

Chapter Six: Responsibility to Place and Time

Introduction

An attachment to place is part of the complex inter-relationships between person and place. As I discussed in the last chapter, attachment can arise either from circumstances of birth and be part of the taken-for-granted world, or it can be self-consciously created. In some instances this attachment will lead to a sense of responsibility toward the place, but this is not always the case. One may have had a strong emotional response to a place visited only once and never again. That place may linger in the memory without creating a sense of personal responsibility toward it. Other places may have become altered in character beyond recognition (for example, a favorite hiking trail supplanted by an industrial park), precluding a feeling of responsibility towards the transformed place. However, a strong attachment to the place where one lives often confers a sense of responsibility and a profound commitment to the place (Relph 1976).

In this chapter I examine actions within the landscape that arise from a sense of responsibility to place, especially those actions which also convey responsibility to the history of the place. I begin with an examination of the way that personal viewpoints and value systems influence those feelings of responsibility and the actions that arise from them. Stories from two individuals, one a homeowner and the other a business owner, provide examples of this and also demonstrate the importance of personal interactions in the development of a sense of responsibility. Next I discuss the collective responsibility that results from Hillsborough's pursuit of the goal of historic preservation. I examine the actions of the Historic District Commission (HDC) and the conflicts that result

between the commission and citizens who do not share their values. These conflicts are influenced by tensions between elites and non-elites, and between insiders and incomers. Finally, I consider the HDC's efforts to preserve one of the town's leading landmarks, a set of actions that has garnered widespread approval.

Viewpoint, values and responsibility

In this study, both the words and deeds of the informants reveal their sense of responsibility towards place and time. Informants discussed both their own feelings of responsibility, and their attitudes and opinions about the responsibilities that others assume or shirk. The actions that people take to maintain, protect, or defend property or landscape also arise from feelings of responsibility. What motivates those actions? Certain actions are imposed by law (paying property tax) or custom (mowing the lawn), but a sense of responsibility may motivate people to actions that extend far beyond these. People who are engaged with history and place may view their responsibilities as part of a chain of custody beginning with the original inhabitants in the past and extending beyond their lifetimes into the future.

Values help determine actions, and therefore an examination of actions may reflect those values. Values change over time, and these changing values are visible in the landscape. Helen Warren discussed the effect of the change in values on the historic infrastructure of Hillsborough (see Chapter 4). Prior to the arrival of a large number of incomers, Hillsborough's historic buildings were valued for their association with historic events, but the obsessive concern with the material characteristics of the structures came later with the historic preservation movement of the 1960s. In addition to this shift in values, there are many residents of Hillsborough who have no interest in history or

historic preservation, and whose aesthetic values are different from those of the members of the history community. As property owners face decisions about the maintenance of their property, the decisions they make reveal their underlying values. For example, a decision to replace drafty wooden single-glazed windows that are contemporaneous with the building's initial construction with energy efficient double-glazed vinyl clad aluminum windows would reveal the fact that the owner values function over history. The owner of an historic structure who values the building's history might make the opposite decision, replacing newer aluminum windows considered inappropriate to the building with wooden windows considered authentic to the building's period.

The form that the expression of responsibility takes in terms of the specific actions in the landscape will be influenced by the viewpoint of the landscape, the "the organizing ideas we use to make sense of what we see" (Meinig 1979, p. 34), in interaction with the person's value system. In "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene" Meinig addresses the multiple meanings that can be assigned to the same landscape (landscape as nature, habitat, artifact, system, problem, wealth, ideology, history, place or aesthetic) (Meinig 1979). Each landscape will convey multiple meanings to individuals, and members of groups may share constellations of meaning about the landscape. For example, discussions that take place among the members of the HDC during their meetings illustrate that they share views of landscape as history; and the views of landscape as ideology and as wealth are often present but not stated explicitly.

Meinig considered "Ten Versions of the Same Scene" at the scale of landscape, which he defines as "that stretch of country as seen from a single point" (Meinig 1979, p.

33). In the following pages I consider the applicability of his concepts at scales of analysis both larger and smaller than he discussed.¹ At a larger scale of analysis I consider first the creation of a single house as an expression of the owner's sense of responsibility to place and time. Next I examine how changes to an existing sense of responsibility occurred as a business owner considered the future of a complex of industrial buildings. At a smaller scale I examine the collective responsibility to place and time that has been assigned to the HDC as they regulate landscape activities within the entire Historic District of Hillsborough. As incomers have replaced insiders in the power structures of Hillsborough, viewpoints and values have changed. The viewpoint of landscape as history espoused by powerful incomers has become increasingly dominant, and the clash of viewpoints often reflects the insider/incomer divide. By examining the interactions between the HDC and the citizens who petition it, I illuminate conflicting landscape values, some of which arise directly as a result of the differences in point of view between insiders and incomers.

Individual Responsibility to Place and Time

Two cases illustrate the interplay between viewpoint and values as they affect personal sense of responsibility to place. First Holden Richards, Hillsborough incomer but North Carolina native, discusses the new house he built modeled after an historic house. Next Sue Green, a businesswoman whose family owns one of Hillsborough's defunct mills, describes the evolution of her understanding of the history and importance

¹ A note for non-geographers: Geographers' use of the term "scale" is derived from cartography. Map scale is the relationship between measurements on the map and measurements on the ground. It is usually expressed as a ratio or a fraction. A map at a large scale, such as 1/1,000,000, will show a smaller area in greater detail than a map at a smaller scale, such as 1:10,000. Therefore, the larger the scale, the smaller the area that is being considered.

of the former mill property. Selections from their interviews provide examples of their acceptance of personal responsibility to time and place.

Holden Richards' Story

Richards, who has served on the HDC for some time and now serves as chair, built a large house in the Historic District modeled after an historic house in the Coastal Plain region of North Carolina. I had two purposes in mind when I requested an interview with him. I wanted to learn how he viewed his individual property in relationship to place and time in Hillsborough, and I also wanted to discuss the role of the HDC in protecting the historic landscape. I began the interview by asking him what aspects of the house he values and why. In the first half of the interview we toured the house, and he pointed out and explained features of the house.

