

February 8, 2006

Association for Preservation Technology International Hurricane Katrina Relief Team #3 Report

APT's third Katrina Relief volunteer team visited Mississippi the week of January 23-30. In a joint effort with The National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP), the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), and the Mississippi Heritage Trust, the team lent its skills and knowledge to homeowners whose houses were not completely ruined by the storm.

The team members were:

David Bergstone, Preservationist, Old Salem, Winston-Salem, NC
Marilyn Kaplan, Architect, Preservation Architecture, Albany, NY
Dean Koga, Architect, Building Conservation Associates, Inc., New York, NY
Randolph Langenbach, Conservation Consultant, Conservantech Consulting,
Oakland, CA
Beth Nathan, Engineer, Structures North Consulting Engineers, Salem, MA
John Wathne, Engineer, Structures North Consulting Engineers, Salem, MA

We were organized by Brian Robinson, and coordinated in the field, and shepherded through our week, by the extraordinary efforts of Jennifer Baughn of MDAH. Her cool management skills guided the team to produce its maximum effort while also keeping us loose. Guiding us as well was Lolly Barnes, the Biloxi representative of the NTHP. All members of the team would like to extend our fondest gratitude and admiration for the work of these two amazing preservationists. We also want to thank Ken P'Pool of the MDAH for his role in organizing the volunteer efforts by preservationists.

The team worked in Historic Districts in coastal communities stretching from Biloxi to Bay St. Louis. Five months after the storm, physical devastation was everywhere, but signs of recovery were everywhere as well. We were told that we wouldn't really comprehend the extent of the damage until we got there, and we didn't. The initial assessments had been done in areas where we were working so we devoted our efforts to buildings we thought were recoverable. Our tasks were threefold: perform more in-depth examinations of buildings and prepare a brief letter report for the homeowner assessing the damage and providing suggestions for rebuilding; meet with homeowners who had received letters from previous teams or who had asked for technical assistance with their rebuilding efforts; and provide photographic documentation of all extent structures in a few Historic Districts. We produced letter reports for 31 houses.

Most of the buildings we worked with were far more damaged than structures we usually address. Most were off their foundations, had been shorn of porches and front walls, and often lacked flooring in the first floor. But if the frame was

relatively sound, we could usually devise a plan for saving the home. Solving the technical issues, though, was no different from what we, as preservationists, do in the course of our usual work. What was different was the extent—both the damage in individual houses and the number of damaged houses.

Our team stayed in Preservation House in Biloxi, and shared quarters with APT member Patrick Sparks. We had many probing discussions about the mechanisms for the damage we were seeing, and appropriate solutions for new foundations. The discussions, fieldwork, and preparation of letters and reports made for a very focused week, which was rewarding in its concentration. But the team was jovial and cohesive, and we shared a lot of laughs.

The need on the Gulf Coast for professionals with a preservation focus continues. The fourth APT team has been assembled, and a call for a fifth has been made. If you are able to volunteer, you will surely find it rewarding. If you are not, please consider making a donation to the Mississippi Heritage Trust in support of volunteer recovery efforts.

Dean Koga

Web Site Editor