

Chapter Eight: Conclusions

Hillsborough's charm and sense of place are rooted in its history. The historic identity of the town has been transformed as an influx of new people and new ideas redefined the nature of Hillsborough's historic sense of place, and through the emergence of the formerly hidden identity of the local Indian tribe. In this chapter I explore the changes to Hillsborough's historic sense of place. I begin by considering the processes that shape the profoundly different senses of place held by insiders and incomers and consider the results that these different views have on defense of place. I do not assert that all incomers and all insiders conform to the senses of place that I describe in this chapter, or that sense of place is of primary importance in their relationships with other citizens and the town, but I do assert that basic differences in sense of place arise from fundamental differences in experience of place. Presenting the opposing poles of insider and incomer senses of place in contrast to one another allows me to illuminate the differences in worldview that have impacted the changing identity of the town. Next I consider the ways that Hillsborough's historic identity has been revised: through a redefinition of history, through the incorporation of additional stories, and through physical additions to the landscape.

The historic landscape of Hillsborough distinguishes the town from the rapidly proliferating placeless places in the surrounding region, and this distinctiveness is a valued aspect of Hillsborough's sense of place. As globalization homogenizes more and more places, those features that represent an authentic local or regional identity gain importance. The desire for a local history can be seen in newly built places whose developers attempt to overcome placeless character. Artificial reproduction of the

palimpsest of history (deliberately faded advertising signs, buildings that mimic adaptively reused warehouses, use of architectural styles from several eras) creates a new generic placelessness that is also adrift in time. Hillsborough's historic landscape provides visual and kinesthetic experiences that connect people to a past that is both genuine and imagined, and rooted in actual events in place. The reality of our historic landscape stands in contrast to the newly minted pseudo-historic landscape that is a current fad among planners and developers.

Hillsborough's distinctive characteristics attract those retirees, dual career couples, and families with young children who believe that Hillsborough will provide a higher quality of life than that to be found in a generic suburban setting. For these incomers Hillsborough provides an antidote to the sense of rootlessness engendered by the post-WWII trends of increased residential mobility and to the increasing placelessness of the American landscape. Hillsborough's compact downtown area with shops and restaurants (none of which are national franchises) and the immediately adjacent historic churches, public buildings, and residential areas attract people who are seeking a landscape that has not been recently manufactured, but that has evolved over centuries. Media coverage of cultural activities in Hillsborough creates certification for Hillsborough's historic characteristics and small town charm. Incomers believe that they will experience the slower pace and friendly nature of life in a small town. At the same time, the proximity of Hillsborough to the capital city and three major universities means that employment, educational and cultural resources usually missing from small towns are available nearby.

There have always been a few incomers arriving in Hillsborough, but pace of those arrivals accelerated in the 1980s. Previous incomers were often from other North Carolina localities, but more recent arrivals hail from locations throughout the eastern United States. Whereas earlier incomers were often related to local families, the later arrivals usually were not. The well-educated and affluent recent incomers have a cosmopolitan perspective that allows them to assess Hillsborough's historic characteristics in comparison with other places they have lived in or visited, and they have sought to defend those aspects of the landscape that they value. They have had a dramatic impact on the nature of the town through their political and cultural activities.

Hillsborough provides those incomers who have an interest in history with opportunities to develop a connection to place and time. Museums, historic sites and numerous roadside markers foster an awareness of history and allow the incomer to explore the past of this place. The physical sites of history, however, merely provide locations for the accumulation of life events and personal interactions that lead incomers towards a greater sense of attachment to place and time. The historic focus of Hillsborough's cultural events means that some personal interactions will increase an incomer's knowledge of place-specific history. Layers of meaning about place and time will accrue through the accumulation of experiences in place. Places become repositories for memories and for a self-consciously constructed understanding of place history and meaning.

Attachment to place and place history results from interactions with other people. This is true for both insider and incomer. But the differences between the two in attitude towards place and history are profound. The insider is born into a network of

relationships which extend back for generations. Knowledge of these relationships is acquired beginning in early childhood and reinforced throughout a lifetime of events and stories, including stories about the contributions of ancestors to the creation of the place. An insider is rooted to place through the family homeplace which provides a focal point for transmission of information about time and place. Knowledge of a family network of genealogical, social, economic and professional relationships develops in an unself-conscious way and becomes part of the insider's taken-for-granted world. For insiders, it is this network of relationships spanning generations that defines the town. History is understood as the past actions of the people within this network; places are locations where people lived and performed these past actions. Place history is understood as sequent occupance, and places are described with reference to the people and families who have lived there. They are the place; the place is them and has been created by them over a span of time that may encompass 250 years. Family history, place history and personal identity are inextricably intertwined. The material objects (land, structures, furniture and other antiques) are merely the physical repository for memories of the relationships that create the town.

The profound contrast in attitude toward history and the historic landscape between insiders and incomers arises from differences in their understanding of what constitutes and defines the town. The incomer initially constructs a definition of the town through a developing sense of spatial familiarity rooted in the physical and material aspects of the town. These are the aspects of the town that are immediately accessible and easily interpreted, especially in a town abundantly provided with historical markers that interpret place and history. Incomers cannot connect to place history through family

history, but they can connect through material culture: structures and landscapes, local antiques. Although as soon as they arrive incomers will begin a series of personal interactions that are important to developing their attachment to place, their relationships with people and families cannot extend back through the previous generations. As they build their own network of relationships they may begin to glimpse the interconnectedness of the insider families, but their own understanding of this will be necessarily more superficial. Even so, the glimpses of the insider networks that they perceive may enhance their own sense of community and counter a sense of rootlessness.

