

# The Historic Huntsville Quarterly

---

Volume 29  
Number 3 *Preservation: Progress and Setbacks*

Article 1

---

9-22-2003

## From the Executive Director

Lynne Berry

Follow this and additional works at: <https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly>



Part of the [Historic Preservation and Conservation Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Berry, Lynne (2003) "From the Executive Director," *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*: Vol. 29: No. 3, Article 1.

Available at: <https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly/vol29/iss3/1>

This Note from the Executive Director is brought to you for free and open access by LOUIS. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Historic Huntsville Quarterly by an authorized editor of LOUIS.

## From the Executive Director

LYNNE BERRY

As happens with many issues of the Quarterly, portions of this one will break your heart. Historic Huntsville Foundation works to preserve historic structures, and as you read through these pages, you'll see the kinds of challenges we and other preservationists face in carrying out our mission.

Demolition by neglect, for example—described so poignantly by Lou Gathany in “Farewell to a Homeplace”—raises this question: At what point is a structure irretrievable? So often the quick and easy decision is to bulldoze or burn a structure so that something bright, shiny and new can be built in its place. Yet, knowledgeable preservationists can determine whether the “bones” of a structure are still good. When they are, these “bones” are most likely of far better quality than anything offered at local retail building supply stores. Moreover, in cases of a building’s missing or damaged parts, materials salvaged from other old structures or appropriate new material can often replace or supplement what’s needed in the restoration.

Some structures fall victim to what Foundation member and architect Marc Goldmon calls “taxidermy preservation”—the interior of a structure is completely gutted, leaving only the shell. While preferable to total demolition, this alternative gives the building an incongruous split personality that does no honor to the unifying and coherent principles of architecture. In our historic districts, this is a situation that is becoming more and more common, with the added complication of additions that are out-of-scale and inappropriate. The Huntsville Historic Preservation Commission regulates only what is visible from the street. But a house that has lost all or most of its original materials—floors, mantels, doors, hardware, light fixtures, trim—and has somehow “morphed” from a 2,800 square foot cottage to a 6,000 square foot complex has, in the view of preservation, lost its soul.

Many historic properties are lost to prevailing notions of progress. Huntsville is far more fortunate than most United States cities in this department. Well-reasoned

community members in our city recognized the beauty and the value of the historic Twickenham and Old Town neighborhoods in the early 1970s and ensured their protection. Unfortunately, this occurred after the loss of what Patricia Ryan characterizes in her article about the Rison House as “Huntsville’s finest concentration of Victorian dwellings.” And over time, impressive public buildings, such as the previous courthouse and the Elks building, have been deemed expendable.

One alternative to demolition is relocation. Frances Robb’s article, “Recycling Redstone,” details some of Jeff Kennedy’s many moving (pardon the pun) experiences. Well-planned architecture is usually very site-specific and structures generally lose their context when moved. For some buildings, though—the Clemens House, for example—relocating is the only choice. (Stay tuned: we expect an exciting announcement about the Clemens House very soon.) In the case of the Redstone houses, relocating the units means families who would be priced out of many housing markets have good places to live, Mother Earth is spared further scarring from a new landfill, and houses that are approaching the 50-year “historic” mark will be around for future generations.

Also on the plus side are efforts like those of Dennis Boccippio and Alex Godwin, who bought a house with a tangled history and 100 years of wear and tear and renovated and restored it, keeping in mind the property’s character and setting.

We all have different ideas about what is important, what should be saved and how, and what can be sacrificed in the interest of progress and modernization. Historic Huntsville Foundation seeks to promote all alternatives to destruction whenever possible. If the Foundation had been around during urban renewal, it would have been, I believe, due a seat at the table when decisions affecting historic structures were made. When destruction is inevitable, the Foundation endeavors to save anything that is salvageable and offer it, through our warehouse, to folks who are working to preserve historic structures. Our historic structures are the visual identity of our community. They give it its unique character. Please help us preserve them.