Meinig's "landscape as Ideology" is intended to illuminate the views not of those who create, but those who view a landscape and see "a translation of philosophy into tangible features... Hovering like ghosts over the distant view are the real creators." (Meinig 1979, p. 42). In the case of Richard's house, the "real creator" is accessible and we can examine his ideas to see the ways in which his philosophy was translated into the decisions he made during the design and construction of the house.²

Richards spoke about some of those who have influenced him, such as Ruskin and Brunelleschi. His comments revealed that architecture, interactions with the environment, and history all matter to him. He described the exquisite care taken from the drawing of the plans to the construction phase to create an elegant, visually pleasing

² It is logical to assume that Richards' wife participated in the many decisions involved in designing and building this house. However, since I did not interview her, I discuss only Richard's relationship to the property.

house with architectural details scaled down from the original.³ This work began with the architect.

The woman who redrew it didn't just make everything smaller. She did it so that everything was appropriate. Because you have [to consider] soffit sizes and design changes. You can't just take something and blow it up or shrink it down. It's not that simple. You really have to take into account the factors that make the house elegant, and she did, and I think that she did a great job.

Richards stated that the builders "got into the spirit of it and...enjoyed almost every minute of it." The lead carpenter studied a fireplace at Moorefields Plantation, a nearby Colonial era home, created a copy and:

It's a damn good copy. He took the time to make these really delicate cove moldings and we spent a lot of time talking about getting the ratio and the expression of the fireplace correct.

The architectural details delight Richards, whose college majors included both art and Southern history, demonstrating that he subscribes to Meinig's "landscape as Aesthetic" viewpoint, "a comprehensive abstraction in which all specific forms are dissolved into the basic language of art: into color, texture, mass, line, position, symmetry, balance, tension" (Meinig 1979, p. 46). Richards made the following comments about the external appearance of the house.

I love the Queen Anne massing on the front, I love the sort of pseudo medieval castle style of the Queen Anne style. The house has five gables and I love that, it has a lot of peaks. We built the original chimney as it is supposed to be, a through-the-house chimney so it looks like the genuine article and not some chimney stuck on the end.

As we toured the house, it was obvious that although Richards appreciates the aesthetics of the architecture, what he values most is the way the house functions in its setting, which he ascribes to the fact that "it is a North Carolina house plan."

³ The original house was 5500 square feet, Richards' is 3500 square feet.

I value the fact that it is native Southern architecture so that it is very comfortable to live in. I think that's the number one thing right there, is that a house like this is built for this climate... There's a lot of economy in this old stupid high-pitched roof. This house is truly built for the south because the 10-12 pitched roof actually keeps the heat so far away from the house that the house has its own natural cooling mechanisms. There's a lot going on inside this house that makes it very practicable.

He gave many examples of the way the house functions in relationship to the environment, and of the effect that this has on his enjoyment of the house.

The thing the colonials had figured out that we really don't, that's taken us forever to get hip to, is that by living in a house that faces east-west-north-south is that when I wake up in the morning and the sun is here [pointing through a window]; when I go to bed in the evening the moon is outside this window when I climb the stair. I have a real connection to the cycle of the day and the weather that a lot of people don't because it is part of my daily routine. When I wake up in the morning and eat in my breakfast room the sun is rising, but when I eat dinner it is setting over the meadow and I can watch it go down, so I have a real sense of what time of day it is, what's happening. My sense of presence within the day is enhanced by living in a place like this, it really is.

This is Meinig's "landscape as System" at the scale of an individual house, "a dynamic equilibrium of interacting processes" (Meinig 1979, p. 38), and "landscape as Habitat," "the ideology of the harmony of man and nature" (Meinig 1979, p. 36) System and habitat converge and intersect with his strong sense of North Carolina identity.

Richards' traces his ancestry on one side of his family back to the Moravian settlement at Bethabara, settled in the mid-1700s and now within the city limits of Winston-Salem, North Carolina. One set of his grandparents were New Yorkers, and Richards spent part of his childhood summers on Long Island. History matters to Richards, and he has worked to incorporate history within the house. As we have already seen, the house references local history, in the details copied from local historic

structures, and North Carolina history in its origins as a copy of a Coastal Plain house.⁴

His family history is incorporated in the house through family portraits and antiques.

There are a lot of things that are in the house that are family things. It would take me a while to show you all the different family things that are in the house but I have quite a few that go back and that all contributes to the home aspect of it. It's real important to know who your antecedents were and what they were about. It helps you be connected to the place you live and that state you live in.

The most treasured antiques are from his family, but a connection to local history is also expressed through his purchase of North Carolina antiques.

Richards' feels that his creation of a new house that respects North Carolina history has been successful. He cited as an example the fact that the week the house was finished "a carpool of old ladies" stopped to ask when the house would be included on the annual tour of historic homes.

Sue Green's Story

Sue Green's family moved their textile business from New York to North Carolina in the early 1960s. Later in the 1960s they bought and operated a textile mill in Hillsborough. During the time the family operated the mill Green was a young woman raising a family and she was not involved in the business. In the 1980s Guilford Mills bought the business but not the mill property. The family then leased the buildings to Flynt Fabrics, who remained until they closed their Hillsborough operation in 2000. When Flynt left, Green took on the responsibility of assessing the property and considering plans for its future. In our interview she described the changes to her

⁴ In the previous chapter I discussed the scale at which people identify with place. Richards, whose family history ties him to several places in North Carolina, identifies with the state of North Carolina and the South as a region. His selection of a Coastal Plain house as a model for his house is in accordance with his personal sense of regional identity.

viewpoints that resulted from her growing involvement with the complex of buildings and with the community.

As we walked through the empty buildings and around the property she described the processes through which her attitude toward the property changed. Her first viewpoint corresponded with Meinig's "landscape as Problem" category, "a condition needing correction" (Meinig 1979, p. 41). Green visited the property for the first time in many years after Flynt closed, and she described her shock and dismay upon first seeing the empty buildings. She described it as an "ugly stepchild," an analogy that she used throughout the interview. They were utilitarian industrial buildings, with the oldest one dating to the early 1900s and others added over the decades, now standing empty. According to Green the oldest building was in a "terrible state of disrepair, the floor...damaged beyond repair." She said "I was sick to my stomach looking at what was going on here, trying to figure out what we could possibly do."

