



Photograph Requirements for National Register Nominations in Michigan

Updated October 11, 2024

Preparers of National Register nominations are encouraged to read National Register Bulletin 16A, [How to Complete the National Register Registration Form](#), National Register Bulletin 23, [How to Improve the Quality of Photographs for National Register Nominations](#), and the 2024 [Consolidated and Updated Photograph Policy](#) along with reading these specifications. These documents are available from the National Register of Historic Places website, www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm.

Introduction

Photographs are an integral component of a National Register of Historic Places nomination. As written in National Register Bulletin 23, photographs “illustrate the property at the time it was nominated, provide a record of the property's integrity and distinguishing features, and support the nomination's discussion of the property's physical description and historic significance.”

Preparers should bear in mind that by completing a National Register nomination, they are contributing to the public knowledge of our collective history. Additionally, a National Register nomination is an enduring record of the historic places in our state and our communities and provide a way to understand the historical development of the places we call home. Even when a property listed in the National Register is demolished or significantly altered the nomination remains. For these reasons and more, it is important that nominations include photographs of high quality and provide an honest representation of the property.

It is with this in mind that this document has been prepared. It does not supplant the requirements described by the National Park Service (NPS), but serves as a supplement, with the purpose of making clear for preparers what both the National Park Service (NPS) and the Michigan SHPO requires so that our historic properties are adequately documented, and that the nomination process is as efficient as possible.

Additionally, this document is meant for National Register nomination photographs. This means the final set of photographs that are to be submitted as part of a nomination to NPS for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. It does not apply to photographs taken for research or documentation

purposes, photographs submitted with the [National Register of Historic Places Preliminary Questionnaire](#), or to photographs taken for historic resource surveys. The SHPO maintains separate instructions for survey photography, and surveyors should read the [Michigan Above Ground Survey Manual](#) before taking photographs as part of a historic resource survey.

The Role of Photographs in a National Register Nomination

The photographer's goal should be to best portray the property, its significance, and its essential, character-defining features through the set of nomination photographs.

- Essential to a nomination
- Provide authentic visual representation property's significant features and its integrity
- Support the nomination's discussion of the property's physical description and historic significance
- Reflect the qualities discussed in the Narrative Description and Statement of Significance
- Communicate the most information about the property as possible in as few views as possible
- Convey the essential characteristics of a property
- Reflect the property as it exists at present
- For districts: illustrate the character of the district as a whole through principal streetscapes, representative resource types, and significant aspects of the landscape

What to Photograph and How to do it

National Register Bulletin 23 was last updated in 1998, before the normalization of digital photography and well before the proliferation of smartphones. Yet, this seemingly dated document is a very useful resource for preparers of National Register nominations. That is because the techniques and aesthetic considerations covered apply regardless of the method and equipment used to visually document a historic property. Likewise, the information about certain types of equipment is applicable to both film and digital cameras alike.

General Advice

It is not necessary to be a professional photographer to properly document a historic property. The ease, power, and ubiquity of smartphones and digital cameras, in some ways, has fostered a "point-and-shoot" approach to National Register photography, however. While this may be appropriate for some

photographs and some occasions, it is not an appropriate approach for documenting a property to be nominated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Preparers should keep in mind that they are documenting a historic property and that their photographs will be a part of an enduring public record that, in part, tells a story that lasts for years and decades to come. These photographs will become a tool that future researchers, officials, and property owners use to understand changes to a property or community over time. Please take the time to thoughtfully compose and take photographs that do justice to the property you are nominating and its history. In other words, if a property is worth nominating, it is worth taking thoughtful photographs.

To that end, we recommend photographers spend some time planning their approach to documenting the property. Photographers should consider factors such as the weather, season, day of the week, time of day, position of the sun, human and vehicular traffic, and so forth. Online mapping applications may provide a basic level of information prior to traveling to the property. It is often useful to walk around the property to assess angles, lighting, and potential obstructions. It is also a good idea to walk some distance from the subject property to assess contextual views (see below) and other environmental and topographical factors that may impact your photography, or that may provide optimal views. Photographers may need to return to a property multiple times in order to make use of optimal lighting and conditions.

