

# PRESERVATION NEWSLETTER

## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Every few months the City of Columbia Preservation staff puts together a brief newsletter that covers various preservation topics; whether it's sharing the history of a specific place or compiling helpful tips for historic property owners, we aim to provide thought-provoking newsletters with a diverse range of topics for those interested in Columbia history. For this newsletter, we wanted to do something a little different; we wanted to put the spotlight on YOU, the people living and working in our historic districts and historic buildings who are putting in the effort to make a difference. We reached out to several people involved in preservation in the City of Columbia to get better understanding of their work and the motivation behind it. The following stories highlight just a tiny fraction of the great work being done across the city to promote preservation and protect history.

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This holiday season we want to send out a big **THANK YOU** to you, the people putting in the work to protect Columbia's history. We appreciate the support over the years and look forward to continuing working with you to protect Columbia's historic places.

## A RENOVATION IN COTTONTOWN

Valerie Moore and her husband, David have lived in Columbia for more than thirty years. The Moore's purchased the home on Summerville Avenue with another family so that their sons would have a quiet and inviting neighborhood in which to live while they finished out their studies at the University of South Carolina. Both families were attracted to Cottontown because of its proximity to downtown and walkability. Cottontown started as a working class neighborhood in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and retains much of its original, pedestrian oriented streetscape. Once their sons moved into their new home, the Moore's fell in love with the lively and active community in the neighborhood. Cottontown regularly has porch parties and neighborhood gatherings and Valerie was adamant that these things happen naturally and “none of it is contrived,” people really want to know their neighbors!

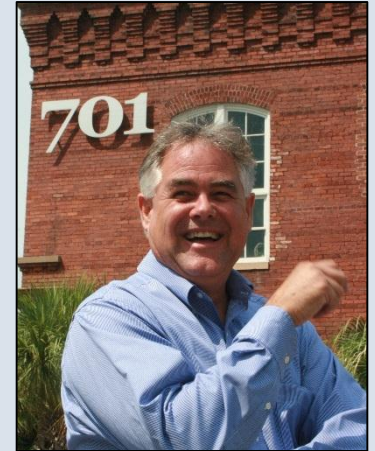
When the Moore's first purchased this property, the windows on the circa 1930 structure were in disrepair and many did not open. Both families decided to attend one of Historic Columbia's window restoration workshops which inspired them to take on the job of restoring more than 30 windows in the house on their own. While it was a huge undertaking for the families to do the work themselves, it became a challenge they ultimately enjoyed. “It's nice to take care of something,” Valerie said of the work, “it was challenging, but it was a lot of fun too.” Now that the project is complete, the families are pleased with the results of their hard work. Valerie noted that with the windows back in operation they save a lot of energy by opening the windows and allowing air to circulate. Historic homes were designed with good circulation and ventilation, which were both essential for South Carolina's summers prior to air conditioning. In addition to saving on energy, Valerie said “it was really environmentally friendly, less ends up in a landfill when you restore rather than replace.” During the course of the window restoration project, the families found a 1964 pocket calendar, likely a relic from when the windows were last restored. As an homage to this discovery, the Moore's placed their own time capsule back in the walls in hopes that it will be found by a future generation.

# FIGHTING FOR PRESERVATION

Richard Burts, Columbia native and University of South Carolina alum, knows a thing or two about taking on difficult projects. Working for many years in the restaurant business, Burts' penchant for creating concepts eventually transformed into adaptive reuse projects. His top requirement when taking on a new building? The building must "speak to" him.

His first large scale preservation project did just that. When he purchased the Pacific Community Association Building in 2006 most people thought the dilapidated building could not be saved; Richard Burts saw only a great old building with potential. Today, the building known simply as 701 Whaley is once again an active community-oriented building that houses 701 Center for Contemporary Art as well as ample office and event space.

Built in 1903 by W.B. Whaley as a store for the mill villages, the 701 Whaley played a central role in mill community for decades. The building expanded in both 1918, with the addition of covered pool to the rear, and again in 1923 with the creation of a large gymnasium; providing even more space for various community activities including movies and bowling. Taking a hit from the Great Depression, the mill sold much of its property, including the Association Building, by the early 1940s. While portions of the building remained occupied by various businesses through the years, numerous exterior changes and deferred maintenance left the once thriving community building in sad repair by the early 2000s. But a bricked in storefront and a missing second floor did not deter Burts, who, through the wreckage, envisioned space that people would once again enjoy.



**Top Left:** Historic image of 701 Whaley;  
**Bottom Left:** 701 Whaley in 2007 (courtesy of SC Dept. of Archives and History);  
**Above:** Richard Burts stands in front of 701 Whaley (photo courtesy of Lee Ann Kornegay)

Renovations to the building were well underway when the building was listed in the National Register in 2007 and were completed 2008 when the building opened, once again, to the public. A video produced by Lee Ann Kornegay chronicled the building's transformation back into the vibrant space seen today.\*

Since his first plunge into a large scale historic rehabilitation project, Burts has remained active in Columbia's preservation community. Chief among his preservation concerns is the desire for increased conversation before demolition takes place. Burts says that he has seen too many buildings lost to "urgency" with no plan for the future and no thought to the effect that the loss of a building, even if it's not historically significant, can have on the fabric of a specific area. This is easily understood with a building like 701 Whaley which was slated for demolition before Burts stepped in. Without creative thinking, 701 Whaley may have been lost forever, creating an indelible hole in the fabric of the mill villages.

