“Preservation is a fundamental human impulse,” says Stephanie Meeks, president and CEO of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C. “There are places that matter to all of us, whether it’s the outdoors or the built environment. One opportunity that land trusts have is to connect people to that sense of place. For many, that’s the built environment rather than natural places.”

Market research done by the National Trust shows that young people are very attracted to older buildings. “So it’s an entry point for the next generation,” says Meeks. “They love the authenticity. That can become a real connection for land trusts wanting to reach out to Millennials, an even larger group than Baby Boomers.”

Land trusts also increasingly recognize the important connection between conservation and community at the intersection of cultural resources and landscape. Cultural resources are defined as the collective evidence of the past activities and accomplishments of people. Buildings, objects, features, locations and structures with scientific, historic and cultural value are all examples of cultural resources.

A cabin. A mansion. A battlefield. A barn. Human history is written all over the American landscape, often revealing stories that enrich our understanding of the relationships between people and the land.
When history is tied to the land, a natural partnership can develop between land conservation and historic preservation.

**Lending Expertise**
Michigan’s Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (GTRLC) doesn’t hold historic easements, “but we’ve never separated historical preservation from land conservation,” says Executive Director Glen Chown. “We preserve context.”

Nancy Finegood, who heads the Michigan Historic Preservation Network, shares that perspective. “Historical resources and the land go hand-in-hand. It’s difficult to parse the two. If buildings were part of the land, they’re often very significant to the property.”

So when the two organizations were alerted to the potential of a high-density condominium development on the Old Mission Peninsula on Grand Traverse Bay, they decided to collaborate.

The 11-acre property features 558 feet of undeveloped Lake Michigan shoreline, old growth white pines and the historic Bowers Harbor Inn. It was the Victorian-era inn, a beloved local landmark, that became the "cri de coeur" for the community. It’s been there for generations, and it feels timeless.

“Part of my philosophy is that historic buildings are even more meaningful when the lands around them are also preserved,” Chown says. The owners were already considering placing an historic easement on the building. Persuading them of the benefits of land protection wasn’t hard. The Michigan Historic Preservation Network now holds both historic and conservation easements on the property.

GTRLC served as an advisor on conservation provisions of the easements—including baseline documentation—but has no ongoing responsibility. “It’s a creative way to be involved in historic preservation,” says Chown. The Bowers Harbor Inn project is part of a larger, landscape-level conservation effort, and now the acreage around it is protected, thanks in part to GTRLC’s expertise. The group was acknowledged in 2008 with the Traverse City History Center’s Community Award for making historic preservation a significant priority in community planning. “It says good things about our organization that we had a hand in preserving it, and it’s a great venue for us to talk about our work,” says Chown.

**Considering the Whole Picture**
Cazenovia, New York, an idyllic lakeside town located just 20 miles from Syracuse, was founded in 1793. It still boasts dozens of homes and buildings from that era in a Village Historic District, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Cazenovia Preservation Foundation (CPF) was created 43 years ago to hold historic façade easements in the village, but over time it broadened its mandate to include conserving the farmland and countryside encircling the town.

“If you’re going to protect a village and maintain its cultural and historical significance, you have to consider the whole picture,” says CPF Conservation Manager Judy Gianforte, “including the current and future use of the town’s rural landscape.” To that end, CPF owns or has easements on 2,600 acres of open space, farmland, trails and wetlands, providing a natural buffer zone that complements and contextualizes the historic buildings.

**Connecting Art, Land and History**
The ties between Maine’s natural beauty and its artistic heritage are deep and longstanding. One of the most prominent of the state’s many renowned artists was Winslow Homer, whose home and studio on the Prouts Neck peninsula in Scarborough affords sweeping views of the Atlantic Ocean.

Much of the masterful work Homer created during the last 27 years of his life was done in that studio and on its wide balcony above the sea. Fortunately, the scene that inspired the artist a century ago has changed little since then, and a 2014 partnership between the Scarborough Land Trust, the Portland Museum of Art and the Prouts Neck Association guarantees it will stay that way forever.

When the land trust was approached about helping provide permanent protection for the land and viewshed surrounding the Winslow Homer Studio, a designated National Historic Landmark owned by the museum, it agreed to accept the donation of a conservation easement on the half-acre piece of land. “We were thrilled to be involved in the conservation of this nationally significant property,” says Scarborough Executive Director Kathy Mills. “When valued landscapes are involved, it can make sense for land trusts to participate in projects that include historic preservation. Winslow Homer captured the beauty...
of Prouts Neck like no other artist, and protecting Scarborough’s natural landscapes goes to the core of our mission. Historic preservation speaks to the heart of a community.”

Catalyzing Larger Conservation Efforts

In 2002, the Sonoma Land Trust (SLT) received the 240-acre Glen Oaks country estate in a bequest from a long-time supporter. Set in a valley of oak woodlands, open meadows and chaparral, the land has the look and feel of old California, says SLT Executive Director Ralph Benson, and it was already protected with a conservation easement.