We strongly recommend that photographers prepare a photographic plan or outline before photographing the property. Doing so will allow photographers to make the most efficient use of time and maximize the information contained in each view. By mapping out the views to be captured ahead of time, the photographer can identify and eliminate duplicative, or near duplicative, views as well as gaps in the set of photographs.

Lastly, photographers should keep in mind that the set of photographs submitted as part of a nomination should provide an authentic visual representation of the property and its important characteristics. The photographs should convey to someone who may never visit the property those qualities that reflect the significance of the property.

Individual Buildings and Complexes

The number of photographs, or views, needed to properly document a property will depend upon the size and complexity of the property and its significance. There are aspects of photographing a property, however, that apply no matter

the size or complexity. If you have questions about the number of photographs to take, please consult with SHPO staff.

All individual property and complex nominations should include photographs that provide:

1. Contextual view(s). Such views should show the property in its wider locational setting. Contextual views are similar to streetscape views and should be taken from an appropriate distance so that the subject property is viewed among adjacent and unrelated buildings, objects, structures, and natural features. The subject property should be readily visible.
2. Views of various aspects of the property's setting, especially those areas that may be deemed significant to the property, such as historic landscape features. See the *Landscapes* section below for examples of these features.
3. Outbuildings, sites, and secondary features, especially those that contribute to the significance of the property or are described in the narrative text.
4. Relationships between resources (contributing and noncontributing).
5. Exterior views that show all elevations of the subject or primary resource, including additions and alterations (corner or perspective views are ok).
6. Details of character-defining, atypical, or unusual exterior features (these may be captured in other views, but some materials may warrant separate photographs).
7. Views of primary, common, or public interior spaces on each floor
 - a. For public buildings: lobbies, vestibules, corridors, meeting rooms, offices, stairs, etc.
 - b. For residential buildings: entries, halls, stairs, living or family rooms, kitchens, entertaining spaces, bedrooms, bathrooms, etc.
8. Views of character-defining, atypical, or unusual interior features (i.e. decorative glass, decorative tile, fireplaces, light fixtures, stairs, floors, built-in features, woodwork).
9. Views of construction materials (these may be captured in other views, but some materials may warrant separate photographs)

Historic Districts

While it is not necessary to photograph every resource in a historic district when preparing a National Register nomination, it is important to be methodical when documenting a historic district (please note: every resource should be photographed when conducting a historic resource survey. See the SHPO survey manual for more information on survey photography). Nomination photographs for a historic district should adequately capture the essence of the

district. Photographs should also be presented in a rational order. This could be alphabetical (Ash Street, Elm Street Oak Street, Spruce Street, etc.), or directional (all north-south oriented streets in order from north to south, followed by all east-west orient streets in order from east to west).

Nomination photographs for historic districts must include:

1. All general areas within the district boundaries. No areas, even those with a high number of non-contributing resources, should be neglected.
2. Streetscapes and prominent intersections
3. Significant or character-defining views, especially those that are described in the narrative text
4. Primary or pivotal resources (buildings, sites, structures, objects, designed landscapes, etc.)
5. Examples of architectural styles – both high style and vernacular – and building forms represented in the district
6. Examples of atypical architectural styles and building forms
7. Examples of non-contributing resources
8. Significant topographical and landscape features that contribute to the *character* (in addition to significance) of the district, especially if these are historic features and described in the narrative text
9. Aerial (drone or otherwise) or oblique views are welcome, as available, but are not required
10. Other character-defining, atypical, or unusual features, especially if described in the narrative text or if those features contribute to the significance of the property

Landscapes and Sites

Landscapes may necessitate certain photographic documentation not listed below. The SHPO advises preparers to contact SHPO staff with any questions they may have in regard to documenting properties involving landscapes. Preparers should review the National Register bulletins [How to Evaluate and Nominate Designed Historic Landscapes](#) and [Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes](#) for guidance on identifying landscape features. Preparers should, at a minimum, provide:

