

Dear Earthwatcher!

Greetings again from Armenia! As many of you know, I have remained in Armenia during the fall semester taking a sabbatical from my university and it is hard to believe that I will be returning to the US in a few weeks. I have spent my time studying Armenian; reviewing, organizing, and building upon the information you helped me collect; making presentations about the project here in Armenia and the UK; and taking weekly trips to Yerevan to work in the National Archives.

Working in the National Archives has proven to be especially challenging as information is catalogued according to surnames of original building owners. Stepan and the Kumayri Museum Preserve have a partial list of names and addresses but none of his information references buildings we documented. Even though I have found no information on any of the nine houses we documented, I have uncovered general historical background concerning Alexandrapol, and specific architectural information regarding the design review process between 1900 and 1903. For example, I discovered that once the houses were constructed, the owner was required to paint the façade within two years. Evidently, city officials felt the gray tuff was depressing and wanted to liven up the appearance of the city. Needless to say, looking for signs of painted facades will be on the agenda for next summer's visual surveys. On another note, I have also spent time visiting some of the families we worked with and they all ask about you, and fondly recall their experiences with each of you. They really enjoyed getting to know you and miss your presence in their lives.

It was such a pleasure meeting all of you and I sincerely thank you for all that you did to help me this past summer. I still have a lot of work ahead of me and your contributions will be very beneficial.

Thank you again and best wishes to you all.

Jane.



Armenia's Architectural Heritage

EARTHWATCH INSTITUTE ANNUAL FIELD REPORT

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Research report

Data and results

During the summer of 2008, 21 Earthwatch volunteers worked to document nine houses. Free hand measured drawings of floor plans, and interior and exterior elevations were produced, along with photographic documentation, and in some cases, the recording of oral histories. An overview of the data collected follows:

- **Cheraz 24:** Four volunteers produced 55 sketches of plans and interior/exterior elevations, 115 photographs, and recorded 1 hour of oral history. From this information, architecture student Kay Chae was able to partially produce the following AutoCAD (Computer Aided Design- a software application for 2D and 3D design and drafting) drawings: 4 exterior elevations, 3 building sections, floor plans and interior elevations for 11 rooms, a diagrammatic plan differentiating what we believe to be original construction from recent additions, and a 3-D Sketch-up model showing what the original house might have looked like.
- **Jivani 80/110:** Four volunteers produced 57 sketches of plans and interior/exterior elevations, and 132 photographs. Sixty minutes of oral history have since been recorded.
- **Ghorghanyan 97 (Dashnaktsutyun Headquarters):** Four volunteers produced 47 sketches of plans and interior/exterior elevations, and 367 photographs.
- **Jivani 48:** Four volunteers produced 60 sketches of plans and interior/exterior elevations, and 40 photographs. From this information, architecture student Kay Chae was able to partially produce the following AutoCAD drawings: 4 partial plans (basement, first and second floors, roof), 4 partial building sections, 3 partial exterior elevations, and 8 partial room plans with interior elevations.
- **Shiraz House Museum:** Six volunteers produced 50 sketches of plans and interior/exterior elevations, 840 photographs, and 15 minutes of oral history. From this information, architecture student Avetik Vardanyan was able to partially produce the following AutoCAD drawings: overall floor plans for basement and first floor, 4 partial building sections, and individual plans of 10 rooms showing interior elevations.

- **Gorki 2:** Three volunteers produced 26 sketches of plans and interior/exterior elevations, 285 photographs, and 90 minutes of oral history.

- **Gorki 8:** Three volunteers produced 35 sketches of plans and interior/exterior elevations, 160 photographs, and 30 minutes of oral history. From this information, architecture student Avetik Vardanyan was able to partially produce the following AutoCAD drawings: one overall floor plan, 2 partial building sections, 3 partial exterior elevations, and individual plans of 6 rooms showing interior elevations.

- **Varpetats 172 (Baree Luys):** Five volunteers produced 47 sketches of plans and interior/exterior elevations, 122 photographs, and 150 minutes of oral history.

- **Abovyan 111:** Two volunteers produced 100 sketches of plans and interior/exterior elevations, and 154 photographs.

Contribution to achieving conservation impacts

Interacting with the families occupying these houses has made them more aware of the history of their city, and the role their homes play in that history. All the families want to see their houses restored; however, neither they nor the city have the financial means to do so. The presence of the volunteers raises awareness concerning the need to conserve these structures, but many home owners feel that they have no way to make even the slightest improvements. Also, the real – or perceived – level of corruption in the city government also leaves families fearing that if they speak up, they might lose their homes altogether. This fear appears to be valid.

