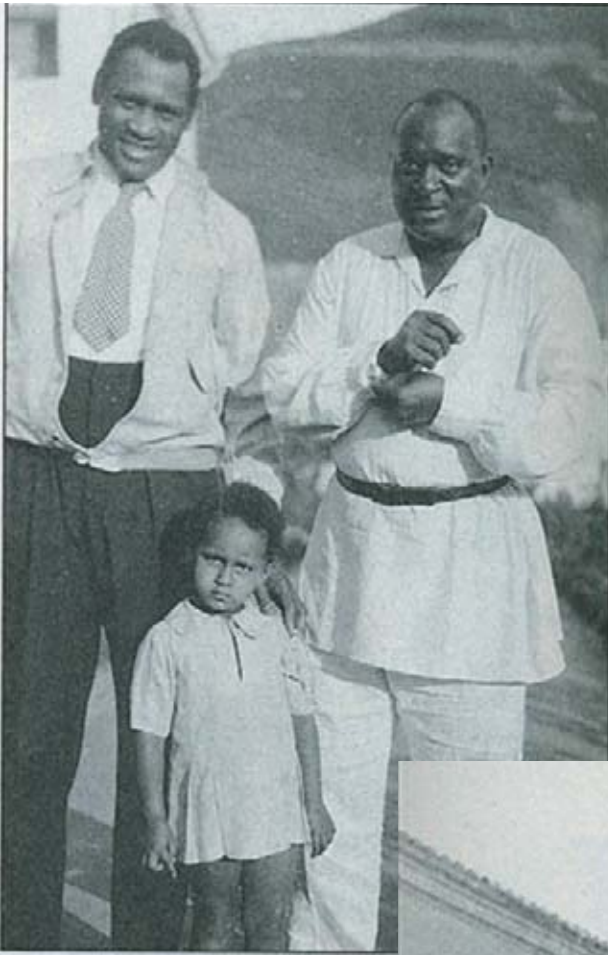


Figure 6: Paul with John Oliver Golden and his daughter, Lillie, in Kislovodsk, USSR, July 1937.



Figure 7: Paul joins two African American members of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, International Brigade for the Spanish Republican Army.

Source: Robeson, Jr. The Undiscovered Paul Robeson.



Figure 8: Paul and Essie with Indian students in London, 1936



Figure 9: Paul and Paul, Jr. at a VOKS (All-Union Society for Cultural Exchange) reception in Moscow, May 1937.

Source: Robeson, Jr. The Undiscovered Paul Robeson.



Figure 10: The Paul Robeson House and West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance Office
Photo by author, 4/2005.