1. Views of all significant features
2. Representative views of all characteristic features
3. Views of any buildings, structures, or clusters of above-ground features
4. Views of historic pathways or circulation systems
5. Views of known or potential archaeological resources
6. Views of alterations and intrusions
7. Views of changes in boundaries (from historical to current)

8. Aerial (drone or otherwise) or oblique views are welcome, as available, but are not required

Structures and Objects

1. Views of the structure or object in its wider setting
2. All sides or elevations of the structure or object
3. Important construction or artistic aspects of the structure or object

Archaeological Properties

Archaeological properties may necessitate certain photographic documentation not listed below. Preparers should review the National Register bulletin [Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Archeological Properties](#) for guidance on identifying landscape features. Please contact SHPO staff with any questions regarding preparing a nomination for archaeological properties.

1. Views of the physical environment and configuration of the site
2. Views of relationships between important features
3. Views of condition of the site
4. Views of above-ground and surface features
5. Views of any disturbances
6. Views of excavations
7. Views of stratification
8. Views of artifacts in context
9. Views of any removed artifacts
10. Views of principal sites and site types for archaeological districts
11. Aerial (drone or otherwise) or oblique views are welcome, as available, but are not required

Other Property Types

For those property types not addressed in the foregoing text, preparers should review any National Register bulletin related to the property type. National Register bulletins are found under the *Guidance* tab of the National Register of Historic Places website,

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm>.

Number of Photographs

The number of photographs included in a National Register nomination will depend upon the significance of the property, the physical characteristics of the property, the architectural and historical complexity of the property, the number of resources within the property, and to some extent the physical size of

the property. Plan for several photographs for an individual property, and more for a district. As a general guide, preparers should plan for:

- 15-20 photographs for an individual property, such as a house, a school, or a religious property
- 20-25 photographs for a small complex, such a farmstead or a factory or mill
- About 30 photographs for a small- or medium-sized historic district

When the number of photographs exceed a reasonable number, or contain duplicative views, the photo set will be returned to the preparer for revision.

Ordering Photographs

The order in which photographs are presented is key to understanding a property. Photographs should be placed in a rational order and follow the flow of the Narrative Description in the registration form. The set of photographs should provide a visual tour through the property as presented in the form, whether an individual building, a site, or a historic district. In other words, the photo set should walk the reader through the property.

This means that the photographs of an individual property should generally follow the description of the property and begin with contextual or general views, then proceed to exterior views, and continue with interior views, generally. Interior views should be arranged by floor and should not skip around from floor to floor.

Photographs for historic districts should generally follow the inventory found in Section 7. This could be alphabetical (Ash Street, Elm Street Oak Street, Spruce Street, etc.), or directional (all north-south oriented streets in order from north to south, followed by all east-west orient streets in order from east to west). General streetscape views should be followed by examples individual resources.

Photo Log

The National Register of Historic Places Registration Form includes a Photo Log. This is a list of all photographs included with the nomination and a brief description of each view.

We recommend waiting until the set of nomination photographs has been finalized before completing the Photo Log. Waiting until the set has been finalized saves the trouble of reordering and renumbering the entries in the event revisions (e.g., additional photographs, fewer photographs, reordering) have been requested.

When completing the Photo Log, do not modify the form. The form contains a template for entering photograph information. Simply copy that template and enter the information as required.

All photograph file names (e.g. "MI_Midland County_Johnson Building_0001") must be included in the Photo Log in the nomination form along with the required NPS information, as found in the *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. The file name must follow the NPS format for digital National Register photographs. Please see the *Technical Requirements* section that follows for more information.

Please note that the basic information at the beginning of the Photo Log (property name and location, photographer, dates, etc.) need only be entered once and does not need to be repeated for each photograph. When photographs have been taken by various photographers or on various dates, enter "Various" or "As Noted" and include that information with the respective photograph(s).

