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ROBERT EDWIN STIPE

The Institute of Government Years, 1957-74

JOHN L. SANDERS*

Robert E. Stipe joined the faculty of the Institute of Government of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in December of 1957. He left in the fall of 1974 to become Director of the Division of Archives and History of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. During those seventeen years he advanced through the academic ranks to become Professor of Public Law and Government, while making many and varied contributions to the Institute's program. So much for the milestones of his career; more significantly for present purposes, it was during that period that he began his professional involvement with the field of historic preservation.

With professional degrees in law (from Duke University) and in city and regional planning (from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Stipe had spent a decade working as a researcher, professional planning consultant, and Institute faculty member before he undertook his first major assignment in historic preservation. While working with a legislative study commission on what became North Carolina's first historic district legislation, he developed an interest that became a consuming passion and made him a nationally recognized authority on preservation law in less than five years.

Stipe's professional development seems—at least in retrospect—to have been straightforward. By his teens, he nurtured interests in art and history. Until his father guided him into the field of law, he dreamed of becoming an architect. Frustrated in his desire to design buildings, he went from law school to a graduate course in city planning, which he conceived to be primarily a design profession. His work at the Institute involved research, writing, teaching, and consulting for state and local officials concerned with planning and land-use regulation. His personal interests led him to an increasing concentration on civic design and aesthetics. From there it was but a short step to a focus on historic areas and buildings.

Stipe brought to the field of historic preservation a new and broader perspective than was current a decade and a half ago. Most of the practitioners in the field then focused their interests on museums and

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monuments, great houses and battlefields, costumes and artifacts. Through his education and experience, however, Stipe had gained an understanding and appreciation of neighborhoods and communities as part of the larger fabric of civilization, of government at its several levels and the ways in which it could support private preservation efforts, and of the law and the limitations and opportunities it represented. As a teacher and adviser, as a creative thinker, and as a publicist, he put this understanding to use. Historic preservation has not been the same since.

It would be impossible in this brief compass to set forth the full range of Stipe's accomplishments and the honors that have come to him. A few matters of special significance may be noted from his Institute years.

Stipe defines "teaching" very broadly to include not only classroom and lecture-hall presentations but also individual advice and consultation and the transmission of knowledge through the printed page and audiovisual means. He thinks of himself as a teacher. And he takes enduring satisfaction from seeing his former students carry on their jobs all over the world in a responsible and intelligent manner.

At the Institute of Government, Stipe participated in hundreds of short courses, conferences, meetings, and conventions for planners, managers, city and county administrators, governing board members, zoning officers, appearance commissions, historic district commissions, and others. With increasing frequency, he found a place in his remarks to mention the importance of the visual environment and conservation of our historic areas. The program of which he was proudest was the short course on Planning for Historic Preservation, which he originated in the mid-60's and which continues today. Officials and interested citizens from throughout the country have attended this course, and they have gone on to a wide variety of responsible positions where they have put their learning to use. In addition to participants in these short courses, he taught hundreds of graduate students in city and regional planning, landscape architecture, architecture, traffic engineering, political science, and law in orthodox academic courses.

At the same time he was engaged in preparing manuals for board members, articles for popular magazines and professional journals, films, slide shows, and videotaped courses, hoping to reach larger numbers than could attend his courses. He spent hours each day on the telephone, in face-to-face consultations, and writing replies to inquiries about problems facing particular officials and organizations. The cumulative effect of all this teaching in so many modes is incalculable.

Besides being a great teacher, Stipe has made major developmental contributions. He almost single-handedly drafted most of North Caro-

lina's statutes on historic preservation. Their quality made these acts the patterns from which the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation developed its Model Laws for State Historic Preservation. He also wrote many innovative historic preservation ordinances for local governments throughout the State.

While at the Institute, Stipe served as a regular columnist for *Preservation News*, published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This column became a platform from which he launched a whole series of proposals and offered new insights into old issues. One of those columns is widely credited with having changed the emphasis of preservation programs throughout the country away from the "museum" approach to today's recognized concepts that we should preserve not merely the mansions of the wealthy but also the places where ordinary people lived and worked; that we should attempt to conserve and rehabilitate our older buildings for new uses, so as to keep them as functioning parts of our communities; and that planning for preservation of historic areas should be integrated with the larger planning processes of our communities and regions. In the few years since their publication, these ideas have become commonplace.

Since leaving the Institute, Stipe has continued his activities along much the same lines as he pioneered in Chapel Hill. He has continued to offer short courses, continued to teach (now in the School of Design of North Carolina State University at Raleigh), continued to advise and consult, and continued to write. But it was at the Institute that he came to terms with himself, capitalized on the opportunities the University offered, and embarked on the professional career that has meant so much to himself and to all concerned with preserving our heritage.