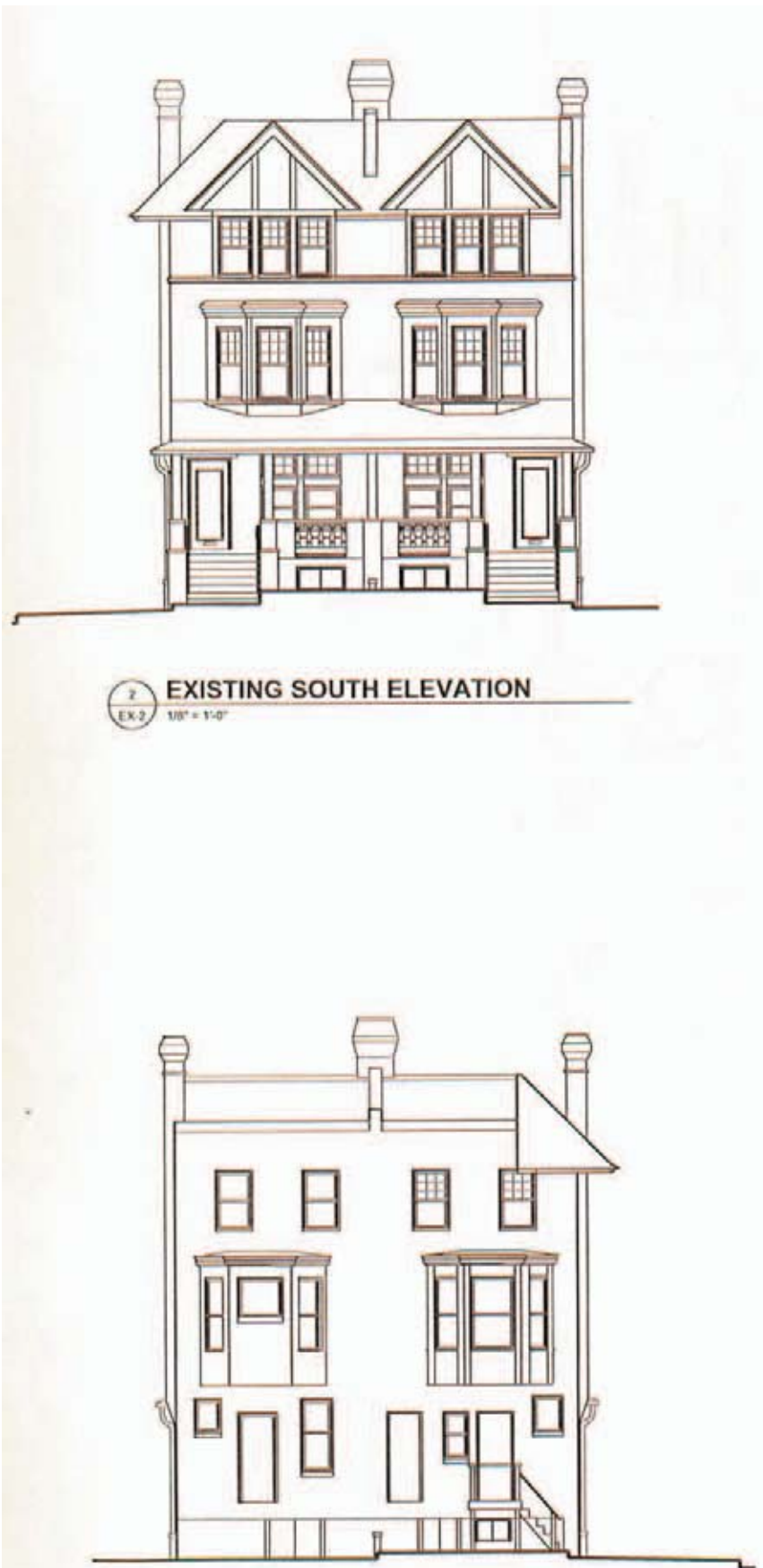


Figure 11: Existing Elevations of the Paul Robeson House and WPCA Office
Source: Master Plan: The Rehabilitation of the Paul Robeson House



Figure 12: Existing Elevations for the Paul Robeson House and WPCA Office
Source: Master Plan: The Rehabilitation of the Paul Robeson House



Figure 13: "From These Roots" exhibit panels, first floor of the Paul Robeson House. *Photo by author, 4/2005.*



Figure 14: Another view of the first floor looking back towards the entrance. *Photo by author, 4/2005.*



Figure 15 - 17: Robeson's bedroom
Photo by author, 4/2005.





Figure 18: Middle room/exhibit space on the second floor of the Paul Robeson House.



Figure 19: Front room/meeting space on the second floor of the Paul Robeson House.
Photos by author, 4/2005.