Significance/ benefits of research

- **Local**

The educational component of this research is currently taking place in the form of ad hoc learning as the PI, local staff, and EW volunteers move around the city and interact with local residents. Therefore, the significance of this research at the local level continues to be its visibility. Homeowners fundamentally recognize that their houses have architectural, cultural, and economic value, but the lack of support mechanisms and financial incentives at the local/national government level contributes to on-going building deterioration. In addition to informal educational opportunities created by the documentation process, other long-term research efforts directed towards the local community include efforts on the part of the PI to organize and hold a hands-on masonry workshop during the summer of 2009. This workshop will provide job training opportunities in the field of masonry conservation, and will educate homeowners in techniques that they can implement themselves in order to reduce on-going masonry deterioration due to lack of maintenance and continued exposure to the elements.

- **National / Regional**

Even though there is a Ministry of Culture at the national level, and the Kumayri Museum Preserve (KMP) at the local level, there are no entities -- like the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street program in the US -- to provide technical or financial assistance to homeowners, city administrators, or businesses wanting to revitalize their neighbourhoods. Citizens of Gyumri perceive the KMP as having jurisdiction over the changes they want to make to their houses; however, since the earthquake it has actually become a non-functioning entity due to a lack of financial support from the Gyumri Mayor's office. Therefore, any type of proposal for overseeing the future growth and development of Armenian historic districts needs to be initiated at the grass roots (local) level. As this research moves beyond Gyumri to communities in Ashtarak and Goris, the PI anticipates being able to elevate an awareness of these issues to the national level.

- **International**

The PI firmly believes that efforts geared towards establishing and/or implementing management plans for historic districts must be initiated slowly and methodically, and driven by internal - rather than external - forces. Therefore, it is anticipated that any impact this research has beyond the borders of Armenia will again have to occur through a process of education that begins at the local level. By disseminating the knowledge gained as a

result of this documentation process, the PI aims to present the findings as a model for other cultures, communities, and countries struggling with similar issues. This process has already begun as during the summer of 2008 the PI was contacted by a cultural planner working in the Singapore office of Ove Arup and Partners expressing interest in the project. As a result, the PI was invited to make a presentation of the research to planners, architects, and archaeologists working in Arup's London office.

Communication of results

Mass media

- 25 June 2008: Karine Kazarova, a reporter for *TV Shant* - the local Gyumri television station - interviewed the PI and members of Team 1 for a segment entitled "Horizon." Since the segment was in Armenian, the PI is having the program translated in order to produce an English language transcript.

Meetings and conferences

- 30 October 2008: Invited presentation at Earthwatch Institute in Oxford, England.
- 29 October 2008: Invited presentation at Ove Arup and Partners in London, England.
- 5 September 2008: Invited presentation to Armenian-American students participating in Birthright Armenia program located in Yerevan.
- 27 August 2008: Invited presentation to Armenian-American students participating in the Birthright Armenia program located in Gyumri.

Educational Opportunities

- Local communities

The activities of this research currently only involve the local homeowners; however, the long-term goal is not only to engage Gyumri, but also involve other communities throughout Armenia in workshops, seminars, and public presentations aimed at raising awareness of the residential vernacular environment. The PI has already taken steps in this direction by working to organize a hands-on masonry workshop scheduled for summer 2009. This workshop, developed in collaboration with Heritage Conservation Network (HCN), will take place at the Kumayri Museum Preserve and aims to teach internationally recruited volunteer participants, local homeowners, and apprentice masons the approaches, methodologies, and skills needed to perform vernacular masonry conservation. If sufficient international and local interest is generated, the PI and HCN plan to schedule subsequent workshops at local and national venues where these newly acquired skills can be applied.

- Students

The PI took a rising fifth-year architecture student from the Mississippi State University (MSU) School of Architecture to help lead the documentation process and produce the digital representations. An architecture student from Yerevan Institute of Architecture and Construction (YIAC) was also hired to assist with the documentation process. Working together, the MSU student was able to help the YIAC student improve his AutoCAD skills.

Participation in this research was extremely beneficial to the student from the YIAC as it made him more aware of the rich architectural history of his hometown. As a result, his Diploma project will be located on Abovyan Street – formerly Alexandrovskaya Street – one of the most famous pedestrian streets during the Alexandrapol years. His project proposes to renovate and restore the old "France" hotel into a Center for the Arts that will also incorporate a new, more modern, addition.

During 2007, the PI was contacted by a graduate student in the US working on a Master's degree in Anthropology at the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho. This student, Kristin Rugroden, spent two years in Bjni, Armenia as a Peace Corps volunteer and was interested in developing a thesis project in Armenia. She was a volunteer on

Team 3, and then worked with Team 5 as a Research Assistant. The PI is on her thesis committee and when Kristin graduates in May, she will return to Armenia as a Research Assistant for the 2009 expedition season.

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