Green repeatedly stressed the importance of making sound economic decisions about the property, reflecting a viewpoint that Meinig identifies as "landscape as Wealth" (Meinig 1979, p. 41). Taxes must be paid and the property must be maintained, so according to Green:

The first priority was to receive the property back from Flynt, they had been a tenant here since 1987. [I had] to be able to...stabilize it, to try to get a tenant in the space that was the most leaseable, which was the dyeing and finishing part, and then to figure out what to do with the rest.

When I asked her if she felt a sense of responsibility toward the property, she replied:

Yes, because it belongs to us. So no matter what, we can't just let it fall into ruins. We feel that it does have some economic value. It was in our self-interest to do the best that we could.

Owners of historic homes may consider “landscape as Aesthetic” or “landscape as History” to be equally as important as a viewpoint of property as wealth, but the successful business owner cannot. Economic considerations must be first and foremost, and other viewpoints are considered only in relation to the view of landscape as wealth.

As Green learned more about the property, her appreciation for it grew. She described her excitement upon seeing the original plans for the first time, and said that it was like finding the birth certificate for a child.

Flynt had been the keeper of a lot of the blueprints, since they used the building. So when I got back the plans and I started to go through them, I saw [the dates] 1926 and 1900, and I actually found the original site plans. They show the creek running through here and just that one building.

As we walked around the perimeter of the site she continued her discussion of the relationship between the physical characteristics and the human uses of the site, indicating that she began to consider this property from the point of view of “landscape as Artifact...the twentieth century concept of man as technocrat in charge of remolding the earth to suit his desires" (Meinig 1979, p. 37).

One of the contractors working on the property recommended that she talk to Eddie Belk, an adaptive reuse architect who has rehabilitated many tobacco and textile buildings in nearby Durham, North Carolina. She invited Belk to view the property and make recommendations about possible future uses.

Eddie had me look at this with totally different eyes, because he knows these buildings...he knew the exact dimension of that original building, so he knows what can be done. And he made me think about this in a whole different way. That there was real potential to reclaim this building and do something good with it.

Belk taught her to see and appreciate some of the original features that had been hidden by later renovations, such as a monitor roof with clerestory windows. If restored, this

would give the building “the potential for a lot of natural light.” Green described the second floor of that building:

It is really beautiful, it has a high ceiling, it’s got windows, it has a nice feel to it. Of course I would never have thought that twenty years ago.

Her interaction with Belk prompted her to begin considering the property from the viewpoint of “landscape as Aesthetic” (Meinig 1979, p. 46).

As Green visited Hillsborough more and more often, she was drawn into a network of relationships centered on the property. She hired a former mill worker to act as caretaker for the property, and she has gotten to know other residents of the West Hillsborough community.⁵ The stories these people have shared about the mill have allowed her to understand the role of the mill in the life of the place. She met others through a task force created by the mayor to examine options for the future of the property. Meeting members of the historic preservation community and the owner of the other defunct mill in town⁶ led Green to consider the relationships between history and economic value. She described the effect of these connections on her feelings about the site:

It has been in our family now for almost more than 30 years. I have to say that I feel more connected to it within the last few years than I have ever been before. Finding the birth papers, school records and all.⁷ And also I have had much more contact within this past year with city officials and I come over here a lot more and so it is holding much more interest for me. I do feel a sort of emotional connection.

At the close of our interview, I asked her if her future plans for the building would attempt to honor, reflect and respect history. She replied:

⁵ Although West Hillsborough is now included within the town of Hillsborough, it was originally a separate town and continues to maintain a distinctive identity.

⁶ The Cone Mills site has been adaptively reused as a business incubator.

⁷ She referred to the original site plans and blueprints as the “birth certificate” or “birth records,” continuing the analogy of the property as a child of the family.

If it works, if it goes hand-in-glove with our ability to maximize the economics of the situation, well then yes. And I guess it's only recently that I have had my consciousness raised with the regard of the historical value... Even last October I looked at this place and thought it was horrible. I couldn't even imagine the idea that it had historical significance, but the more I have gotten involved with it and the more and the more times I have come over here, or the more that I get to look at it with different eyes and think of it in a different way, the more then that becomes a more prominent idea. And I think it could be a useful, good idea.

During our interview, Green constructed a narrative to describe how her sense of responsibility to place and time evolved. As a businesswoman she began with a sense of responsibility to the family business, and the mill represented one of the family assets. Her knowledge about the place, its features, and its physical and temporal context expanded as a result of the relationships that she formed. Learning to see significance in the architectural elements, the history, and the role of the mill in the community led Green to consider her relationships to the past, to the place, and to the people of the community. Although she does not live in Hillsborough, she is aware that the actions of her family will affect this community, and she wants the effects to be positive. She now understands that the historic significance of the site may add value to the property. Her primary responsibility remains unchanged however: the responsibility to make sound economic decisions.

Collective Responsibility to Place and Time

The examples above illustrate the fact that the sense of responsibility assumed by individuals is influenced by their relationships with others. Bill Crowther, executive director of the Ayr Mount historic site, commented on the snowball effect that can occur as preservation becomes important in a community. He spoke about his early days in

Hillsborough in the 1980s when, as a graduate student at Duke Divinity School, he earned money by working as a carpenter and cabinet maker.

Early on when I was here fixing up these houses, you could see that people were taking pride in these places because they thought it was their responsibility to those who came before them. It was kind of contagious. When folks on one side of the street started fixing up and taking care of the places, it was a nice contagious kind of thing that moved along.

A growing nationwide interest in historic preservation has generated interest in the restoration of older homes. Crowther identified three elements that can make historic preservation successful.

I think to be very successful it has to have a very natural base. It is nice to have a river running through your town... a lot of vegetation growth, some green spaces. That is the base on which I think historical preservation grows.

As evidence for this, he discussed the visual characteristics of historic districts located within cities. "They may have some trees but...if you look out beyond it, it is not appealing." The next element he considered vital is:

the integrity of the people who built the historic structures that are here. The folks who did the work originally are what makes the buildings last. We had some good people building these places and that made a big difference and that leads to the success.

