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## Report from the HHF Preservation Committee Chair

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## **Report from the HHF Preservation Committee Chair...**

submitted by  
Carol Harless

“The purpose of the Historic Huntsville Foundation is to acquire, hold, improve, sell, exchange, preserve, develop, and restore sites, buildings, residences, and other structures of historical or architectural interest in and around Huntsville, Madison County, Alabama, and to increase knowledge and greater appreciation of such sites, buildings, residences, and structures.”

The Preservation Committee was created in order that HHF could better carry out the goals stated in the by-laws purpose statement above. With this statement as a guideline, the committee has set forth short-term goals during its very short existence—two years.

Of primary concern has been the Norfolk Southern Freight Depot. HHF has previously had a roof patch performed. Recently, another patch has been done. We are attempting to obtain bids from contractors for renovations and restoration of the Depot. We are working with the Alabama Constitution Village/Historic Huntsville Depot Board in these efforts.

The committee is working on a listing of sites and structures in Madison County of architectural or historical significance. This list will include those properties already on the National Register and on the Alabama Register. The listing will not be limited to those properties still existing, but will include those lost. Eventually, the listing may be included in a booklet with maps to show locations of the properties discussed.

The long-discussed revolving fund has been researched by a special subcommittee. Preservation recently held a workshop with a guest who has set up revolving funds in several states. A revolving fund could allow the committee to exercise options on properties considered endangered to the point of needing immediate action. The establishment of such a fund now before us.

Another subcommittee is looking into easements and is sharing with the committee all they learn. The latest preservation effort being undertaken by the committee is support for relocation of a bridge from Geneva County to Huntsville. We were asked to assist the city environmental engineers with this project.

The entire committee has monitored structures and sites—some of which were reported to us by the general public following a feature article in *The Huntsville Times* on preservation. We have not been successful in some cases. In others we have made progress.

The Freeman House, now restored by Central Presbyterian Church, is one of the houses whose fate we monitored closely. The Quick House, which First United Methodist Church purchased, is still under preservation's watchful eye.

Some structures are valuable examples of earlier architecture now hidden by brick or siding. Thanks to occasional photographs and to Harvie Jones' renderings, we are able to better determine what these properties will be like when restored.

The Mastin House issue (i.e., the house being moved out of Madison County before we could save it) did not defeat the committee. It did serve as a painful yet valuable lesson that expedience is a key factor in preservation.



## Rules To Guide By

- **R** eal estate worth saving takes time and risk.
- **E** ligible properties must be matched with eligible purchasers.
- **V** olunteer action in education and fund-raising is essential.
- **O** ptions to buy offer a first line of defense.
- **L** enders make good neighbors and friends.
- **V** ital preservation goals must be set.
- **I** ndustrial and retail buildings may have rehab reuse.
- **N** eeded time is purchased by Revolving Fund negotiations.
- **G** oals of good preservation-planning assure wise decision-making and fund-allocation.
  
- **F** und management requires vigilance, patience, resourcefulness.
- **U** rban neighborhoods and mill villages make good revolving fund projects.
- **N** ote-worthy preservation efforts should be assisted, praised and publicized.
- **D** onors hold the key to the Revolving Fund's success.

## Property Values vs Historical Preservation

Property values in historic districts increase as much as 60% to 150%, with some properties such as in Galveston, Texas, rising 440%. Benefits also accrue in cutting down on deserted buildings and neglected neighborhoods. Rehabilitation promotes habitation which promotes property values, taxes, and better services. Tourists flock to these historic sites like latter day pilgrims to Lourdes, and the tourist industry becomes big business. Whole retail streets spring back offering food, books, antiques, boutiques, discount outlets, specialty shops, museums, and civic centers. Tourism feeds off of historic preservation and everyone is invited to the banquet.

Historic Districts Are Protective, Productive, Not Restrictive AND Do Increase Value.



## Mill Village Rehabilitation?

Why not use creative bank mortgage financing and Revolving Fund financing to enable moderate-income home buyers to purchase a two-unit house—which most mill housing is. The home buyer would live in one unit and rent the other. Should the rental be to low-income tenants, subsidies from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development tied to each rental would help guarantee sufficient income to help qualify the owner for the bank's mortgage.

Remember, also, the historic rehabilitation tax credit equal to 20 percent of the cost of rehabilitating historic buildings for rental or other income-producing purposes. A smaller, 10 percent rehab tax credit applies to nonresidential, non-historic buildings constructed before 1936.

