Remarks by Assistant Secretary of the Interior John A. Carver, Jr., at 2:30 p.m., P.D.T., Thursday, October 1, 1964, in San Francisco, California, at Ceremonies for the Presentation of a Historic Landmark Plaque for the San Francisco Cable Car System

We in the Department of the Interior generally regard our organization as America's Department of Conservation. While we tend to think primarily in terms of natural resources in the physical sense, it is not at all inconsistent that we should also be charged with the Federal function of historic preservation.

Historic preservation is conservation in its highest sense. In fact, it is frequently referred to as "area conservation". Just as our national conscience and self-interest have prompted us to apply wise husbandry to our forests and soil and to protect disappearing wildlife species, so also must we bend our efforts toward protecting the symbols of an inspirational national heritage.

America must never make a fetish of its past. We must live for the future. Yet the landmarks of our forefathers' progress and accomplishments give us the daring and the strength to pursue the American ideal of human equality in an environment of peace and prosperity--the Great Society which President Johnson has established as the goal of our generation.

This is the reason why I am proud to have the Registered National Historic Landmark Program as one of my responsibilities in the Department. Congress in 1935 established the national policy of protecting for public use and enjoyment historic sites, buildings and objects of national significance. Many such sites have been acquired for operation and interpretation under Federal management--Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Spanish missions in your own State of California, prehistoric Indian settlements in the Southwest, the Civil War battlefields of the East.

The Registered Landmark program is a major aspect of the same preservation effort. We could not possibly bring into Federal ownership all of those historic objects or structures that ought to be protected. For those that are, and ought to remain, in private or non-Federal public ownership, the present owners must be encouraged to assume a responsibility for a part of the nation's heritage. The Landmark program is in the nature of an incentive to that end--as well as an official recognition and designation that the landmark itself represents a nationally significant part of our history.

I am honored by the opportunity to pay that honor to the San Francisco cable car system. In so doing, we also honor those who have been so vigilant in preserving this part of San Francisco's colorful history against the temptations toward modernity. The cable car is more than just a memento of a city's past. It is also your world-renowned trade mark.
Mayor Shelley, Mr. Chief Justice and guests, I take great pleasure in presenting this plaque on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior and the entire nation. We thank you for your commitment to the task of saving your cable cars so that the rest of the nation may share this part of America's past.