The final element he identified as essential to the success of historic preservation is "the energy of the people who are living today to keep them up."

The town of Hillsborough assumed a collective responsibility to place and time in 1973 with the creation of North Carolina's first historic district. Creation of the district was followed by adoption of a preservation ordinance in 1973 which provided the mechanisms to promote historic preservation. The Historic District Commission was created to provide a quasi-judicial board with responsibility for enforcement of the preservation ordinance. The scope of the commission has expanded beyond historic

preservation over time however, both as the understanding of what is “historic” has expanded, and as the commission has been granted power to regulate the appearance of all aspects of the landscape, including new construction and landscape features such as decks and fences. In this section I first consider the economic, social and community benefits of historic preservation. I then examine the relationship between historic preservation and sense of place and the role of the Historic District Commission in the defense and maintenance of the landscape.

Cathleen Turner, executive director of the Alliance for Historic Hillsborough, commented on the relationships among historic preservation, economic development, and quality of life in an editorial titled “Preserving Historic Properties Benefits Hillsborough.” She wrote:

In passing the preservation Ordinance in 1973, the town acknowledged the importance of its historic atmosphere and its potential as a tool for economic development. And because of this foresight, we as a community have reaped the benefits from the preservation of the historic district, including a highly regarded quality of life, aesthetic appeal, tremendous community pride and a well-established tourism program that brings revenue into the community (Turner 2002).

Although economic analysis is neither the purpose nor the subject of this dissertation, the prevailing beliefs about the relationships between historic preservation and economic development are relevant to this discussion. The view that historic preservation is an economic blessing is widespread in the planning community (Schucker 2001; Greenfield 2004; Wilson 2004). In a special issue of the Planning Commissioners Journal titled “An Introduction to Historic Preservation Planning,” preservation planner Amy Facca outlined the planners’ perspective (Facca 2003). She listed the following points:

- Creation of local historic districts stabilizes, and often increases residential and commercial property values.
- Increases in property values in historic districts are typically greater than increases in the community at large.
- Historic building rehabilitation, which is more labor intensive and requires greater specialization and higher skills levels, creates more jobs and results in more local business than does new construction.
- Heritage tourism provides substantial economic benefits. Tourists drawn by a community's (or region's) historic character typically stay longer and spend more during their visit than other tourists.
- Historic rehabilitation encourages additional neighborhood investment and produces a high return for municipal dollars spent.
- Use of a city or town's existing, historic building stock can support growth management policies by increasing the availability of centrally located housing.

The fact the Hillsborough's leaders have committed the financial resources (always scarce in a town budget funded by a population of only 5,500 people) to employ an historic preservation planner is a measure of their belief in the economic benefits of historic preservation. Crowther said that a study demonstrated "that for every dollar spent on restoration and renovation here it generates about seven more."

As Hillsborough has become more economically integrated into the Triangle region through transportation connections, the prices of historic homes have risen. As long as the fashion for historic housing stock continues, an historic house becomes an economic investment beyond the value of the physical structure of the house. The appeal of these houses is strong among incomers, who have no personal relationship to local history. The insider families have watched the rising prices with bemusement and some have been quick to take advantage of the situation. When one of my insider informants inquired about an historic property that another insider had for sale, he was told by the seller that the price would be more than my informant would wish to pay—the seller was "looking to fuck a Yankee."

This anecdote reveals much about the nature of the relationships between insiders and incomers. Yankees, the traditional enemies of Southerners, are constructed as “other” and therefore are appropriate victims. Between insiders there is accountability: there is a long history of interactions in the past, and an expectation that those interactions will continue throughout the lifetimes of the insiders. In addition, many details of any interaction between insiders are known to a wide circle of additional insiders. To take monetary advantage of another insider brings discredit and ridicule to a person. Between an insider and a Yankee there is no accountability. The Yankee is not part of the network of interpersonal relationships that connects insiders to one another. Yankees may be exploited without consequences. They are known to be willing to spend more money for property than the locals would consider the property is worth. The seller’s refusal even to name a price to another insider implies that he feels that the price he expects to get is one that another insider would not consider to be reasonable and would not be willing to pay. To the seller (and, he assumes, to the insider who inquired about it) the house is just a house, but the seller recognizes the fact that to the Yankee it is more valuable because of its historic interest. The phrase “looking to” implies that he is waiting with patient anticipation. He would rather wait for the appropriate victim than dispose of the property now. Once he can find someone foolish enough to pay substantially more than he himself thinks the property is worth, he will be willing to take advantage of that person.

Historic District Commission

Created in 1973, Hillsborough’s historic district was one of the first, and is currently one of the largest in North Carolina (Turner 2002). Informants often cited the

historic infrastructure as an important component of Hillsborough's distinctive sense of place. Hillsborough has "more than 100 late eighteenth and nineteenth century structures that illustrate the Town's early history. In addition, there are numerous secondary buildings, bridges, mill sites and dams along the Eno [River], and Native American relics from the locations of ancient towns stretching back thousands of years" (Hillsborough 2004). Oversight of the historic district falls to the Historic District Commission (HDC), an arm of the town government which exercises control over the landscape within the boundaries of the historic district. In this section I define the mission of the HDC, describe its operations, and discuss the means by which it defends the visual characteristics of Hillsborough's landscape. Conflicts that arise from differing viewpoints and values are often negotiated through participation in the processes of the Commission.

The mission of the HDC is "to identify, protect, and preserve Hillsborough's historic architectural resources and to educate the public about those resources and historic preservation in general" (Hillsborough Historic District Commission 2000, p. 2). The Town Board has granted quasi-judicial powers to the Commission to accomplish their mission: it "hears evidence, determines relevant facts, and then applies the law" (Hillsborough Historic District Commission 2000, p. 2). Property owners who contemplate "any proposed exterior alterations, changes in exterior building materials, new construction, significant site changes, and relocation or demolition of properties within the historic district" must apply to the Historic District Commission for a Certificate of Appropriateness, which must be obtained before a building permit will be granted (Hillsborough Historic District Commission 2000, p. 3).

