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From the Chair...Ben Walker

As someone much wiser than I once said, "There is nothing more certain in this life than change." The longer I live the more truth I see in this statement. This doesn't say that there are no fundamental truths and principles which stand the test of time. It does say that the things surrounding these truths and how the principles should be applied are in constant evolution. With all this said, what does it have to do with the Historic Huntsville Foundation?

Our purpose for being is, of course, to promote the preservation and restoration of buildings and sites of both historic and architectural significance and to educate the public as to their value. This is our "fundamental truth" as identified in our charter and bylaws that is unchanging. Our challenge in this rapid-paced world is to apply this in identifying what is of significance, and more specifically both significant and endangered, and to determine how to best prevent its loss. What must continually change is our review of just what is "significant."

When our organization began, of primary concern were the antebellum homes and other selected structures in our area that had reached the sacred age of 100 years. Most were in what is now the Twickenham or Old Town Historic Districts or the downtown area. Through the efforts of this and other organizations and certain individuals, much has been done to "safe" these areas. While various structures in these sections, particularly downtown, still need watching much of our job seems done. We have seen the inevitable changes many of which have been positive, as there are now several layers of protection for these areas.

All that said, have we now met our objective and can we now sit back and dwell on Huntsville's accomplishments in this area? Heaven forbid!! The hardest part of our mission lies ahead, the protecting of things that are not nearly so beautiful. We much change our perspective in many cases to recognize that the mission field for us now lies largely in other areas. In the past many of these areas have been of the

nature that "only a mother could love," but it is now up to us to protect. This will probably involve such areas as mill villages and various buildings constructed in the twentieth century, many of which we may have looked upon with disdain in years gone by.

To assume that structures of architectural significance constructed in the last century will somehow survive to reach that hallowed age of 100 years purely by random chance, would be in direct defiance of our purpose for existing. I feel strongly that we are called upon to change much of our focus so that we can point more heavily towards these areas that have been somewhat neglected in the past.

It puts me in mind of my dentist's office, "Ignore your teeth and they will go away." The same is true of these properties. During the recent visit of Dr. Dean Herrin of the National Park Service, I was somewhat astounded to realize how little physical evidence of our bast mill village history still remains and how rapidly it is disappearing. Additionally, at our current pace of demolition and reconstruction, it seems reasonable to assume that virtually none of the "significant" commercial structures of the '50s and '60s will ever reach 50 years of age, and certainly not 100.

I would hasten to add that neither personally nor as a representative of the Foundation would I advocate an anti-growth or anti-development posture. To the contrary, the preservation and restoration of our older buildings to meet today's real estate needs can be not only aesthetically pleasing, but as had been pointed out by Harvie Jones on many occasions, economically sound. Benefits to the community are many, not the least of which is to keep Huntsville from becoming another "Anytown, USA," where all streets and buildings look alike be they in California or Connecticut.

The challenge is ours and I think we are up to the task.