Photo Key

1. Photographs for complexes, historic districts, landscapes, archaeological properties, and large sites must be keyed to a map with the direction and number of each view indicated. The number of the photo must correspond to the number in the Photo Log, as noted in IV above.
2. Photographs for single properties should include a photo key that identifies photographs taken on each floor of the property.
3. It is highly recommended that preparers reference the particular photograph(s) using an in-text reference when describing views or features of the property in the narrative portions of the nomination that have been documented in the nomination photographs. For example:
 - a. "...hipped gable roof (Photo 0013)."
 - b. "... a small, non-historic shed situated atop a rise in grade (Photo 0027)."

Note: in-text photograph references do not constitute an in-text citation, as addressed in the [Michigan State Historic Preservation Office Style Guide](#), and should be made as described here.

Historical Images

Please note that a National Register nomination documents a historic property at the time it is nominated. As such, historical images (photographs, postcards, etc.) **are not included in the final set of nomination photographs but may accompany the nomination as figures.** Additionally, historical images are not required for a National Register nomination but may be included as illustrative aids. A limited number of historical images may be embedded in the narrative sections of the registration form (Sections 7 and 8), or included in an appendix, to illustrate certain aspects of a property. If you wish to include these types of materials in the registration form, please contact SHPO first.

Please do not submit historical photographs of people unless the property is significant under Criterion B. In that case, a limited number of historical photographs of the significant person(s) may be submitted as figures.

Historical photographs that are not owned by the preparer or that the preparer has not received permission to duplicate must not be embedded in the registration form or included as an addendum or attachment. If you have received permission from an individual or institution, a copy of that permission must be included with your nomination materials.

Do not submit screen captures of historical photographs images or watermarked versions of historical photographs or images. Rather, contact the holding institution and request to use the image. Please note that some institutions may charge for the use of an image in their collections. The choice to pay for an image is the preparer's alone. The use of historical images in a nomination is not required by NPS or SHPO, and neither NPS nor SHPO can reimburse a preparer for acquiring any materials, including historical images.

Technical Requirements

The SHPO requires that preparers submit digital photographs that meet or exceed the “preferred” specifications of the NPS 2024 *Consolidated and Updated Photograph Policy*. Additional information is provided below. Please note that most, if not all, modern digital cameras will exceed the “best” requirement. If a digital camera has adjustable quality settings, please set the camera to the highest available setting. Photographs should not be altered in any way.

Image Size (Dimensions)

The 2024 NPS photograph policy states that the *preferred* photograph size required by NPS is 2,000 by 3,000 pixels. While this is currently the size *preferred* by NPS, **this is the minimum size required for each final nomination photograph submitted to the SHPO.** Smaller images will not be accepted. Any modern digital camera should meet that requirement without difficulty. It is recommended that preparers set their cameras to the highest possible setting prior to taking nomination photographs. In many cases this will not be an issue, but we suggest taking a few practice photographs before photographing the subject property to ensure you obtain the best image and to avoid retaking photographs.

Neither SHPO nor NPS have a fixed maximum pixel or file size for photographs, but both SHPO and NPS reserve the right to reduce either pixel or file size, as needed. This is often done to save digital space or to transmit photographs from one entity to another.

On Windows PCs, dimensions can be found by right-clicking on an image file and selecting the “Details” tab or viewing the file information in the “Details pane” in Windows Explorer.

Please do not alter, crop, or resize the digital photographs. Submit the original file only.

File Format

The 2024 *Consolidated and Updated Photograph Policy* indicates that NPS accepts photographs in JPEG, TIFF, or PDF format. **Please note that SHPO accepts photographs in JPEG or TIFF format only.**

Preparers may submit either JPEG or TIFF format photographs at their preference, but **all photographs submitted must be in the same format.**

Photographs in other formats such as PNG, RAW, BMP, GIF, DWG, HEIC and so forth will not be accepted and will be returned for revision. HEIC stands for “High Efficiency Image Container” and is a format that is proprietary to Apple. It is the default setting for Apple iPhone and iPad cameras. Photographs submitted in HEIC format will be returned for revision. To change the image format on an iPhone or iPad from HEIC to JPEG, please see the Apple support document here: <https://support.apple.com/en-us/116944>.

