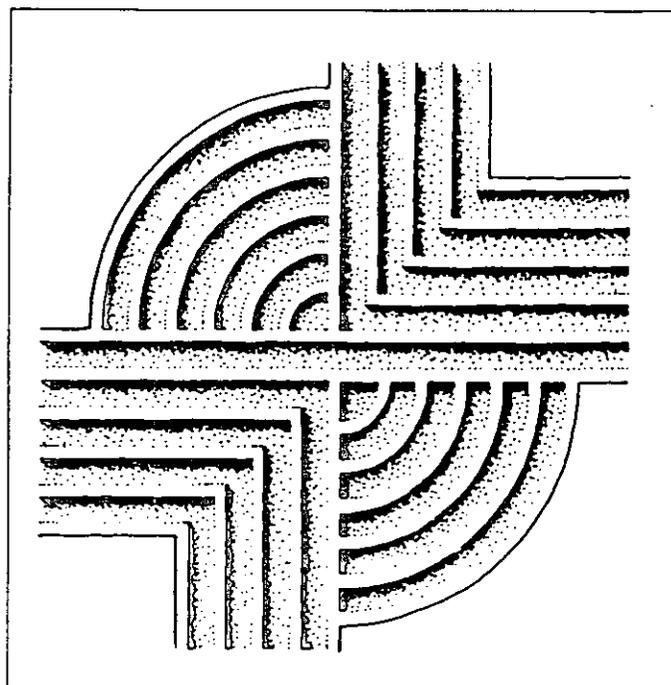


PRESERVATION PLANNING IN
GREENVILLE COUNTY:
AN ABORTED REVOLUTION



RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION 183

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I appreciate this opportunity to be here with you today. I have always had a tremendous respect for the DAR, their beliefs, and the projects they undertake. I hope that what I can tell you will be of interest to your organization. All revolutions are predicated on the concept of "dangerous thoughts" — ideas that those in power don't want others to be thinking. There is a saying, loosely translated from German, that "my thoughts, they are free." It means, of course, that while the government can sometimes control our bodies — our physical being — they can't control our minds and what we think.

I have been criticized by the County and the South Carolina Department of Archives and History as advocating dangerous preservation ideas. I hope that by the time I'm finished you have some dangerous thoughts as well.

My goal this afternoon is to challenge your ways of looking at the past and offer a new perspective on how to best preserve our fragile heritage. I hope to live up to this — we all know that it is easier to entertain than to challenge.

A central theme of my discussions will be that heritage resources — such as archaeological sites and historic buildings — aren't automatically important. Most of us probably take this for granted. Because we love the past, we are inclined to believe that it is important. But resources don't automatically have importance — they are ascribed importance by the public. If enough people believe that Mount Vernon, or the neighborhood McDonald's, is important, then it *becomes* important.

This means that archaeology must have a constituency and that this constituency must be vocal. In fact, the constituency must be down-right pushy and aggressive. But I will come back to this concept in a few minutes.

A second, and equally important theme, is that government can either be an ally to preservation or can be a sworn enemy. Strangely, there seems to be no middle ground. Far too often governmental agencies feel that while they make and, presumably enforce, laws, they have no obligation to live by them. Far too often governments can become abusive of their power, causing exceptional damage to the preservation movement. I believe that it is the proper role of government to support preservation efforts and I will take a few minutes to suggest some ways that this can be appropriately, effectively, and economically accomplished.

All of this means that those of us in preservation must be very careful in our dealings with the government. And I will come back to this as well.

I would like to take you on a whirlwind tour of a project that Chicora Foundation

began over a year ago with the best of intentions. We wanted to use cost-effective historical planning and research to develop a preservation plan for Greenville County. We believed that there was a better way to help communities identify and preserve their historical resources than the very labor intensive — and costly — surveys typically conducted. Although this project seems like a win-win situation for everyone, we found that it was tremendously upsetting to the Department of Archives and History and eventually the County. This project can illustrate for us the way the system works, and doesn't work. It can perhaps help us to better understand how preservationists can focus and re-direct their efforts.