The ordinance that established the historic district set standards of evaluation and points of law regarding renovations and building practices. Guidelines which interpret those laws are published in the Hillsborough Historic District Design Guidelines (Hillsborough Historic District Commission 2000). The town's historic preservation planner, a landscape architect, provides the commission with context to help them apply and interpret the published design guidelines. The commission has taken significant steps to see that every household is aware of their responsibility to seek approval for any proposed exterior changes. When the latest version of the design guidelines was published in 2000, one of the commissioners walked the streets of the town to personally hand-deliver a copy of the guidelines to every house within the historic district, and talked with as many homeowners as he could. One of the benefits of Hillsborough's small size is this ability to pursue the educational mission of the Historic District Commission in a face-to-face manner.

The Historic District Commission controls the visual characteristics of Hillsborough's eclectic collection of buildings through the application of the design guidelines, which detail acceptable renovation and building practices.⁸ Elements of individual buildings under their control include masonry, wood, architectural metals, paint color, windows, doors, rooflines, porches, and balconies. The goal is to ensure that repairs and renovations blend harmoniously with existing landscape elements, and also to maintain features that are characteristic of this place. Although the HDC has tried to ensure that property owners are aware of the necessity of obtaining approval prior to

⁸ Development of the current version of the design guidelines were financed in part with funds from the National Park Service. Jo Ramsay Leimenstoll, AIA, served as the project consultant. Leimenstoll is a professor of architecture at UNC-Greensboro and has assisted other North Carolina cities in the development of design guidelines for historic districts.

making changes, some people may learn of the requirements for the first time as they apply for a building permit. Permit applicants whose property lies within the historic district are directed to the town's historic preservation planner, Margaret Schucker. Schucker provides information about the design guidelines and the required design review process. Applicants who are willing to listen to her guidance (and not all are willing) are better prepared to plan projects that will meet with the commission's approval and be granted a Certificate of Appropriateness. Much of the commission's impact occurs during this application process, as applicants chat with or question the planning staff, and during the application hearings, when commissioners offer advice and provide the context for that advice. For example, one person who was planning to build a reproduction of a Carolina late Victorian brick house was advised to tint the mortar because "around here the cement was mixed with mud from the river." Some citizens are seeking place-specific information and welcome the advice, while others resent interference in plans they had made prior to appearing before the commission. All applicants are forced to consider their own building within the context of other local place characteristics.

Commissioners are appointed by the Town Board, often after having been recruited to apply by present commissioners, and are assisted by the historic preservation planner. In a town of 5,500 people, the number of citizens who are willing to assume leadership roles is necessarily small, and it is common for commissioners to have served in other roles (Town Board, School Board, Chamber of Commerce) in the past and to continue in other service roles after leaving the commission. Hillsborough residents may become commission members if they "have demonstrated special interest, experience, or

education in architecture, history, archaeology, or other preservation-related fields” (Hillsborough Historic District Commission 2000, p. 2). These characteristics are most often to be found in members of elite groups. Relph has observed that “attempts to create places that reflect...a sensitivity to the significance of place in everyday life...[are] often the prerogative of elite groups and individuals rather than an articulated expression of the values of all members of a community” (Relph 1976, p. 71). Most commissioners have been incomers rather than insiders, and at present none of the commissioners are members of insider families. As we have seen in earlier chapters, the relationship of incomers to a place is significantly different from that of insiders. Incomers will have a perspective that has arisen from having lived in or experienced multiple places (although this may also apply to insiders who have lived or traveled elsewhere). Catherine Howett, in her analysis of the evolution of the importance of visual values in evaluating landscapes, discussed the role of perspective, which implies a distance between the observer and the observed. She said that “the separation of the observer from the object of the study invested visual perception with a privileged function among the senses contributing to the aesthetic experience” (Howett 1997, p. 89). Commissioners place a high value on the visual characteristics of individual buildings and streetscapes, and this often brings them into conflict with property owners who have other priorities.

Since commissioners have an interest in history and architecture, many of them share viewpoints and values that are not held by all of the applicants who appear before them. The views of landscape as aesthetic or landscape as history are learned values more likely to be held by people whose education and life experiences (such as travel to other historic places) have taught them to see and value the aesthetic or historic

characteristics of landscapes. Such views may be a luxury not available to the person who needs to find the lowest cost way of repairing a dysfunctional window or adding a shed in which to store a lawnmower. Tuan observed that “working class and poor people do not live in homes and neighborhoods of their own design” (Tuan 1977, p. 171). In Hillsborough they also may not be permitted to modify the design of their homes to meet the needs that they themselves perceive. Poorer people do not usually employ architects as they plan for changes to their property either, and this puts them at a disadvantage as they present their plans to the commission. Although the use of an architect is not required, it facilitates the design review process. It is easier for the commission to envision the proposed changes when they can study an architect’s drawings and elevations. Architects and commissioners speak the same arcane language. Homeowners may not know a gable from a cornice.⁹ Architects working in Hillsborough are usually familiar with materials considered appropriate to historic structures, and are not likely to recommend building materials that will be rejected by the HDC. Homeowners may be familiar only with what is available at Home Depot. Architects will be cognizant with styles; homeowners may only be interested in functions. They may want a skylight to bring light into an upstairs room whether this is in keeping with the style of their house or not.

Historic District Commission: A bulwark against placelessness

Many of the informants in this study described Hillsborough’s positive qualities by contrasting them with the negative characteristics of other places. The contrast most

⁹ Hillsborough’s Historic District Design Guidelines includes many photographs and provides a glossary of architectural terms. Not every property owner who appears before the commission has studied them, however.

often cited was with Cary, North Carolina, a suburb of Raleigh disparagingly referred to as the “Confinement Area for Relocated Yankees” (Lewis 2001) (see Map 5, p. 21).

Cary’s government pursued aggressive growth policies for decades, resulting in vast areas of suburban housing developments punctuated by strip malls. Cary was characterized by National Geographic Magazine as “Super Suburbia,” where “every employee works in a 10-foot-by-12-foot office, nearly everyone ...lives in ...a two-story colonial with five windows across the top and two windows on either side of the entrance” (Bourne 2001). Although Cary is the butt of many jokes, it obviously has attractions for some “relocated Yankees” (and for some Southerners) and is an ideal location for those who prefer a socioeconomically uniform, automobile-dominated, consumer-culture lifestyle. It is the quintessential North American placeless place.