Accessibility

To enable access to nomination materials (registration form, maps, photographs, etc.) for individuals with disabilities, preparers may add descriptive text, otherwise known as “alt text” or “alternative text” to nomination materials. Alt text describes the appearance or function of an image, and does not simply repeat a caption. Alt text may be added by accessing the “Properties” window of a file.

Submitting Photographs

All nomination materials – nomination forms, photographs, maps, research materials, and so forth may be submitted on one CD or DVD or a flash drive (also called a thumb or USB drive). Do not submit printed photographs.

Please note that media on which nomination materials are submitted will not be returned and become the property of SHPO. Likewise, all photographs submitted with an unrestricted National Register nomination become public documents and may be used by SHPO or the public at any time. Please do not submit any photographs that the property owner does not want to be available for public use or that you do not have permission to use.

Digital File Naming Convention

Digital nomination photograph file names **must** contain four components:

1. the two-letter state code,
2. county name (including “County”),
3. property name, and
4. the four-digit number of the photograph in the sequence.

All nomination photographs must follow the NPS file format:

MI_County Name_Property Name_0001

Properties with long names may be truncated. For example, photographs for the “Shrine of the Black Madonna of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church,” for example, may be entered as:

MI_Wayne County_Shrine of the Black Madonna_0001

Note that the number suffix must include four digits. The file name must contain underscores (“_”) between each component of the file name. Photographs

with file names that do not conform to the NPS standard will be returned for revision.

Photograph file names must include "County" in addition to the name of the county. Do not abbreviate "County" to "Co." For readability, the file name must contain spaces between the county name and the word "County" and between each word of the property name.

For example, do not enter the file name as:

MI_BayCounty_CenterAvenueHistoricDistrict_0001

Instead, the file name must be entered as:

MI_Bay County_Center Avenue Historic District_0001

Other Considerations

- Please use caution when taking photographs. Getting the right shot is important, but you are infinitely more so. Please be aware of your surroundings; watch for cars and environmental hazards; take a colleague or buddy, as needed; wear protective gear (like hard hats) when entering unknown buildings; and be sure to communicate with the appropriate individuals regarding where you will be and when.
- Please respect private property rights. Photographs should be taken from the public right-of-way unless you have explicit permission from the owner to enter private property.
- Please communicate with local communities (city officials, local police department, etc.) when photographing historic districts. A letter of introduction from the project sponsor and visible identification may be useful, depending on the project and circumstances.
- Please respect copyright. Please do not submit photographs protected by copyright unless you have received permission from the photographer, owner, or copyright holder to do so. If you have received permission, a copy of that permission must be included with your nomination materials.
- Please do not submit Google Street View images or other images from mapping websites. They are not acceptable nomination photographs and will be removed. Aerial or satellite imagery from mapping applications may be used to create maps for National Register nominations, however.

Please see [Map Requirements for National Register Nominations in Michigan](#) for more information on preparing maps for National Register nominations in Michigan.

- Please do not submit any screen capture images. They are **not** acceptable for nomination photographs and will be removed.
- Please do not submit photographs of historical documents, maps, or other research materials. These are not acceptable nomination photographs and will be removed. Such materials may be submitted as supporting documentation, however.
- Please do not submit photographs of photographs or other similar materials as nomination photographs.
- Please take your photographs in proper conditions. Poor photographs will not be accepted and will be returned for revision. Examples of such photographs include subject properties or resources that are: obstructed; blurry or unfocused; obscured by foliage, rain, snow, or fog; washed out; unbalanced; poorly lit (e.g. a photograph taken at night); poorly composed.
- Photographs in which the subject of the photograph is unclear will be returned. In other words, if we cannot tell what we are looking at or which property is the subject property, the photograph will be returned.

Please see Appendix A for illustrations of common problems.

Use of National Register Photographs

By submitting a photograph to SHPO to be included in a National Register nomination, the photographer or preparer acknowledges that each photograph is entered into the public domain and may be reused by SHPO, NPS, and other entities and individuals.