The Greenville Preservation Planning Project

It was our intention that this baseline study in Greenville would accomplish several objectives. First, it would provide an immediate planning tool. Developers, county officials — anyone needing information on where significant historic resources were located — could quickly and conveniently obtain at least some preliminary information. Second, it would begin to help the county understand the extent of heritage resource losses. It would help answer questions such as "What types of sites are being most rapidly destroyed?" and "Where are our greatest problems?" Third, it would help focus attention on those "gaps" in the survey area which need additional investigation and exploration. In other words, it would serve not as a final exhaustive study, but as a foundation on which future work could be built. And finally, Chicora's study would help focus archaeological research, maximizing its potential to address significant research questions. By already having a lot of information compiled, researchers could devote their energies to important questions and topics.

I hope that you will agree with me that all of this sounds like a good idea. In addition, it was affordable. Chicora Foundation contributed about \$5000, matched by about \$7000 from the County and City and an additional \$7000 from the National Park Service, administered by the S.C. Department of Archives and History. It was, all things considered, a very cost-effective approach to preservation planning.

We used period maps, historic documents, previous studies, and local resources, including the community, to identify and locate a range of historic properties. While certainly not exhaustive, let me explain a few of the steps we took to find historic sites.

First, we mailed out a brochure to over 1,000 Greenville citizens with a known interest in preservation and history asking them to contact us if they knew of historic resources. The brochure, entitled, "Will You Spend 32¢ to Help Preserve Greenville's History?" was a success. Typical direct mail nets about a 2% return, meaning that if 2% of the 1000 cards, or 20, were returned we would have done well. We got back nearly 50! I realize this may not sound like much, but based on the science of direct mail appeals, this was outstanding. We found out about cemeteries, about family diaries, about photographs, about house sites — all the sorts of things we were interested in.

Coupled with this brochure, we were fortunate to have very good media coverage — both the local paper and television stations covered the survey. And it was Peggy Denny's interest in the project which brings me here today.

Next, we began looking at historic documents, trying to identify events in Greenville's history which were significant and which might have left some kind of lasting, physical site. We began searching for historic maps and plats. We also examined previous historic surveys.

We also sought out individuals in the community with special knowledge of where historic sites were located — people like Anne McCuen, Ruth Ann Butler, Penny Forrester, Richard Sawyer, Leonette Neal, and Wes Breedlove. We knew that we could never know as much about Greenville County as those who had lived here and studied the history much, or all, of their lives.

This baseline study identified and located 44 Greenville sites which are currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, 67 sites currently listed as "historic sites" for the County, 221 archaeological sites currently recorded by the S.C. Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, 1431 archaeological sites identified by a local avocational archaeologist, and 1401 historic sites identified from primary and secondary historical sources.

In total, 3,164 sites were located on the comprehensive maps of Greenville County.

None of this, I suspect, sounds very "dangerous." And if we had stopped here I suspect everyone would have been happy. But remember, we were also supposed to develop a preservation plan for the County.

In looking at traditional preservation planning we found a series of serious, we believe, fatal flaws.

First, traditional preservation planning is oriented toward standing structures — buildings, houses, streetscapes. Such traditional approaches totally ignore archaeological sites, sites which can't be seen because they are below ground. Traditional preservation approaches may save the above ground edifice, but destroy all evidence of how people lived that is buried below ground. Buildings are nice, but it is what is buried that can give the invisible people in history a voice. As all of you realize, while the American Revolution is often associated with individuals like Patrick Henry, Benjamin Franklin, and John Hancock, it was the individual citizen soldiers who fought and died for freedom. Too often these small farmers, merchants, and mechanics are ignored by traditional history. Only archaeology can help us understand how they lived. And traditional historic preservation ignores their story.

And second, traditional preservation is forced preservation. It is predicated on laws which *require* you to protect a building, or paint it a particular color, or conduct an archaeological survey. Although these laws are typically very effective, they create resentment. With the current political climate, such laws are increasingly coming under attack. We were not convinced that tough, ordinance based preservation laws could be enacted in Greenville.

As a consequence, we sought alternative approaches. And we found an excellent model which has been working for over a decade in Fairfax County, Virginia. We explored National Park Service publications and recommendations, which also explored different means of preserving and protecting our heritage.