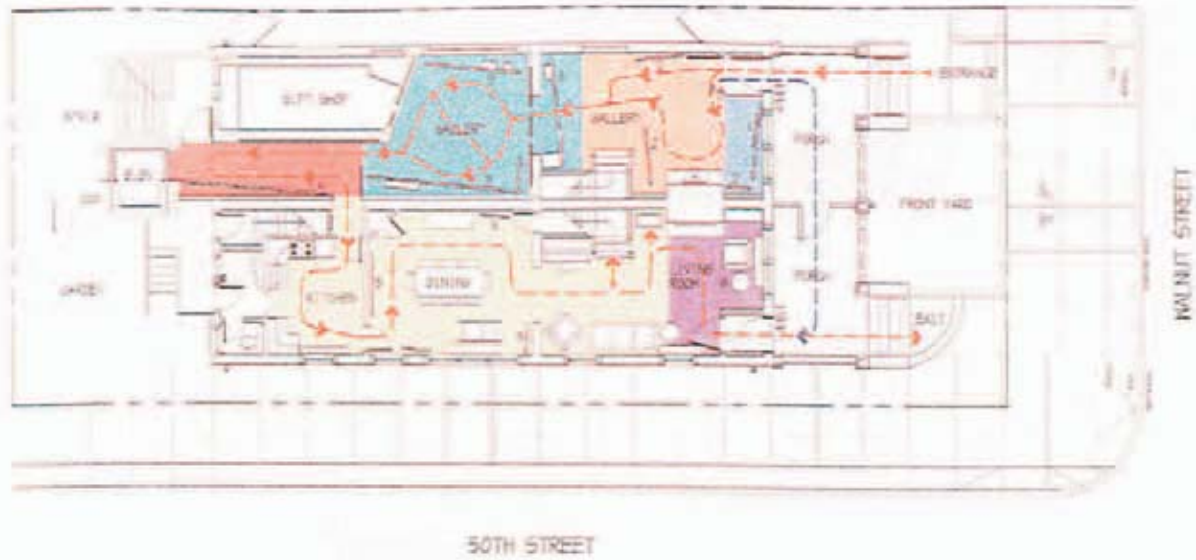
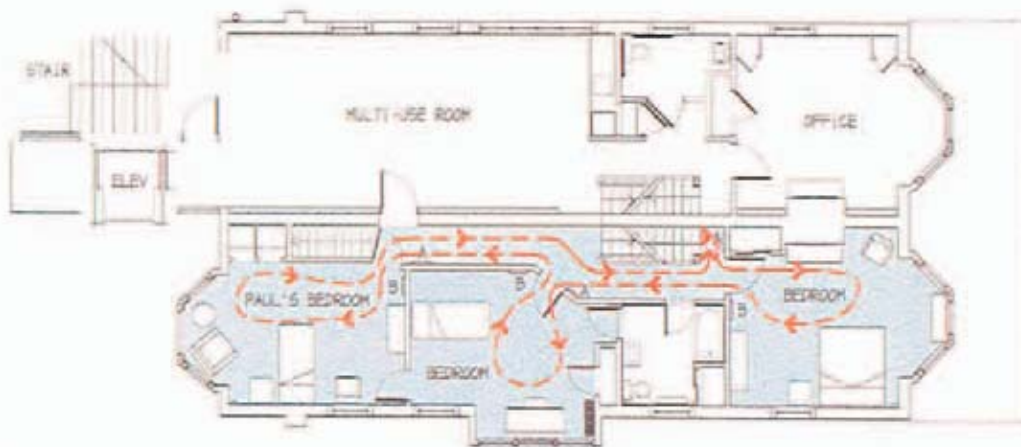


EXHIBIT ZONES

- 1. WHO WAS PAUL ROBESON?
- 2. WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO MEET HIM?
- 3. THE WORLD PAUL ROBESON LIVED IN
- 4. WHAT HE SAID ABOUT HIMSELF AND HIS CONVICTIONS
- 5. WHAT OTHERS SAID ABOUT ROBESON
- 6. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SAY ABOUT HIM?