In his efforts to prevent thoughtless demolition, Burts advocates for more buildings to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. He has secured funding for several National Register nominations, including the Olympia Mill Historic District that was recently added to the Register, and additionally hopes for more mid-century resources to be added to the Register in the near future, such as Cornell Arms which, with Burts' encouragement, was recently reviewed at the state level. While listing in the National Register does not prevent demolition of historic resources, it does open the building up to local, state, and federal incentives such as the Bailey Bill tax abatement and Federal Tax Credits, making the possibility for rehabilitation more financially feasible. Whether he's advocating for the protection of individual buildings or entire areas, Burts understands that reviving historic resources successfully takes hard work and vision, and that incentives help.

701 Whaley, which recently celebrated its 10-year anniversary, is a testament to what creative thinking and planning for the future can do for an individual building and community as a whole. With long term plans to renovate the pool building and gymnasium, it seems that Richard Burts intends to keep on fighting for preservation.

\*The video may be viewed on YouTube or on the 701 Whaley website on their "About Us" page: <https://701whaley.com/about-us/>



# HARD WORK IN HISTORIC MELROSE

The historic neighborhood nestled between Gervais, Millwood Avenue, and Trenholm Road has long been considered a desirable place to live. With much of the land owned by various members of the Powell family as early as 1872, this land just outside of city limits was developed into three different suburbs over a period of several decades: Fairview to the west, Melrose Heights at the center, and Oak Lawn to the east. Today, this area, collectively referred to as Melrose, is a neighborhood known for its strong sense of community and distinct historic charm.

“Recognizing the value of preservation in Melrose is nothing new” according to resident Anna Redwine; The neighborhood was made a local historic district in 2003, which provides local protection through the use of design guidelines, and was listed as a National Register of Historic Places Historic District in 2016. Redwine, originally from New Orleans, “where the importance of preservation is obvious”, has been involved in recent efforts by neighborhood leadership for increased outreach to educate the community and investors about the historic value of Melrose.

**“We've had a surge of investors attempting renovations that compromise the neighborhood's enduring character,” says Redwine. “When we drilled down we realized that a major part of this growing pain was simply a lack of education about what the safeguarding guidelines are (and that there are guidelines at all!) so we formed a committee to spread the word. Our goal is really to invite our whole community-- Melrose neighbors and beyond-- to celebrate the importance of our history and the value of preserving it responsibly for the future.”**

Ongoing efforts to emphasize the historic nature of the Melrose neighborhood kicked off by rebranding as the fully inclusive “Historic Melrose”, building a neighborhood website, increasing their social media presence, and installing Historic Melrose signage at main neighborhood entrances. But the neighborhood association’s ideas don’t end there; they plan to also use door hangtags to welcome new residents and reach those not using digital media and also hope to create Historic Melrose merchandise to sell for steady fundraising.

Through all of their efforts, the passion for the neighborhood and the overall sense of community within Melrose is obvious. Josh Shelton, current neighborhood treasurer, has lived in the neighborhood since 2016 and has been active in the recent neighborhood campaign. “I have always believed that you have to be active in your community. From the start I realized that the association was a group of neighbors who were active and cared deeply for the success of Melrose,” says Shelton.

**“We love our house and our neighborhood. We are continually surprised by and enjoy the connections in the neighborhood. The generosity and kindness displayed among the neighborhood is a dream. We all help each other in any way we can, we organize together around issues, events, and special occasions. We let each other borrow our tools. We watch each other's pets. We utilize each other’s networks to accomplish tasks and advance causes anyway we can. We decide to randomly meet after work just to share a Bradford watermelon or a drink. I could never live in another place that does not have that level of connection.”**

Anna Redwine agrees. “I love my neighborhood! Over the summer I scraped, reglazed, painted and polished my beautiful old windows and they make me happy every time I come home. (So does the National Register plaque next to my original round-top front door!) Even more important than the built environment, though, is our community. My neighbors are diverse and inspiring. They take care of the park garden like it's their own; they keep our chickens safe when we're out of town and we collect their Amazon packages when they're out of town; we get together socially and over important issues like preservation. And of course it's just a beautiful place right in the middle of a great city. What more could you want?”

Check out the recently launched Historic Melrose website at <http://www.melroseneighborhood.org/>.