Standing in contrast to Cary is Hillsborough with its eclectic mix of people and of structures, which range from grand dwellings that have always been homes for elites, to much smaller dwellings that, at least until recently, have been home to people of modest means. Turner described the mix of dwellings and people, and gave her opinion on the benefits of this diversity:

Here in Hillsborough you’ve got Craftsman Bungalow next to eighteenth century Piedmont house next to 1950s ranch, next to turn of the century vernacular... Then you’ve got large manorial properties on big lots with a couple of smaller properties on smaller lots next to them. And that’s the wonderful thing about Hillsborough...you’ve got this eclectic size, type, style and it allows for diversity in the community which, in my opinion, makes the community stronger. If you have all of one type of person or family in a place I think it’s going to stagnate... I think diversity...makes communities stronger.

Some of the diversity in population is visually apparent even to the casual visitor and adds to the appeal of the place. Carla, a resident of a nearby rural community, observed:

There is an interesting mix of people. You have got your highly educated professionals, you've got the whole literary set that is now in Hillsborough, and then you have your farmer in bib overalls walking around. I really, really like that mix.

The Historic District Commission has designed policies to help preserve this mix of building sizes and styles and indirectly to preserve the socioeconomic mix of people, but the latter is a difficult proposition as housing values soar. One downside to the popularity of historic preservation is that as prices rise, smaller properties become desirable to people for whom the designation "historic" adds a valuable cachet. As they repair or renovate, they may wish to expand the building. If they are permitted to do so the small affordable home is transformed into a larger home suitable for someone in a higher tax bracket. Although Hillsborough's Design Guidelines state that "additions should be kept to a minimum" they also recognize that "accommodating changes in lifestyle and occupants over time may be essential to the ongoing useful life of the building" (Hillsborough Historic District Commission 2000, p. 38). This fact of life, added to the region-wide upward spiral of housing prices and Hillsborough's success at positioning itself in the local media as a community-oriented, family-friendly place with small town charm, means that housing in the historic district of Hillsborough becomes less and less affordable for people of modest means. Turner worries about preserving the characteristics of the community in the face of regional growth: "We're at the juncture of I-85 and I-40. We're a mid-point between Raleigh and Greensboro and adjacent to the Research Triangle and so that presents a set of problems. How do you preserve what makes such an exquisite quality of life in light of the fact that it's so popular that they could kill the goose that laid the golden egg?"

The architectural and socioeconomic diversity that Turner and others value contributes to Hillsborough's sense of place. Although the mission of the HDC is to "identify, protect, and preserve Hillsborough's historic architectural resources," the preservation and protection of these resources has been interpreted to include control of the streetscape and context in which these buildings are found. This includes many buildings which are not historic. Holden Richards explained why the HDC is committed to preserving the eclectic intermixture of sizes and styles of buildings.

As the town spiraled out through the years and the centuries that its been here, the central thing that's been correct no matter who built or what was built was the spacing of the houses, the scale of the streets, the whole Historic District Commission phenomena thing, it really does work. If you have all that stuff right it doesn't matter what era the houses are from, they have a certain sense of place and they have their own sensibility. There's really something to it. It is almost formulaic in one way, but it's the randomness and the sort of intermixed aspect of Hillsborough that makes it charming. It's not that it's fixed in any particular way, and that's particularly not modern. The eclecticism shows the age and development of the town in a very organic real way.

The role of the HDC in preserving sense of place extends beyond their regulation of the landscape. I asked Richards about the role of the Commission in maintaining the historic aspect of sense of place, and he replied:

As far as preserving the history it's useless, but as far as preserving a sense of place it's indispensable. All the history can be perverted in all kinds of ways, but its physicality cannot. The real pleasure is...the diversity of scale and shape and size on the common street. I think that's the real incontrovertible truth about Hillsborough, is its physical record, and that's what we protect, regardless of what people say about it. We know what we see....But here's the critical bit, you have to keep telling the stories otherwise what's good and valuable won't be valued. So history is a shared cultural value and it has to be passed on. It's part of the reason it's important that we have an Alliance for Historic Hillsborough and a Historic District Commission because what we are is, we are a living history record, we tell people what their houses were, what they mean, what the context is and why its important to maintain it. It is *the* function of the Historic District Commission. We have that living memory, we are the living memory of the town, even if we may not have experienced any of this stuff, the survey and the guidelines, all those things add up to help us perpetuate that sense of real

history that actually occurred here. Even if things do change, they change in such a way that you can imagine the history happening in front of your very eyes.

Turner stated that the role of the HDC “is to preserve the spirit of the historic district, not to place a bell jar over it, not to freeze it in time, [but] to allow for adaptation and change which can be absorbed into the historic district but also allow for the continued preservation of the historic district.” Evidence of adaptation and change is preserved on the facades of buildings through renovations and additions made to older buildings over a long span of time. For example, an older home may have clapboard siding of one width on the original portion of the house, while a newer portion has a different width of clapboard and a different roofline. These features are believed to add value because they provide a visual record of the building’s history. They are only valued, however, if the construction included the traditional material of wood, stone, or brick. More recent innovations in building technology (such as vinyl or fiber cement siding) are not valued. In fact, the only major exterior change to a building that does not require design review and a Certificate of Appropriateness is the “removal of artificial siding when the original siding is to be replaced or repaired and painted or stained” (Hillsborough Historic District Commission 2000, p. 70). These newer materials are discouraged even on new construction. Therefore, although the eclecticism of Hillsborough is valued, the fact that renovations or new construction must blend in with the existing landscape means that the landscape cannot continue to evolve in an eclectic way.

The design guidelines codify a set of values grounded in the traditions of historic preservation and landscape architecture. Most commissioners share these values, in fact most appear to be “true believers” who accept as articles of faith that these are the best

values to hold; best for the town, best for the structures, best for the homeowners.

Conflicts inevitably arise with property owners to whom other values are important. The power that the HDC has to impose their values on those who do not share them can lead to the conclusion formed by one of the informants that the board is “a bunch of elitists. You either have to satisfy their own thoughts, or you don’t get anything.” As Jackson observed, “a landscape, like a language, is the field of perpetual conflict and compromise between what is established by authority and what the vernacular insists on preferring” (Jackson 1984, p. 148). These conflicts are negotiated within HDC meetings.

