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Title:

Preserving Adobe Heritage: Cornerstones Community Partnerships at Twenty Five Years

Abstract:

In 2011 Cornerstones Community Partnerships celebrated 25 years of outreach: disseminating information and collaborating with Southwest communities to ensure the heritage of earthen architecture. Cornerstones began in the mid 1980's, when a conditions survey of over 300 adobe churches, missions, and morades took place, resulting in the 1986 formation of "Churches: Symbols of Community," whose mission was to strengthen communities by assisting in their preservation of historic buildings and cultural traditions. In 1994, "Churches" became Cornerstones Community Partnerships, a non-profit corporation. Initially work focused in Northern New Mexico, home to a unique patrimony of vernacular earthen architecture. Cornerstones has now built a national and international reputation for the creative use of historic preservation as a tool for community revitalization, the affirmation of cultural values, and the training of youth in traditional building skills and sustainable construction methods. The largest portion of this work has been skills and methodologies used for centuries to maintain and perpetuate earthen architecture. Partnerships with other organizations have enlarged its constituency. In 2010 Cornerstones joined the Desert Southwest Cooperative Ecosystems Network, a consortium of government and non-government non-profits working out of the University of Arizona providing resources for research, training and technical solutions for cultural and natural resource challenges. Hands on workshops held around the southwest are case studies for how this actually works. Cornerstones published an Adobe Architecture Conservation Handbook and a Flood Mitigation Handbook which have wide circulation. Major current Cornerstones' projects are San Miguel Mission in Santa Fe and the Trading Post at Santo Domingo Pueblo (a community development project). While tremendous achievements have been made many challenges remain. Recent collapses of adobe walls at important churches in Lemitar and Questa, New Mexico as a result of inappropriate non compatible modern construction practices are reminders that much remains to be done.