Questions


Please contact SHPO with any questions about photographs for National Register nominations. We are happy to answer any questions about photographs or other aspects of nominations.

APPENDIX A

EXAMPLES OF PROBLEMATIC PHOTOGRAPHS

What follows are photographs that illustrate common problems with National Register photographs as seen by SHPO staff. The accompanying text explains the issues in each photo. Some photographs may fall into multiple categories but are presented only once.

Obstructions

	<p>The façade of this house and some of its details are obscured by the large tree. A better view would be had by moving to the left for a three-quarters view. In this case, it may also be good to take a second three-quarters view photograph from the right.</p>
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The construction equipment located in front of this building is unavoidable, but the roof and dashboard of the automobile from which the photograph was taken surely are. The dome of the building has been cut off by the roof of the car as well. To the extent possible, National Register photographs should not be taken from an automobile, and especially not through a windshield. Views of this building could be safely taken from the corner that is visible at right in this photograph. That said, safety is a paramount concern. Photographers should not place themselves in unsafe conditions or circumstances when documenting a property.

Note, too, the black car in the middle of the road. To the extent possible, wait for traffic to pass before taking the photograph.

Perspective and Composition



Photographing tall buildings in a confined space presents special challenges. Without the proper equipment, photographs may look like this. The angle of the view is poor and a portion of the building is not visible. A better view could likely be had by moving to the opposite side of the street and some distance from the building.

Lighting can be a challenge as well. Photographers should take care to plan their work so that photographs are taken at the time of day in which light is optimal. Repeat visits may aid in obtaining a properly illuminated view.



This photograph suffers from poor composition. National Register photographs should be taken at normal angles and provide views of the subject property or resource as it is normally viewed.



The deep blue sky, wispy clouds, and green grass and trees are a nice contrast to the limestone façade of this building. Perspective and composition are the problems with this photograph, however. A better view could be had by moving to the left so as to be centered with the building and moving back some distance. A three-quarter view from the right and left may also be a good approach.



In this photograph, the facades of the buildings are difficult to see. It may be difficult to photograph these buildings at any angle due to the trees, cars, and people. In this case, it would be better to wait until early spring or fall, when the leaves have fallen, and on a day and at a time when fewer cars and people are present.



The buildings in this downtown are difficult to see. The right side of the street is heavily shaded. The buildings are visually subordinate in this photograph, too. A better approach would be to photograph each side of the street separately. This photograph would also benefit from a landscape (horizontal) orientation, rather than a portrait (vertical) orientation.

Lighting and Exposure



This photograph is too dark to be useful. This is either an exposure or lighting problem. Be sure to check the settings of your camera and adjust as necessary. Backlit or poorly exposed photographs seldom provide the details necessary to understand a property. Returning on a different day or at a different time may improve results too.



The roof of this walkway dominates this photograph, and the rear portion of the building is overexposed. Taking additional views from other locations and positions, and adjusting the exposure settings of the camera, would likely produce an acceptable photograph.

Visual Obstructions



This otherwise fine view of a section of a downtown commercial district is affected by the visual obstructions of cars and street furniture. This photograph would be improved by returning on a day and at a time when fewer cars are present.



This view would be improved by returning at a time of year when the leaves are not present. This photograph would also benefit from better lighting or exposure.



This otherwise fine photograph would benefit by taking care to omit the street light from the view. Stepping forward (though not into traffic!) or to the left should do the trick.

The activity that is the subject of this project has been financed in part with federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, through the Michigan Strategic Fund, State Historic Preservation Office. However, the contents and opinions herein do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products herein constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior or the Michigan Strategic Fund, State Historic Preservation Office. This program receives federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504, of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, marital status, or disability.

If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or if you desire further information, please write to: Chief, Office of Equal Opportunity Programs, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1849 C Street, NW, MS-2740, Washington, D.C. 20240

Find additional information and guidance at:
www.michigan.gov/nrhp