The conflict that most often arises, in Hillsborough and in other historic districts around the country, is the conflict between the private property rights of the individual and the collective control over property administered by local government. Denver property owners, for example, fought the formation of a historic district “on the grounds that it was tantamount to taking of property” (Morley 2004, p. 301). Similar concerns were voiced in Hillsborough at the time our historic district was created. The following story illustrates the intensity of feelings that can accompany disputes based in conflicting values.

The first time I interviewed Mrs. X¹⁰ I did not get very far into my prepared questions before she commandeered the interview to air a twenty-year old grievance against the Historic District Commission. The events she described occurred shortly after her husband, a local businessman, had died. He had planned to install a canopy over the gas pumps at a convenience store that he owned, but this project had not begun at the

¹⁰ In a town the size of Hillsborough the concept of confidentiality encounters the problem of scale. Even the barest bones of this story, the minimum number of elements necessary to tell the story, may reveal her identity to people who lived here during the events described. Mrs. X did give me permission to quote her by name, and if she had not I could not have used this story. I have chosen not to reveal her identity directly, but the insiders will certainly know who she is.

time of his death. She proceeded with his plan, and encountered resistance from the HDC. This concluded with an acrimonious encounter at the convenience store between her and a commissioner. Mrs. X, a woman of great strength of character, prevailed and the canopy remained there for the next twenty years.

Her objections included a theme common in complaints about the actions of historic preservation commissions here and in other locales (Morley 2004): personal property rights and issues of personal power and autonomy. Mrs. X said

I think no one, with the exception maybe of Uncle Sam, should have the right to dictate to someone about their property. I very much resent somebody telling me that I couldn't paint my house pink, if I wanted it pink. I don't want it pink, I don't want my neighbor to paint hers pink. But I will defend her right to her property... I hate a dictator, and as far as I'm concerned, it's a dictator who tells you what you cannot do.

Their objections to the canopy represented a personal challenge to her power over her own property: "I assured myself that they would not dictate to me, and they didn't."

Mrs. X is one of the people who originally opposed the creation of the commission. At the time of its creation Hillsborough had experienced the loss of some historic buildings, but she did not perceive that these losses were significant enough to justify the abridgement of the property rights of the owners. She viewed government intervention as unnecessary because "everybody takes pride in their home around here." However in the early years of the commission she found that "there were very few problems then, because they worked with people." But then "a lot of damn Yankees came in, and decided we didn't know how to run our town, so they'd run it for us."¹¹

Mrs. X felt that many local homeowners, Southerners with both taste and money, did not need instruction from outsiders. "I also consider it an insult to my intelligence, to

¹¹ Although the message was serious, the delivery was friendly and humorous. She knew very well that she was speaking to a "damn Yankee" as she told me this story.

tell me you don't have enough sense to do what's right or what's proper." She constructed her argument based on a difference in moral values between the Southerners and Yankees. She indicated that anyone who wished to spend enough money on lawyers could overcome the dictates of the HDC. "I've got news for some of those damn Yankees. A lot of these Southerners have money too." Her argument is that the Southerners (at least the wealthy ones) could impose their own values if they chose to fight in the courts. But since the Southerners have a different set of values, in which they "don't want to dictate like the damn Yankees" the Southerners have negotiated this conflict by choosing not to contest the actions of the HDC.

I asked Mrs. X if she had seen a copy of the current design guidelines. She said "I got a copy of that and immediately put it in the trash can," indicating her refusal to recognize the right of the HDC to control her actions. She continued by saying "They don't abide by their own guidelines, so why should I? I mean, that's evident." As an example of this, she said

I have a friend who I'd rather not name, who wanted to put a fence up, and she went through the proper channels, and it was a plastic fence, very decorative and pretty. And they told her, no, they didn't allow plastic fence in the city. She says [to one of the commissioners], 'you check your next-door neighbor, he has a plastic one.' And so he did. And there was a plastic one. See, that just adds to the fact that it's who you are, as to what you get. And that's so unnecessary here.

In small towns such as Hillsborough, so the joke goes, "you don't have to put on your turn signal because we all know where you are going." In this case the applicant before the commission knew the commission members personally, knew where they lived, knew who their neighbors were, and knew more than they did about the construction of the fence in question. Mrs. X and her friend interpreted this incident as evidence of the fact that "who you are" determines "what you get." They believed that the fence, which did

not meet the design guidelines, had been approved as a result of friendship between the fence owner and a commissioner.

Any discrepancy between the policies of the HDC and actions in the landscape that do not conform to those policies is noted and resented. However, since commission meetings are not covered by the local press, residents sometimes assign blame to the HDC for actions that are not within their control. It is possible, for example, that the plastic fence was erected without an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness. Similar misinterpretation of HDC actions can arise when the property owner does seek and gain approval for a project, but the owner and contractor or builder create changes to the plan during construction. When property owners take action without consulting the HDC or make changes after approval has been granted, and this comes to the attention of the commission, commissioners must then decide whether to confront the owner and impose remediation, or whether to ignore the violation of the policies. Commissioners discuss these problems and weigh the seriousness of the violation and the consequences of the possible actions of the Commission before making a decision.

As in other desirable locations, the pace of infill is accelerating, and the HDC is sometimes inappropriately blamed for this as well. If a property meets the requirements set forth in the town planning ordinances (such as the minimum lot size allowed) the town cannot prevent the owner from building on the lot. The Commission is committed to preserving characteristics of the streetscape, and the design guidelines specify the characteristics of new construction. New buildings must be “compatible in height, roof form, scale, massing, material, detail, and proportion of the street façade with surrounding buildings that contribute to the historic character of the district”

(Hillsborough Historic District Commission 2000, p. 35). Judgments about what is compatible are subjective, and any new buildings will alter the streetscape, which inevitably leads to complaints. For example, two of the informants commented on the addition of a small brick house in the heart of the historic district. A woman who had served on the commission many years ago (during a time when the housing market was stagnant) complained of “new houses not fitting in with the old.” She complained that the HDC was not following the guidelines that were in effect when she was a commissioner, and said “the house is too big for the lot.” Another informant, speaking of the same property, referred to the “big brouhaha” over the new house, but said “It was a very tasteful house. It looks like it’s been there forever but it changed the historical use of that site and people took umbrage at that.”

