

North Carolina Central Law Review

Volume 11
Number 2 *Volume 11, Number 2*

Article 4

4-1-1980

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Recommended Citation

Edmisten, Rufus L. (1980) "Tribute to Robert E. Stipe," *North Carolina Central Law Review*: Vol. 11 : No. 2 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://archives.law.nccu.edu/ncclr/vol11/iss2/4>

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TRIBUTE TO ROBERT E. STIPE

RUFUS L. EDMISTEN*

At the annual dinner of the Historic Preservation Society of North Carolina, I was pleased to announce, on behalf of the School of Law at North Carolina Central University, the first preservation law course in a North Carolina law school. I was also honored to announce that the *North Carolina Central Law Journal* would publish a symposium issue on historic preservation in honor of Robert E. Stipe.

I am now doubly pleased—and honored—to pay tribute to Bob Stipe. It is a fitting tribute, coming as it does on the tenth anniversary of Bob's far-sighted article entitled "Preservation Lawyers-Unite!" which appeared in the July, 1970 issue of *Preservation News*.¹ The tribute is also appropriate because North Carolina has established a tradition of preservation in the state, and North Carolina law schools have contributed significantly to preservation law. Both Duke, in 1971, and Wake Forest, in 1976, have had law journal issues devoted exclusively to historic preservation.

This issue of the *North Carolina Central Law Journal* is an especially fitting recognition of an individual who has had enormous influence on historic preservation, and who with few others—and I am proud to join that group—knows of the hard battles. Some were won, and some were lost, and some very important ones would have been lost had it not been for Bob Stipe's energy, skill, perception, and diligence. On behalf of each of us who cares about the preservation of our heritage, I offer this tribute.

I have come to know and respect Robert Stipe over the years largely through our historic preservation efforts. As an attorney, Robert Stipe is an unusual man. He is capable of dealing with legal matters, as one would expect of any person holding the positions he has held. But beyond this, Bob is a scholar and a humanist in the traditional sense. He has read widely and possesses interests that I doubt have perceptible bounds. He has perfected an ability to discern the broader view of man's purpose from the thicket of trivia in which most of us are lost as we go about earning a living. He is a sensitive man who has dedicated his life to improving the human situation. Beginning with friends and

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1. Reprinted in 11 N.C. Cent. L.J. 208 (1980).

family, where most of us leave off, he continues to be a positive influence and an example for the community at large.

Nurtured by the Institute of Government at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Bob Stipe knows the difference between the law in books and law in action. Most of us who make our living by practicing law have heard the expression that “the law is man’s servant and not his master.” This is, of course, a famous axiom; for Bob it is a banner he carries every day of his life. His special perspective and special knowledge have become the foundation of his success; it is his commitment to make the law a tool to build a better life for generations that follow. The commitment sets him apart from his contemporaries.

During a long and productive life he has remained an influential leader and critic of the historic preservation movement. An often quoted writer, he is known as a visionary. As a city planner he has focused new attention to landscape and rural preservation.

To speak with Bob Stipe is a pleasure. One is always aware of his sincere desire to solve the problems of man in terms of the ever more complicated lives we lead. He remains a well of inspiration where we all pause to enjoy and refresh ourselves prior to continuing our separate works. If you know Robert Stipe, it is easy to understand how this can happen. He never asks for your attention or your thanks. It is almost by osmosis that we absorb ideas merely from being with him. We accept his ideas while not always giving credit to the man who has offered them. His ideas become a part of us.

Because of his city planner’s role, he has a great facility for abstraction. He understands statistics, abstract models, and the inner workings of government. A great many planners are similarly endowed, but Bob has a uniquely perceptive mind, tempered and honed by actual experience. Many phrases have been used to describe him and his works:

- ahead of his time in describing the city as a ‘people’s environment’;
- instinctively realized the danger implicit in cities’ development in the fifties;
- for Bob Stipe planning begins with a consideration of people not statistics;
- originated the concept of historic preservation as a trend toward a human city.

Robert Stipe is an example for all of us to follow, and our state is richer because of him. Through his work the lives of a vast number of people who will never be fortunate enough to know him are enriched. What more can be said of a great North Carolinian and a true humanitarian?

Perhaps in this issue of the *North Carolina Central Law Journal* we can begin to share Robert Stipe’s commitment to people through his-

toric preservation, as illustrated by his own comment, quoted by Mr. Justice Brennan of the United States Supreme Court in *Penn Central Transportation Company v. City of New York*: “[H]istoric conservation is but one aspect of the much larger problem, basically an environmental one, of enhancing—or perhaps developing for the first time—the quality of life for people.”²

2. 438 U.S. 104, 108 (1978).