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From the Chair... Diane Ellis

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From the Chair...Diane Ellis

Dear Foundation Friends,

This issue of the *Quarterly* honoring Central Presbyterian Church on the eve of its centennial year is also about how a group of people found a resolution to one of the key issues facing preservationists today: how to find a use for an endangered historic building.

The problem is a national one. Across the country historic structures of every type are imperiled because no one is using them. Grand old downtown churches with shrinking or vanished congregations, abandoned railroad depots, empty hotels, boarded-up mansions, lonesome farmhouses, and sagging barns testify to profound social changes that have made many architectural treasures seem redundant in the modern age.

Although the cost of reclaiming huge public or commercial buildings can be an impediment to preservation, money isn't always the problem. Some structures, like log cabins or old houses, are offered by preservation organizations to people who can pay the moving costs and have the right place to put them. The Foundation has helped relocate (and thus save) some historic buildings. But you can't move everything.

In other cases, community efforts frequently succeed in raising money to restore and maintain a landmark in its original location. But then what? Historic residential properties located smack in the middle of commercial sprawl will require those imaginative buyers we love but know are scarce. And many commercial property buyers claim that older downtown buildings in America's cities don't fit today's business and manufacturing operations.

Historic Huntsville Foundation's preservation committee wrestles with these issues at every meeting. We know of several historic residential properties that have a dim future once their aging owners are gone, because their location is no longer desirable for family living. There are other buildings on our watch list that will need new sites because the owners have other plans for their property.

So it's truly a blessing that, in one instance, a group of Huntsvillians have managed to marry beauty and use in preserving a lovely old house in their custody. Central Presbyterian Church's restoration of the Freeman House and its planned use as a gathering place and music conservatory is what we would wish for every church with an historic building in its care. This is truly a birthday gift for everyone in the community.

Happy Centennial Birthday, Central Presbyterian! The Foundation looks forward to publishing a special issue for your 200th—and celebrating it at the Freeman House.



Watercolor of the Freeman House
by Kirk Carlisle