Another source of dissatisfaction with the actions of the HDC arises from comparisons of their actions in Hillsborough and the actions of similar boards in neighboring towns. Joyce Brown, Hillsborough native but now a Chapel Hill resident, applied for permission to replace a roof on a property that she owns in Hillsborough. The commission denied her application to use a certain material on her roof, material she had used on a house in Chapel Hill that won an award from the Chapel Hill Preservation Society. In an editorial written for the News of Orange County, she expressed her unhappiness with the commission’s “rigidity and conformity” and “power to impose its will” (Brown 2003). The control of the town by incomers is another source of resentment in this case. Brown said “Even though I am a native of Hillsborough, my roots in the community are deep, I am a taxpayer, my parents and my brother are buried in Hillsborough, and I will be buried beside them, I realize I am now an outsider, a big

strike against me” (Brown 2003). Brown is now in a position where the incomers (the Historic District Commission) have made her feel like an outsider in her own home town.

Incomers and insiders alike share an interest in the welfare of the town. Although the examples given above illustrate the sources of conflict that arise from differences in perspective and value systems, shared attitudes are more dominant than divergent ones. The fact that the HDC has been in operation for over 30 years without a serious challenge to its existence demonstrates this fact. Individuals may grumble when the commission thwarts their plans, but most residents value Hillsborough’s historic identity and recognize the importance of the HDC as a watchdog over the historic landscape.

The HDC recently created a new ordinance, one which extends their power over property. This “Demolition By Neglect” ordinance imposes fines on property owners who allow their buildings to fall into ruin. The particular stimulus for the development of this ordinance was a series of citizen complaints about a small house a few blocks from the downtown area. Long abandoned and boarded up, its condition deteriorated each year. Citizens were offended by its appearance, and feared for the safety of children who might have been tempted to enter it. The commission examined policies in other historic districts and crafted an ordinance that was eventually approved by the Town Board. This further circumscription of personal property rights was controversial, and voices were raised in opposition. The editor of the Chapel Hill Herald warned that the ordinance was too broad, and could lead to the humiliation of citizens whose property had deteriorated as a result of their financial problems (Chapel Hill Herald, 2002).



Figure 3: Colonial Inn, Front View. (Photo: Cheryl D. Warren, 2005)

Financial problems are responsible for the shameful state of repair of the Colonial Inn, one of the town's best known and best loved structures (the location of the Inn is indicated by No. 15C on Map 7, page 75). Its history is venerable (at one time it was billed as "the oldest continuously operating inn in the United States").¹² General Cornwallis was quartered there during the Revolutionary War, and Aaron Burr and Dolley Madison are reported to have stayed there. While it was still open its restaurant served lunch and dinner to locals and to many busloads of tourists. It functioned as an

¹² A previous owner told me this as an example of the folklore surrounding the Inn, but warned that the claim could not be substantiated.

important community center, hosting meetings, banquets, and wedding parties. This structure should be the crown jewel of Hillsborough; instead it is an eyesore.



Figure 4: Colonial Inn, deterioration visible on the front porch. (Photo: Cheryl D. Warren, 2005)

The Inn was sold in 2002 after the previous owners filed for bankruptcy. It was purchased by a businessman who also owns significant historic properties in Chapel Hill, and town leaders hoped and expected that he would begin the series of renovations that were necessary. This did not happen and over the next two years the deterioration of the building accelerated. In May of 2004 the town used the Demolition by Neglect ordinance to file a lawsuit against the owner of the Inn. According to town officials, the immediate

repairs needed include “repairing holes in the foundation, fixing chimneys, waterproofing certain areas, fixing broken windows and a section of roof, trimming vegetation, washing and painting wood surfaces, and other similar repairs” (Velliquette 2004). A fine of \$100 per day has been accruing since May 17, 2004, and a countersuit by the owner was rejected by the courts.¹³

This was the ideal case for the first application of the Demolition by Neglect ordinance and was greeted with resounding approval. The large size and prominent location of the Inn in the heart of downtown ensure that many residents are aware of its condition. The fact that the current owner is not from Hillsborough means that no local families will be harmed by the application of the ordinance. The role that the Inn played in community events and the affection that people feel for it create a sense that it is appropriate for the town to intervene to save the structure. Even some of my informants who were the most vocal critics of the HDC were pleased with the application of this ordinance.

Conclusion

Fields of care are made manifest when a person assumes responsibility towards a place. The actions taken in the landscape result from a commitment to place that may be casual or profound, and may be perceived as arising from and applying to the present time only, or be perceived as part of a continuum of events in place that extend into the past and the future. Among those residents who care about history, Hillsborough’s historic landscape is appreciated by incomers and insiders, elites and non-elites.¹⁴

¹³ The issue remained unresolved at the time this dissertation was written.

¹⁴ People who were not interested in history were not included in this study.

Control of this landscape, always in the hands of the powerful, has now increasingly devolved to the incomers who have chosen to play an active role on the Historic District Commission. When the incomers are perceived as Yankees (accurately or not)¹⁵, this exacerbates insider resentment. Conflicts rooted in differences in viewpoints and values arise, but the values that most often dominate are those elite values based in historic preservation and landscape architecture, as codified in Hillsborough's Design Guidelines.

People who assume responsibility towards a place may do so at several scales, from an individual structure to a neighborhood, to an entire town (and, but beyond the scope of this study, to the state, the nation, and the planet). Their sense of responsibility may arise from, and be reinforced by, their identification with that place. For example, Holden Richards, in common with many Southerners, values his Southern identity. His creation of a house based on "native Southern architecture" fulfilled a responsibility to place that was consonant with that identity.

¹⁵ One of the things that I discovered in the course of the interviews is that insiders perceive incomers to be "Yankees" solely on the basis of the lack of a distinctive Southern accent. Several of the individuals described to me by name as "Yankees" are actually educated Southerners from other cities in North Carolina or the wider Southern region who have shed their regional accents.