

MERGING THE BUCOLIC SUPERHIGHWAY OF THE GARDEN STATE WITH THE VIRTUAL SUPERHIGHWAY OF THE WORLD WIDE WEB

Editors' Note:

The editors of the MEMO are always on the lookout for interesting stories about the activities of our fellow alumni. In this issue, we are pleased to publish the following article by Gregory Dietrich (CU-MSHP/CU-MSRD '03), detailing his documentation of an unusual historic resource: New Jersey's Garden State Parkway.

Significance can appear in the most unlikely of places. In fact, it is not uncommon for something that the public has spent their entire lives taking for granted to acquire new meaning over time and become significant. New Jersey's Garden State Parkway (GSP) is one such example: Constructed between 1946 and 1957 and stretching 173 miles from the New York State line to Cape May, the GSP has been a boon for motorists, expediting trips for hordes of business commuters and seaside weekenders alike for over 50 years. But the GSP is more than just an expressway—it is an historic resource.

In 2001, the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office (NJ-HPO) determined that the GSP was eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places for its innovative design, which combined the high speed and efficiency of a modern superhighway with the naturalistic elements of a historic parkway. In making its determination, the NJ-

HPO became responsible for ensuring that any proposals to alter the GSP via state or federal funding or permitting would have to consider the potential effects on the resource. This requirement eventually resulted in an interesting and innovative new resource: the development of a site on the World Wide Web documenting and explaining to the general public the history of this historic and important road.

1. CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND MITIGATIONS

Falling within the domain of Cultural Resource Management (CRM), the laws protecting cultural resources such as the GSP have their origins in the National Historic Preservation Act and the National Environmental Protection Act on the federal level and various historic preservation and environmental laws on the state level. Although federal and state laws concerning cultural resources do not offer the same levels of protection found in local preservation ordinances, they do have the capacity to foster activities that support preservation objectives. These activities are known as *mitigations* and can vary depending on the site's significance and the project's anticipated effects. Mitigations may include such actions as excavation of an archaeo-



Cape May Terminus of the Garden State Parkway

Photo credit: New Jersey Turnpike Authority

logical site, preserving the resource in place by buffering it from new development with plantings, relocation of the resource, or—if demolition is unavoidable—professionally documenting it via text, photographs or drawings. Mitigations may also include preservation easements, restoration of physically or thematically associated resources, or the creation of educational materials to highlight a resource's history and significance.

In the past, such educational materials have taken a variety of forms, from interpretive signage to murals to pamphlets that employ text and graphics. Among these, interpretive signage is widely encouraged since it has the capacity to convey the history of the resource in its original location, thereby lending a certain element of authenticity to the viewer experience. By contrast, pamphlets have the disadvantage of reaching

a limited number of people due to a finite number of copies housed at a finite number of repositories. In an effort to avoid this limitation but also to reach as wide an audience as possible, State Historic Preservation Offices regulating CRM projects increasingly prefer the Internet as a mitigation tool for promoting historic resources to a much wider audience.

(see PARKWAY, p. 4)

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2.

THE GARDEN STATE
PARKWAY HISTORY WEB-
SITE

In 2004, an electric utility's proposal to upgrade a transmission alignment running alongside and parallel to the GSP through Ocean, Burlington, and Atlantic Counties required a state wetlands permit, thereby incurring NJ-HPO oversight. In response to the adverse physical and visual effects posed by the reconfiguration and enlargement of the existing transmission alignment, the NJ-HPO issued a series of permit conditions as a means of mitigating these adverse effects on the GSP. Among them was the creation of a website that would explore the GSP's history and significance. Creating a website entailed coordination between the applicant (Atlantic City Electric), cultural resource consultant (Cultural Resource Consulting Group), web designer (Hamptons Online), and owner (The New Jersey Turnpike Authority).

It also required substantial research at the Turnpike Authority's archives in order to cull both historical information and graphics which would ultimately provide the site's content.

In telling the story of the GSP, there were multiple aspects to be considered that included its planning, design, construction, various roadside features, and overall impacts, as well as the human-interest aspects of its development. There were also "quotable quotes," statistical data, and trivia that had the capacity to enrich the story. As archival research uncovered a rich assortment of historic photographs, postcards, and maps to support these ideas, the form of the website began to emerge. At the recommendation of the web designer, Flash technology was used for its ability to offer high-resolution graphics and animation. Each theme was represented by a color postcard image which in turn became the background for accompanying text and photographs. Supplementing this information were "fun



The Essex County section of the Garden State Parkway featured low-sprung, stone-faced bridges and wide, grassy medians.

Photo credit: New Jersey Turnpike Authority

facts" which took the form of sidebars incorporating the quotes, data, and trivia. This diversity of information and visual matter has produced an educational resource that has appeal to both parkway enthusiasts and non-enthusiasts alike.

As a stop on the World Wide Web's virtual superhighway, the GSP history website has the ability to engender a wide variety of visitors and in doing so, to honor the State of New Jersey's mission to promote a monumental ex-

ample of its unconventional legacy. To take the journey, visit www.gsphistory.com.

In the capacities of project manager and architectural historian, Mr. Dietrich oversaw the development and coordination of the website mentioned in this article, and provided editorial input for the site's ultimate launch. He is the sole practitioner of Gregory Dietrich Preservation Consulting, (www.gdpreservationconsulting.com), located in New York City.



The first car passed through the Bergen Toll Plaza on July 1st, 1955.

Photo credit: New Jersey Turnpike Authority



Among the various ways in which the New Jersey Highway Authority promoted the GSP was the Miss Parkway Beauty Contest which was held during the 1960s.

Photo credit: New Jersey Turnpike Authority