

New York State and National Registers of Historic Places

TIPS ON PHOTOGRAPHING A BUILDING

Good, clear photographs are important for preservation projects, including historic resource surveys and National Register nominations. Images should be well-composed and provide an accurate visual representation of the property and its significant features. They must illustrate the qualities discussed in the nomination. Photographs should show historically significant features and any alterations that have affected the property's historic integrity. The required number of photographic views depends on the size and complexity of the property.

- ▶ Choose a good quality camera that you're comfortable using. If you're not familiar with an SLR, use a good point-and-shoot camera. Local camera shops may offer training classes to help you.
- ▶ Photos should be taken at 2000x3000 pixels or more.
- ▶ Consider the time of day that you're shooting your photos. Try to avoid facing into the sun while photographing the building, as this can lead to backlighting and lens flare, which makes it difficult to see the details of the building. If you can, shoot the building when the sun is behind you or on a slightly overcast day, when bright light and deep shadows won't obscure the details.
- ▶ If possible, consider the season. It can be easier to see the building features if photographed in spring or fall when the leaves are off the trees. Piles of snow can make it difficult to read features like roofing or how the building meets the ground.
- ▶ Step out of the car! Don't shoot through a windshield, which causes reflections and glare. If you must remain in your vehicle for safety reasons, make sure to shoot through a rolled down window.
- ▶ Try to capture at least two elevations of the building, if possible, to show the depth and massing of the building. Only showing a front-on elevation shot creates a sense of a flat plane, which may not adequately represent the building.
- ▶ Frame the building in the photograph, showing some area around the building. Make sure to step far enough back from the building to avoid cropping key details of the building such as cornices or foundations. Moving up and down, or even across the street, may reveal a better angle to document the building.
- ▶ Take advantage of digital photography! Make sure to take several of the same photo from the same locations to help ensure that you have captured a photo that isn't blurry. It's always easier to shoot more and select a few good images later from your computer, rather than having to go back out to reshoot.
- ▶ When documenting a building, start with general overview images that show the entire wall or elevation. Then document more specific features, such as windows, doors, trim, etc.
- ▶ Photographing an interior can be tricky. Generally, a good rule of thumb is to take photos from two opposite sides of the room to convey the size and depth of the room, openings, plus materials. Again, try different angles. If you can, turn on the lights or use a flash.
- ▶ For a historic district, photograph mostly streetscapes, conveying the relationship between properties, and make sure to document all property types and styles, including non-contributing features. The photos should convey the variety of the nominated district.
- ▶ Most important—practice!

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Here are just a few examples of “dos” and “don’ts” for photographing buildings. Sometimes just a simple adjustment yields a far better quality result!



Front image doesn't reveal much about the massing or size of this building



Showing two elevations of this building better describes its form and features



Backlit, poorly centered streetscape with car in foreground



Better centered, clearer image, more accurately shows character of buildings



Blurry, out of focus, with lens flare



Clearer, sharper image, closer up shows more detail of monument

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