However, the original farmstead—a 20-acre envelope that includes an 1869 stone mansion, a fieldstone horse barn and a smokehouse, all listed in the National Register of Historic Places—presented a challenge. With a mission that emphasizes land conservation, the SLT board struggled to develop a rationale for keeping the property, burdened as it is with old buildings requiring significant restoration and maintenance.

Coincidentally, a vintage dam on Stuart Creek outside the historic envelope was a contributing factor for the listing of the buildings in the National Register. But it was also a barrier to steelhead spawning habitat. By modifying the old dam for fish passage, SLT restored miles of spawning area, and at the same time added an aquatic link to a multicounty San Francisco Bay Area Wildlife Corridor.

“We started acquiring other properties in the watershed to protect [the creek],” says Benson. “One thing led to another that wouldn’t have happened without our ownership of Glen Oaks Ranch. We got to know the terrain. Now we’re native to that place, too.” The ranch has been designated as an “anchor” preserve. “It’s really been a catalyst for larger conservation efforts.”

Protecting America’s Origins

The Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail in the Blue Ridge Mountains and foothills of Virginia, Tennessee and North Carolina winds through an area rich in Revolutionary War history, including four counties where the Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina (FCNC) protects forests, sensitive habitats, watersheds and farmland.

“We find these historic landscapes in our region often intersect with greater conservation goals,” says Stewardship Director Andrew Kota. One of those is the Cane Creek Battlefield, the site of a 1780 Revolutionary War skirmish and today part of a rural landscape of fertile farmland and forest habitat near public game lands in the Broad River Basin. In 2013, FCNC received a $40,000 grant from the National Park Service’s American Battlefield Protection Program to hire an archeological consultant to determine the battle’s accurate location. “If the consultant does locate a specific place, the next step is a nomination for today.”

An easement donated to the Cazenovia Preservation Foundation in 2013 protects the exterior architecture of four buildings of the Hillcrest property, as well as the open space around the buildings.

CAZENOVIA PRESERVATION FOUNDATION
as a national historic site, then ideally some preservation projects and possibly work with NPS on historic interpretation,” says Kota.

Even though FCNC doesn’t have an ownership interest in the Cane Creek area, “I think the public places a lot of value in protecting what remains of the historic resources and cultural sites, and Foothills Conservancy is in a unique position to enhance their protection by weaving historic sites into natural resource conservation. It can also strengthen a project for grant funding,” Kota says.

After the Cane Creek encounter, some 1,000 patriots traversed 330 miles across the Blue Ridge Mountains on what would be memorialized as the Overmountain Victory Trail to fight the Battle of King’s Mountain. They claimed a decisive victory over the British and changed the tide of the war. FCNC received a grant from the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund to acquire a conservation easement on the home site of William Lenoir, a captain in the Battle. Before the war, Lenoir built a fort on the banks of the Yadkin River to protect settlers against attacks by Cherokee Indians. After the war, he purchased the land and named the home he built there Fort Defiance for the original stockade. It’s now listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The conservation easement protects the grounds of the Fort Defiance National Historic Site, as well as its forested backdrop, which harbors streams feeding the Yadkin River. “We have this great opportunity to spread our vision and mission to segments of the community that feel strongly about the protection of historic values and places,” says Kota, “and to add another layer to our conservation mission.”

Connecting Then and Now
Not far from the famous Trapp Family Lodge and mountain resort in Stowe, Vermont, is another much smaller building that also once catered to vacationers. The historic Mill Trail Cabin was one of the first roadside tourist accommodations in the state, built as an inn in the 1930s on a 31-acre site now owned and managed by the Stowe Land Trust. A second cabin on the property served as a blacksmith shop.

“The cabins were a conundrum at first,” says Stowe Land Trust Executive Director Caitrín Maloney. “The board took on the property with the land in mind.” Set in a mixed northern hardwood forest, the conserved land includes a portion of the Mill Trail, which is popular with snowshoers and cross-country skiers. The trail edges Notchbrook, a favorite swimming hole and fishing destination. Now with the help of a $60,000 grant from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, incremental restoration has begun on the first floor of the two-story inn.

“Layers of human history and land use are concentrated in this place,” says Conservation Program Manager Kristen Sharpless. They include remnants of agriculture, milling and logging from cellar hole to old barn and mill foundations. “And you can get down to the river, flip the rocks, look for bugs, too.” A Summer Naturalist Program, now in its second year, uses the cabin as a base to reach hundreds of children and adults with natural and cultural history offerings.

“The way in which that supports our mission is unique,” says Maloney. “It’s a jumping-off point for learning and a compelling way to connect. It helps people see what Stowe Land Trust is about.” Making those kinds of connections pays off in community engagement. “You don’t need a building to do that, but it helps.”

WRITER ELISABETH PTAK MAKES HER HOME IN INVERNESS, CALIFORNIA, A COASTAL VILLAGE SURROUNDED BY FOREST AND FARMLAND AND FLANKED BY THE PACIFIC OCEAN AND TOMALES BAY. SHE CAN BE REACHED AT EPTAK@HORIZONTOCABLE.COM.