New Exhibits Plan - First Floor



- A - ROOM LABEL
- B - INTERPRETIVE WALL PLAQUE

New Exhibits Plan - Second Floor

Figure 20: Proposed Exhibit Design Plans

Source: *Master Plan: The Rehabilitation of the Paul Robeson House*

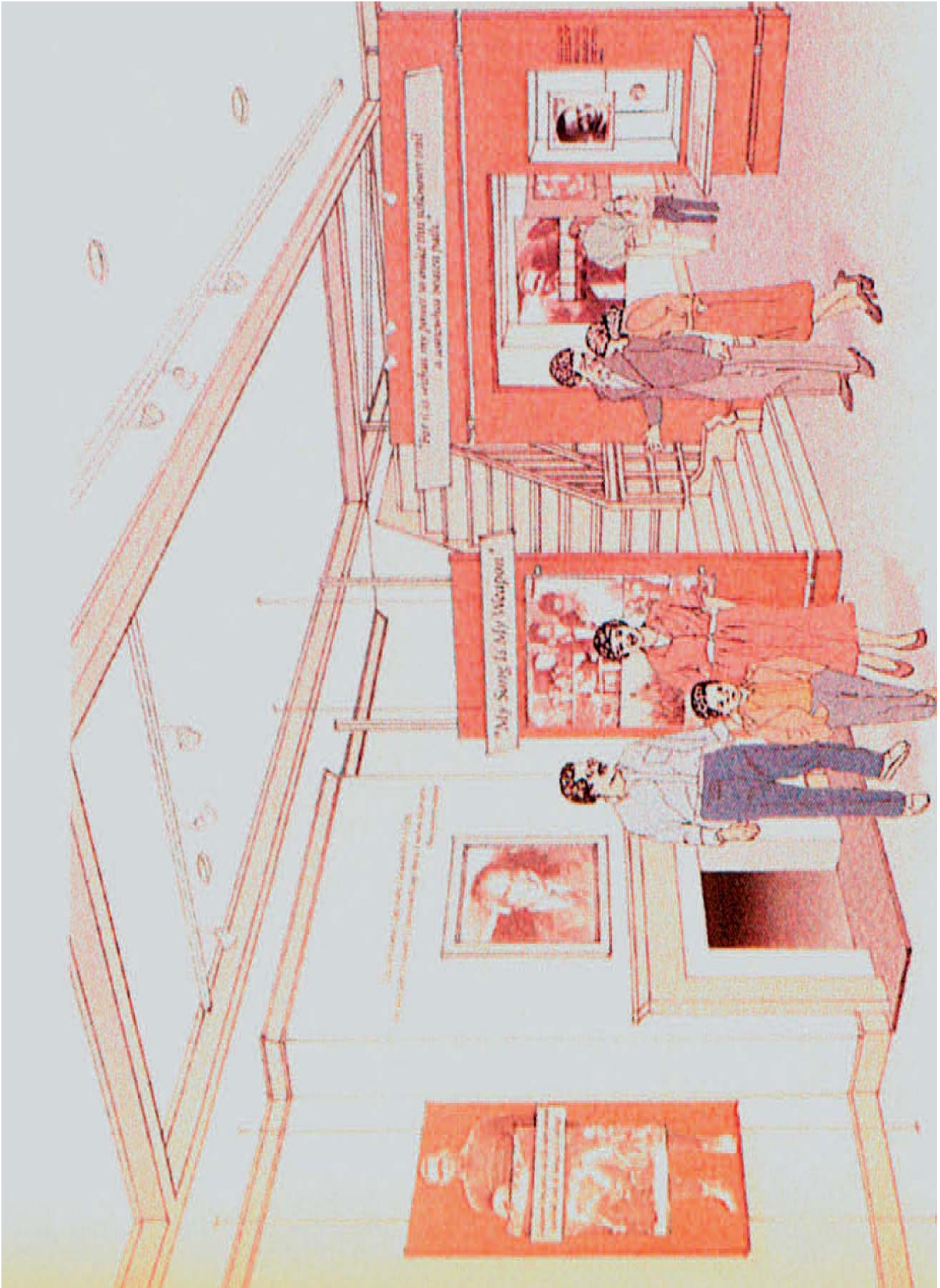


Figure 21: Perspective Drawing of the proposed Entrance Gallery of the Cultural Center

