



National Historic Landmarks Program

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Initial Inquiry before Beginning a National Historic Landmark Nomination

A letter of inquiry introduces the property to the NHL Program staff. It provides a written overview of the property, its historic significance, and its historic integrity. This letter also serves as a formal written record of your initiating the NHL designation process. Prior to writing your inquiry letter, you should speak with NHL Program staff regarding your property and its potential for designation as an NHL. They will answer questions you may have about the initial inquiry letter.

Please click on the questions below to learn more.

What should I include in my letter of inquiry?

Your letter of inquiry should provide preliminary answers to the following questions:

- What is the historic importance of the property? What **nationally significant** story does the property tell?
- How would you assess the current condition and **integrity** of the property? Has the property undergone major alterations since the historic period? If so, how extensive are these alterations?
- Do you have the support of the property owner?
- Is the property already listed in the National Register of Historic Places?

You are welcome to include materials above and beyond the letter, such as photographs or brochures. However, be aware that materials sent to us via the U.S. Postal Service are irradiated; this process destroys photographs. We request that you send this type of material to us via an alternate mail carrier. Please note that these materials will not be returned to you.

[Click here to find addresses for your letter.](#)

I'm not a historian or an archeologist. Can I write the letter and prepare the nomination or should I hire a professional to do this?

An NHL nomination requires professional-level research and writing in history, archeology, or architecture (or a combination of these disciplines, depending on the property to be nominated). Continue reading through the Apply section to determine the required skills to complete a National Historic Landmark nomination.

If you believe that you need assistance, there are consultants and contractors who are experienced in writing this type of nomination. The NHL Program offers **webinars** to explain the qualifications to look for in a consultant, as well as the nomination process.

If I decide to hire a consultant, what qualifications should I look for?

When hiring a consultant, you should consider:

- Does the consultant possess an advanced degree in the discipline associated with the property?
- For a property being proposed for NHL Criteria 1, 2, 3, or 5, look for a consultant with an advanced degree in history.
- For a property being proposed for NHL Criterion 4, look for a consultant with an advanced degree in architectural history or the history of science/technology.
- For a property being proposed for NHL Criterion 6, look for a consultant with an advanced degree in archeology.
- Has the consultant written a successful nomination for either the National Register of Historic Places or the National Historic Landmarks Program?
- Ask to see the nomination to determine if the consultant wrote this nomination on his or her own. If the nomination was co-written, contact the co-author to ask about the nomination and the quality of the consultant's work.
- Contact your [State Historic Preservation Office](#) or the [NHL Program](#) to ask about the nomination and quality of the consultant's work.

The [Wisconsin Historical Society](#) has additional information about hiring consultants on its website.

Do you have any sample letters of inquiry?

Yes. Please see:

- [Letter of inquiry for the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum](#), Alexandria, VA
- [Letter of inquiry for Stepping Stones](#), Bedford, NY

To whom do I send my letter of inquiry?

Please consult our [contact](#) page for a list of regional and national offices.

What will the response to my letter say?

Yes: Congratulations! You have made it over the first hurdle. You will receive a letter from the NHL Program indicating that we are encouraging the preparation of a NHL nomination. We will assign a reviewer/contact person to you; this reviewer will send you the NHL forms and work with you throughout the process.

Maybe: You will receive a letter from the NHL Program indicating that additional information is required. Before we can make a preliminary determination on the potential eligibility of the property, we need additional information from you.

No: You will receive a detailed letter from the NHL Program explaining why we have determined that the property is not eligible for further consideration.

Please note: This is a first step. Not all applicants who are encouraged to continue with the nomination process go on to prepare a successful NHL nomination.

Checklist: Before you go any further

1. Before writing my letter of inquiry, did I speak with NHL staff about beginning a nomination?
2. In my letter of inquiry, have I outlined the national historic importance of the property in my letter?
3. For non-archeological properties, have I discussed the historic appearance of the property in my letter? Have I described how the property's current condition reflects that historic appearance?
4. Have I included a statement regarding the property owner's support in my letter?

Continue to the next section: [researching a nomination](#)

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