

>> **Pro Path Guide** >>
for History Majors & Graduate Students

Historic Preservation, Interpretation, and Tours of Historic Buildings

Author: Greg Jirik, Graduate Student Research Assistant, Department of History, University of Northern Colorado, Fall 2020.
Editor: Dr. Jacob Melish, Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Northern Colorado, Fall 2020.
Sources: Interviews with professionals in the field—Betsy Kellums, City of Greeley Planner III/Historic Preservation, and Scott Chartier, Curator of Historic Sites for Greeley Museums—and research on professional websites.
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Overview of the Professions

Most cities with buildings from the nineteenth century or earlier probably have a historic preservation office within the city planning department.

The goals of historic preservation are the identification, assessment, preservation, and interpretation for the public and stakeholders of historically significant sites. Historic properties fifty years old or older are researched and evaluated via construction documents and physical surveys as well as written and photographic documentation in archives to be eligible for government preservation grants or listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The research and administration branch requires researching and understanding community planning, political science, and financial management, which are all important to the process of local preservation planning.

Historic preservation also has a technical or “brick and mortar” branch requiring knowledge of project management, construction skills, and architectural history. When the site of historic preservation is an earth dwelling or ruins, a background in archaeology is essential.

Work interpreting historic structures or sites for the public can be a different professional path and take the form of interpretive tour guide, historic reenactor, exhibit designer, and/or print or video design and production.

Examples of historic preservation employers

- Local Government – City Planning Office
- National Park Service
- State Dept. of Transportation
- Cultural Resource Management companies
- Museums
- University Facilities Dept.
- Oil & Gas Title Research
- Historic Preservation Private Consultants

Is any additional training, education or certification/qualification helpful?

Major and minor in two of the following fields, internships, a master’s degree, and work experience are recommended, depending on your specific interests.

- History
- Archaeology
- Architecture or Real Estate
- Business Management
- Political Science
- Native American Studies
- GIS (Geographic Information Systems) mapping
- Project/Construction Management

Is internship during undergrad necessary or recommended for employment in this field?

Internships are recommended if available with your local city historic preservation or planning office. These tend to be competitive. Contact Dr. Melish, jacob.melish@unco.edu. If you are more interested in the “brick and mortar” side, then experience in construction is helpful.

Professional associations related to this field

Colorado Wyoming Association of Museums (CWAM). They offer student membership.

<https://www.cwam-us.org/membership/>

National Alliance of Preservation Commissions. They offer student membership. <https://napcommissions.org/join/>

Colorado Preservation Inc. <http://coloradopreservation.org/>

American Association for State & Local History. <https://aaslh.org/>

National Trust for Historic Preservation. <https://savingplaces.org/>

National Preservation Institute. They offer short instructional courses in a number of areas. <https://www.npi.org/>

Description of the typical career path:

Getting your foot in the door usually requires taking a part-time internship or volunteer position. After obtaining job experience, one can then apply for part-time and full-time positions. Be willing to relocate. Look for positions in rural areas as a way to get experience.

What is the message to undergraduates?

Do well in your History BA and relevant internships then get a professional master’s degree (*and* a history master’s if possible) while getting in more internships and relevant entry-level employment whenever possible.

What are chances for employment in this field?

Competition is steep for the small number of jobs available. That means you need unpaid internships, qualifications, and experience in several entry level jobs where you work diligently. Be willing to relocate and look for positions in rural areas.

Job posting websites

Colorado Wyoming Association of Museums (CWAM). <https://www.cwam-us.org/professional-development/jobs/>

American Association for State & Local History (AASLH). <https://jobs.aaslh.org/>

Average pay

Entry Level Full-time Assistant: \$15–\$20/hr.

Experienced Full-time Planner or Planning Tech.: \$23–\$32/hr.

National Park Service Preservationist: \$24/hr.

National Park Service Historic Preservation Maintenance Worker: \$17–\$21/hr.

UNC History Department or other UNC contact for students interested in employment in this field:

Professor Welsh, michael.welsh@unco.edu

Websites and/or books relevant to this career:

Colorado’s Historic Architecture & Engineering Guide

<https://www.historycolorado.org/colorados-historic-architecture-engineering-guide>

Field Guide to American Houses by Virginia Savage McAlester (2015)

The Art of Relevance by Nina Simon (2016)

Are internships available to UNC undergraduate and/or graduate students?

UNC has limited internships to qualified students and job shadowing opportunities available. Internships, which are usually unpaid, are highly recommended. They can be taken during the academic year for 1–3 credits or performed during the summer. Contact jacob.melish@unco.edu

Are there paid positions for undergraduate or graduate students in this field?

Paid positions, if any, usually go to graduate students.

Are there any UNC Alumni or employee working in the field who can answer further questions?

Not yet. We're working on it. If you go into the field, let us know! If you do an internship, your supervisor or colleagues will be good sources of information.