

The Historic Huntsville Quarterly

Volume 5 | Number 1

Article 7

9-1-1978

From the Chairman

Lynn Jones

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Recommended Citation

Jones, Lynn (1978) "From the Chairman," *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*. Vol. 5: No. 1, Article 7.
Available at: <https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly/vol5/iss1/7>

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from the Chairman

I believe that the Historic Huntsville Foundation since its creation in 1974 has had a positive impact on the quality of life in Huntsville. There seems to be an increased awareness of the aesthetic and economic rewards of preserving historically and architecturally significant buildings. I see an emerging sense of pride in the unique character of our city as visitors are shown both the rockets pointing to the future at the Space Center and the carefully restored older homes and buildings signifying our strong links with the past. One might say that Huntsville has the best of three worlds - the past, the present, and the future.

In a sense this issue of the QUARTERLY under the editorship of Linda Bayer marks a new beginning for the Foundation. For the first time, copies will be sold to the public at a nominal price, focusing attention on the historical redevelopment movement in our community and, we hope, bringing to our organization additional members and financial support.

As I look at the goals we established last spring, I see progress being made. Membership continues to increase. Soon a drive will be underway to solicit business memberships. A grant application has been submitted for partial restoration of the Hundley House. Our program series has been set up. The calendar is being printed. The downtown tour for children was a huge success.

Downtown. This is one area where I do not feel altogether comfortable about our efforts. Most of the commercial buildings downtown would be categorized as "every day" or vernacular structures, built by former generations to house their businesses and institutions. Many of them, including Cotton Row and our old Courthouse, have been demolished. Individually those that are left may not all be historically significant, but COLLECTIVELY they are immensely significant in that they give our downtown its special identity. Savannah, Mobile, Louisville, Columbus, Georgia, and many other cities are successfully revitalizing their downtown areas. Leopold Adler, a leader in the downtown restoration of Savannah, had this to say in a recent address in Huntsville:

This rebirth of our downtown has meant more than refurbishing old buildings - more than the tourism that has sprung from it - more than national historic landmark status that resulted from our efforts - although these are wonderful and important happenings.

What Savannah is accomplishing is a healthy environment. We are becoming aware of our surroundings. We are retaining our sense of place and identity - for it is terribly important for each city and each area to identify and assess its unique qualities.

The certainty of increased ad valorem taxes in the near future has forced owners of vacant properties in downtown Huntsville to consider their options. One owner has decided that it will be to his advantage to demolish his building; our Foundation has been attempting to help him find a better alternative. Other buildings may be in danger that we are unaware of.

With the opening of Constitution Hall Park, the Weeden House, and the Transportation Museum, tourists will be coming downtown in increasing numbers. Large numbers of people work downtown, and still others find it necessary to visit the courthouse, the municipal building, or a lawyer's office. The possibility for the development of restaurants, specialty shops, and gift shops would seem promising. Of course there are problems. But where does a community begin? There seems to be a general lack of knowledge about what to do. Obviously bankers, savings and loan associations, real estate people, city planners, and community design experts need to be involved.

With the help of the Twickenham Preservation Society, Old Town, and the new Downtown Development organization, our Foundation is formulating plans for a seminar next year to bring together experts in the field of downtown revitalization and concerned local people. We solicit your suggestions and your help.

I would like to take this opportunity to say thanks to all of you who have responded to our requests for help. It has been appreciated.

Lynn Jones

THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION is a non-profit organization established in 1974 to encourage the preservation of historically or architecturally significant sites and structures in Huntsville and Madison county and to increase public awareness of their value to the community. Membership is open to all persons interested in enhancing Huntsville's future by preserving its significant architectural heritage. To join, send your name, address, and telephone number to Mrs. Lynn Jones, Chairman, P.O. Box 786, Huntsville, Alabama, 35804. Student - \$2.50; Individual - \$10; Family - \$15; Business - \$50; Patron - \$25-99; Benefactor - \$100 and up.