The approach we selected was predicated on a single, very simple principal — the *management* of Greenville's heritage resources in a manner which maximizes their preservation while allowing for appropriate economic development of the region. The approach we recommended recognizes the importance of land owners' rights and fair compensation for their preservation efforts. We recommended the development of a Heritage Resources Management Plan embedded in Greenville County's comprehensive plan. We recommended incorporating density credits and other proffers in trade for preservation efforts, development of a revolving preservation fund for archaeological research, internships and other public outreach programs, and a proactive program of preservation and conservation easements and remainder interest gifts.

We recommended only two new ordinances or laws — one to establish procedures to protect cemeteries from development activities and one to protect archaeological sites from vandals and looters. Neither law would have affected legitimate property rights. The rest of the program we recommended was entirely incentive based and voluntary.

We emphasized the importance of education in heritage management and encouraged the County to explore techniques for helping teachers to incorporate heritage issues in the classroom. We recommended establishing a volunteer program for archaeological research, designed to gradually evolve into a para-professional effort integrated into the County's management activities.

This was a unique approach to preservation which sought to encourage developers and land owners to form partnerships with those in preservation. We sought to avoid confrontational and adversarial situations. Bitter, costly, and ultimately unproductive clashes over preservation are avoided in favor of a win-win scenario which thrives on public participation and support.

The approach we sought to advocate recognizes that the differences between archaeology, history, and architectural history are artificial and unworthy of separation. All three fields are concerned with our heritage resources, whether they are standing structures, below ground ruins, or archival records. There should be no false dichotomy

between "bricks and mortar" preservation and "archaeological research."

The Reaction

Before explaining the reaction we ultimately received, let me tell you that we kept all of the parties fully informed as our project progressed. We provided the County and the City with drafts of our recommendation chapters. I provided Tom Meeks, with the County's Planning Department with a draft and asked him for comments. Specifically I asked that if he saw any administrative or logistical problems to let me know so we could work together. I came to Greenville twice for progress meetings with the Greenville County Historic Preservation Commission.

Never did I hear anything from anyone with either the City or the County. My letters requesting input went unanswered. My invitations to attend the meetings were never acknowledged.

The Foundation, however, did provide the draft report to two of our colleagues for their peer review. One individual, Ms. Martha Zierden, is widely recognized for her archaeological and preservation work in the City of Charleston. She applauded the study. Another individual, Dr. David Anderson with the National Park Service in Atlanta (the same organization which provided the funding to Archives and History), thought the work was exceptional. Our peer reviewers found the ideas we proposed intriguing and worthy of considerable attention.

Initially neither the County, nor the City, had any objections to our study.

But, after several months, the Department of Archives and History finally wrote back demanding that we eliminate our recommendations. They further threatened future funding of City and County preservation efforts if these groups didn't go along.

That's correct, a state agency serving only to administer this federal grant, demanded that our professional recommendations be silenced. Simply put, this was intellectual censorship. We had stumbled, it seems, on an idea too dangerous to be allowed free discussion in South Carolina — that preservation be incentive based rather than mandated and regulated by the government.

When we balked at this pressure, suggesting instead that we all sit down and talk about it, Archives and History refused and simply ignored our letters. Instead, in a clear case of abuse of government power, they used legal and financial pressure in an effort to break our will. They cited copyright law, they claimed ownership of the report, they asserted that we failed to fulfill our scope of services — in short, they did everything possible to impugn our professional reputation, all the while refusing to sit down face-to-face and work out a compromise.

I hope that this attitude worries the DAR as much as it worries me. Ignore who is right and who is wrong — what harm is there ever in talking and attempting to devise a compromise that all parties can live with.

Only after the involvement of our Foundation's attorney did Archives and History suddenly change direction and accept the report as it stood. But, even in this small victory, the state agency ensured itself of the right to censor the study by continuing to claim ownership.

Our study, its background, its exploration of issues, its analysis, and its recommendations will never be made available to the public — the S.C. Department of Archives and History simply thinks that it is too dangerous for the public to handle.

Perhaps they are threatened by the idea of people being allowed to make the choice to either support or not support preservation. Perhaps they are afraid of losing control over the local governments. Perhaps they are too tied to the status quo. You decide for yourself.