Source: *Master Plan: The Rehabilitation of the Paul Robeson House*

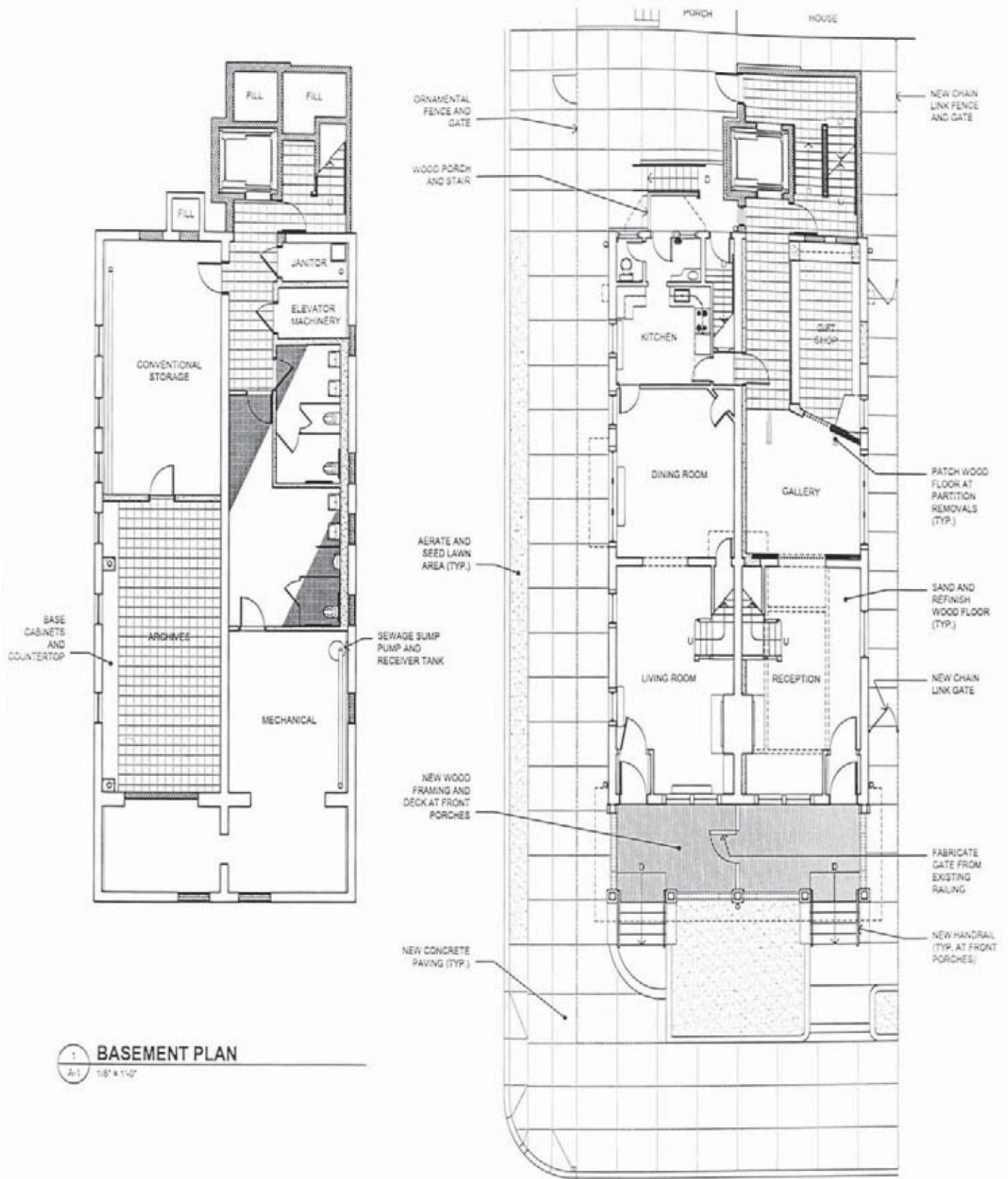
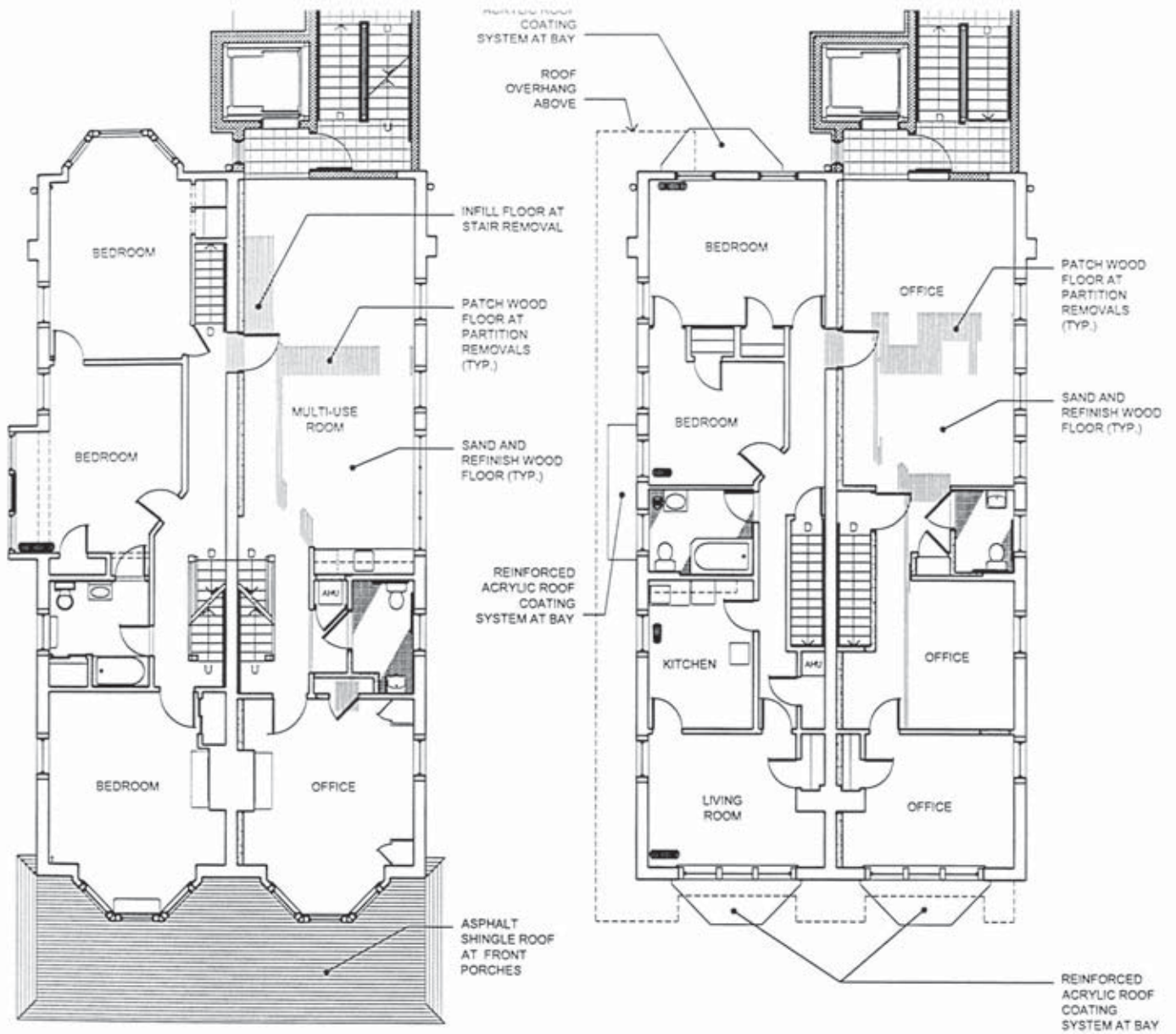


