

**A Sociological Study on
Historic Preservation Movements in the U.S. and Japan:
A Preliminary Study**

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[SYNOPSIS]

The intersection of 9th and Olive streets in downtown St. Louis, Missouri, was called “the Corner.” It once was *the* prime location in the city, and on The Corner stood a magnificent U.S. Custom House and Post Office building which was affectionately called “the Old Post Office” by the locals. This building, with its immediate neighbor to the west, “the Century Building,” has been a battleground of historic preservation *twice*.

The first battle was about the Old Post Office (OPO) in the 1960s and 1970s. A citizen-led preservation movement, “the Committee to Save the Old Post Office,” reversed the federal government’s decision to demolish the OPO and was instrumental in gaining National Historic Landmark designation. The incident ultimately led to the passage of two important federal preservation laws. It was a major triumph in the history of American historic preservation movements.

The second battle, however, was an entirely different story. Developers claimed in the 2000s that, in order to renovate the OPO, the adjacent Century Building should be demolished to make way for a proposed parking garage. The locals stood up just as in the first battle, but this time only to find the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the preeminent leader in the preservation movement, was supporting the developers. The 108 year old marble-clad Century was demolished in 2004. It was a major defeat for the preservation community in the U.S.

Why did local preservationists fight against the National Trust? Why did the Trust agree to the demolition of part of the historic fabric of “the Corner?” The author chronicles the two battles, and also compares them with a Japanese preservation case in Otaru, Hokkaido. The data used and reported here is based on fieldwork carried out by the author in the U.S. (2007-2015) and Japan (1984-2014).