Regardless, the revolution we were proposing in the way preservation is handled was aborted by a state agency too afraid of its own constituency to allow them the right to read different views and decide for themselves.

The Future of Preservation

Preservation has much to recommend it, if we are only able to find rational individuals willing to listen — and government agencies willing to trust their own citizens. I think that our first effort should *not* be to emphasize the intangible benefits of preservation, but rather to focus on the economic impact of preservation — the dollars and cents of preserving the past for future generations. It isn't that I don't believe the intangibles are important, but rather because I believe the economic arguments will most likely get developers, businessmen, bankers, and the like to stop, look, and listen. These economic arguments, at least initially, will be the most compelling.

In terms of architectural preservation we can perhaps focus on the University of Louisville study which found that \$100 million in rehabilitation efforts creates \$20 million in state and local tax benefits, while new construction generates only \$15 million. We can perhaps point out that rehabilitation reduces construction time by an average of 18% and that this time is the same as money. Or we can explain that preservation is the sustainable choice and that every year 3 billion tons of construction waste flows into our already overcrowded landfills.

In terms of economic development we have the National League of Cities study where mayors placed preservation as the seventh most effective tool for development — out of a field of 45 common tools. And we can also point to the fact of the 20 most

successful cities undergoing economic redevelopment, 15 have focused *their* efforts on preservation. The top three — Baltimore, Boston, San Antonio — are very well known for their preservation initiatives.

In terms of heritage based tourism we might point out that the African American tourism market is a \$15 billion a year industry *and growing!* Or that in North Carolina, our sister state, tourism brought in \$7.9 billion in sales revenue and \$450 million in taxes last year alone. A survey found that 67.5% of the people visiting North Carolina did so for its scenic beauty. But the number two reason — cited by 58.9% of those responding — was that they came to North Carolina for activities, events, and features associated with historic preservation.

But don't we *need* development for our tax base? That is certainly the old tired story we hear from the pro-development forces. Yet, studies are beginning to show that sometimes rural *is better*. For example, several studies are revealing that developed areas require services which cost between \$1.06 and \$1.23 for every \$1 in taxes brought in. In contrast, rural areas use about 12¢ to 74¢ of services for every \$1 of taxes they generate. Another study found that houses would have to be valued at over \$300,000 to break even with the services provided.

Frequently, then, development costs a community much more than it generates in return. Communities *might* be better off exploring the option of remaining rural — or carefully controlling development — than rushing headlong into a process which not only strips them of their heritage, but also condemns the citizens to countless tax hikes.

What is the Future of Preservation?

What is the future of preservation? Is it more regulation, more preservation ordinances, more rules telling people how they must treat standing structures or archaeological sites? That is certainly the conventional "wisdom" of agencies responsible for historic preservation. They, of course, have a vested interest in "business as usual."

I believe that there is a better idea. An idea which focuses on incentives rather than the big stick of government regulation.

If preservation is important to society, if preservation packs an economic punch or if it offers inherent benefits to citizens, then preservation should be something that the public is willing to pay for.

Right now we pay for preservation through government regulations, bureaucrats, red tape, and pass-along costs from developers.

I wonder if it wouldn't be more intellectually honest to expect society to pay for preservation by offering landowners incentives for preservation. For example, tax

abatements, assessment freezes, transfer of development rights, development of agricultural districts, and assessing land at actual use value rather than at market value. By providing land owners with incentives to preserve their property and the heritage sites they own governments would avoid the pitfalls of regulations and mandates. By offering incentives for preservation governments would be acknowledging that preservation is worthy of public support. And offering incentives, I believe, preservation would lose much of the stigma of governmental interference it has developed over the past 30 years.

I admit that this approach is radical. But it is honest and it is responsive to the current political climate.

Maybe if there was broad-based support for preservation efforts built on the concept of cooperation rather than regulations there would be a constituency to speak out for preservation. Maybe if we focused on the good that preservation can accomplish in turning our cities around, rather than whether or not a city has a preservation ordinance, it would be possible to obtain grass-roots support for preservation efforts. And maybe with that level of support Counties like Greenville would treasure their history, rather than relegating it to oblivion as "insignificant," "old," and "in the way."