These variations in definition of the town lead to differences in approach to defending the landscape from the loss of its most significant characteristics. For insiders the landscape is appreciated as a location for the lives of its people, and the continuity of families in place is the most important component of sense of place. Insiders therefore experience loss when ownership of a property passes from the hands of any insider family. The property may continue to be referred to by the family name for many years after the original family has gone (Bellevue, formerly the Hillsborough House Inn, is still referred to as “the old Webb place”). Although such losses may be regretted, insiders do not control the economic circumstances of other families, so defense of place is a function that takes place within families only, for example through the financial assistance of one generation to the next.

Incomers, who lack a family connection to place, are concerned with the visual characteristics and spatial relationships of the material objects that comprise the place for them. They may feel that ownership of an historic house links them to the builders of the house and the linkage may extend through all of the previous and future inhabitants,

anchoring the incomer to place and history. Even if the incomer lives in a modern house, the historical structures that are in proximity to the house may be valued for their contribution to the incomer's view of the landscape. Because the incomer's sense of place is rooted in material culture rather than family ties, loss is perceived when structures vanish from the landscape and when the spatial relationships of structures change through the addition of new buildings or the demolition of old ones. Therefore it is primarily incomers who seek to defend the current historic landscape. This is accomplished through the Historic District Commission; a group originally composed of both insiders and incomers, but now composed primarily of well-educated elite incomers.

As political control of the historic landscape has passed from insiders to incomers, the defining features that create the importance of Hillsborough have changed. To the insiders it was the history itself that conveyed meaning and importance to the place. This focus has been replaced by a preeminent concern for features that are most important to the incomers: the physical manifestations of history that are visible in the historic landscape. Incomers have gained the power to control this landscape through the imposition of a set of values rooted in the historic preservation movement. These values are codified in Hillsborough's Design Guidelines, which are designed to ensure that renovations and new structures harmonize with the current visual characteristics and spatial relationships of the landscape. Since insiders define the town as a network of personal relationships, the "damn Yankees" who are not a part of insider networks are therefore not a significant part of the town. This makes especially galling the fact that these incomers now have the power to control the actions of insiders on their own properties. Ironically, by their presence and the imposition of their values the incomers

change the characteristics that initially attracted them. A small community of networked families now includes incomers who control the landscape, and a landscape that has evolved in an eclectic fashion over the centuries is now prevented from evolving in the same fashion in the future.

At the same time that power over the historic landscape was shifting from insiders to incomers, the national view of history was also changing. In the 1950s Hillsborough's historic identity was consonant with national attitudes towards history at that time. Constructed by a white elite for the white elite, the deeds of the great white men of the Colonial and early Federal periods were highly valued. These periods were indeed stirring times in Hillsborough, then capital of North Carolina, site of the Constitutional Convention, and home to influential people who shaped events. White insider families who can trace their ancestry back to that time period were, and are, understandably invested in the identity of Hillsborough as a Colonial era town. The focus on the Colonial era also permitted insiders to overlook the difficult subject of slavery. Most Southern towns celebrate their Civil War era past, and in those towns the topic of slavery is always felt, even if never spoken. Hillsborough's emphasis on an elite Colonial history rather than a Civil War history meant that relations among the races could be ignored. To some white insiders, and more than a few white incomers, the contributions of people of color to the history of the town were (and unfortunately still are) simply invisible.

After the civil rights and women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s a changing view of history began to value the contributions of women and of people of color. The incorporation of white women into history was easy in a town where the creation and management of history had traditionally been the province of the all-female Garden Club.

It would take two more decades before the impact of people of color would be officially recognized. By this time the civil rights movement had begun to bear fruit, and the black elite, who had always had power in their own ethnic community, now exercise political, social, and economic power in the wider community. They are notable by their absence from participation in the history community today, however, with only a few exceptions (which include incomers). Their reluctance to contribute their own stories to the history of Hillsborough means that by default the stories of the black community are primarily being interpreted by white people. The results of this have been mixed. Elizabeth Keckly, once a slave and later a woman of economic power and national political influence, is now honored. But the first attempt to address the issue of slavery included the controversial depiction of happy slaves dancing at a wedding. In contrast, the local Native Americans have seized control of the representation of their history. Not only have they begun to incorporate their story into the story of Hillsborough's history, but they have also been active participants in the heritage tourism industry, and have created a new landscape feature that pushes the boundaries of Hillsborough's history back a thousand years.

Hillsborough's historic identity and sense of place have changed dramatically over the last fifty years. These changes have arisen from the changing composition of the population of the town, the changing fortunes of formerly disempowered minority peoples, and the changing national understanding of the role and purposes of history itself. The story of Hillsborough's history is constructed by the people and organizations who are telling the story, their understanding of the history, and their reasons for telling the story. All of this has changed over time. In the 1950s the story of Hillsborough's

history was told by an elite class of white people for other elite white people. The elite class in Hillsborough now includes people of color, and the elite view of history now encompasses people of color. Although Hillsborough still celebrates the Colonial era past, the ethnic and temporal boundaries of its historic sense of place have been expanded. A narrowly framed white Colonial identity still comprises the historic identity of the town for some insiders, but the landscape now incorporates features representing one thousand years of human occupancy and honors the contributions of black, white and Indian residents of this place.