Figure 22: Proposed Plans for the Basement and First Floor of The Paul Robeson House and Cultural Center
 Source: *Master Plan: The Rehabilitation of the Paul Robeson House*



3 SECOND FLOOR PLAN
 A-1 1/8" = 1'-0"

4 THIRD FLOOR PLAN
 A-1 1/8" = 1'-0"

Figure 23: Proposed Plans for the Second and Third Floors of the Paul Robeson House and Cultural Center
 Source: *Master Plan: The Rehabilitation of the Paul Robeson House*



Figure 24: Paul Robeson sitting in the living room of the House, 1970's.
Source: Duberman, Paul Robeson: A Biography

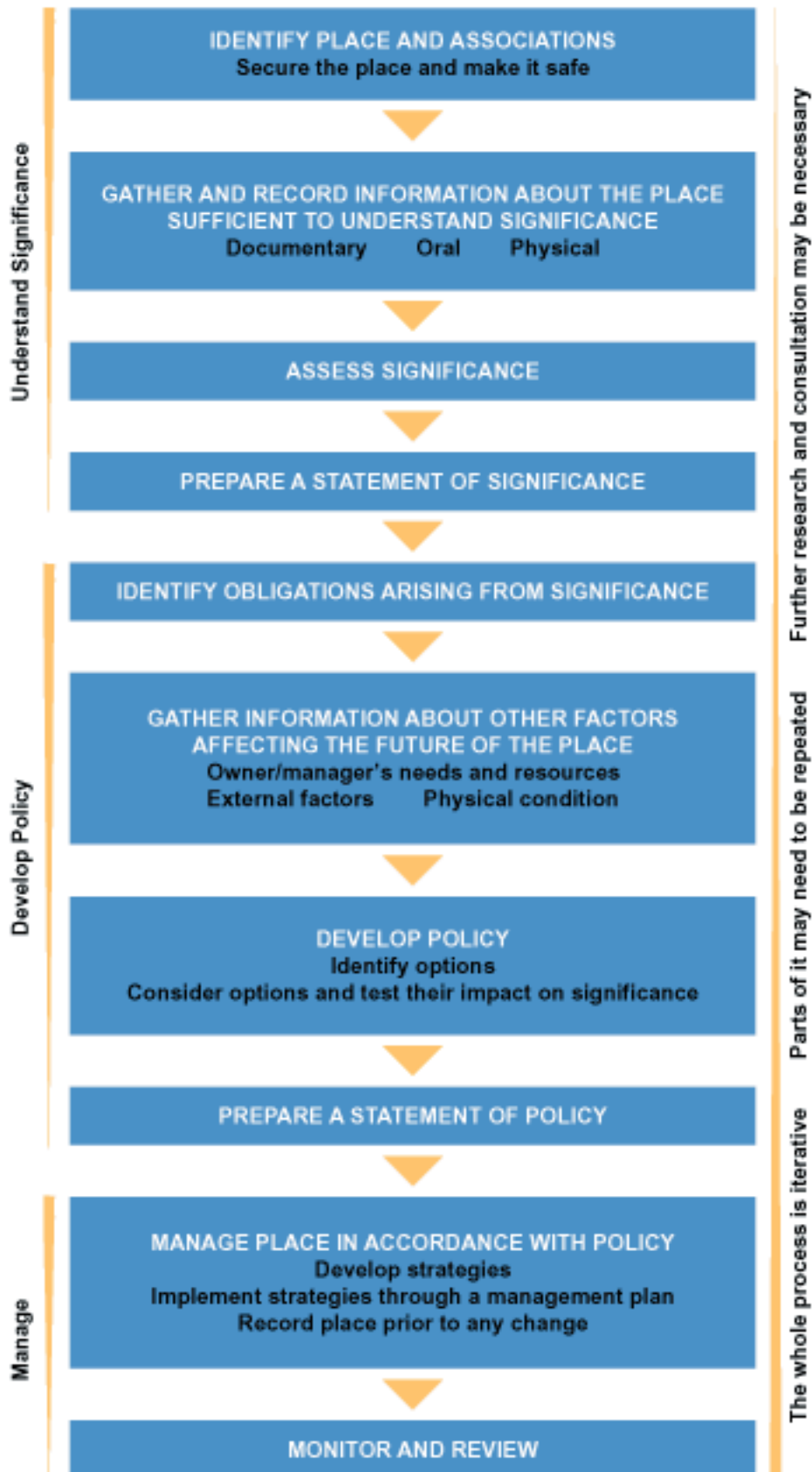


Figure 25: The Burra Charter Process: Sequence of Investigations, Decisions & Actions
Source: Australia ICOMOS website

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