**Community Events in Historic Melrose;** photos courtesy of Paul McCollough (above) and John Sherrer (below)



# RENOVATING MAIN STREET

Anyone who has been in Columbia for a while knows that there's something going on along Main Street. A visitor to Columbia even 10 years ago may take a moment to recognize the thriving buildings that line the street today; go back to the 1970s and 80s, and the street is virtually unrecognizable. The 1600 block of Main has been especially touched by recent the Main Street renaissance, as Freeman Belser, local attorney and Main Street property owner, is well aware.

When looking for a new building to house his law firm Belser knew that he wanted to be downtown; He soon found 1634 Main Street – a building that had the added benefits of off-street parking, proximity to the courthouse, and an affordable price tag. The building did, however, need a bit of work.

Originally built in the 1870s, 1634 Main Street had seen a number of significant façade changes over the years. One of these changes was in the 1930s when a new brick façade was installed for the J.C. Penney store with a new storefront installed around the same time. At the time Belser purchased the building in 2015 a stucco façade from the 1980s was in place covering over the 1930s brick.

As a building on Main Street, Belser knew that there was the potential for tax incentives if the building was renovated, but it required a little work first. The building fell within the area of the Columbia Commercial National Register Historic District, but was considered non-contributing due to the large number of changes to the building. If Belser wanted tax incentives he need to prove that his building still maintained historic features and was, despite its current listing, actually contributing to the National Register District. That's when the fun began.

Through exploratory demolition, Belser and his team were able to prove that the 1930s brick façade was still intact underneath the 1980s stucco; this combined with historic images which showed the J.C. Penney façade meant that the building would be able to be restored to its historical 1930s appearance. Because of this, 1634 Main Street was soon after listed as contributing to the National Register District and was also listed locally as an Individual Landmark. Renovations continued to uncover treasures such as hardwood floors, the Maxwell terrazzo floor, fragments of pressed tin ceiling, and 1950s newspapers tucked into the walls like insulation.



**The evolution of 1634 Main Street; Left:** Image from *The State* newspaper in 1937; **Middle:** 1978 image by Russell Maxey (Richland Library collection); **Right:** Freeman Belser and Ben Rex stand in front of 1634 Main Street today

Through his travels, Belser has seen revitalization of downtown areas happening across the country; a change that he believes would not be possible without tax incentives. Even before finishing the Main Street building, Belser and his business partner, Ben Rex, took on another historic rehabilitation project where they once again were able to utilize tax incentives. The local landmark 1325 Park Street, historically Champion-Pearson Funeral Home, now houses Belser's law firm while Rex works out of 1634 Main Street.

With each of his renovation projects, Belser believes that the final product was better because of the support received from tax credits. And while Belser admits that his first dive into historic tax credit and commercial historic rehabilitation was at times difficult, it was a workable process that he was able to figure out as he went along- and it certainly paid off in the end!



# LOVING HISTORIC WAVERLY

Frank Houston has lived in Historic Waverly for over 20 years. He understands the importance of a historic district like Waverly, the earliest suburb of the City that transformed into Columbia's most prominent African American neighborhood by the 1920s. It is both the contribution of the significant residents of the community and the buildings themselves that the neighborhood strives to protect. While it was designated as a local historic district in 2005, over time residents found that their design guidelines failed to protect significant pieces of their collective past. The most striking example was the demolition of the Waverly 5-and-10 cent store, located at 2313 Gervais Street, run by civil rights activist George Elmore\*. In 2016, led by Frank Houston, the neighborhood decided to strengthen their design guidelines to ensure that this type of loss would not happen again. Below is an excerpt from a letter written by Frank Houston:

**"I love looking at historical architectural designs in Historic Waverly. For the last twenty plus years of living in Historic Waverly I recognize the great minds that built the homes in Waverly. It is a history of designs that is not being replicated today...I am now retired; my profession was Culinary Arts. I used the best ingredients in my work to make great dishes. And, it took all the best architectural designs in Waverly at that time to make a great neighborhood; mixing people of many different professions, economic, social and cultural status mixed with architectural structures together as its main ingredients for a great neighborhood. It is still a great recipe for a great neighborhood. It is a community that tells a story, representing an economically diverse community.**

**As president of this Historic Waverly Neighborhood, I am, we are committed to preserving this community and its Overlay Guidelines. For that reason, we asked for the guidelines of Historic Waverly to be strengthened. And, for that reason we also connect with other historic community leaders who have the same appreciation for historic structures and homes. Future generations need to see the works of the great minds of the past and not just reading about them. What better way for them to do that than to have them walk historic communities. Being active in every way, keeping an eye on legislations that are aimed at destroying historical properties and changing the historical landscape of all historic communities and districts.**

**Historical Districts are integral to any city, especially Historic Waverly being the oldest Suburb in Columbia, SC. Waverly derived its original configuration from an 1855 subdivision of lands owned by Robert Latta. Waverly with its Shotgun houses like that at 1211 Heidt Street with its Rafter-tail Roof, Dormers and Columns; the 1922 design of the Chappelle Administration Building at Allen University. Here in Waverly we also have Bungalows, central hall cottages, Victorian, even Colonial Revival-influenced residences. The love of this community extends from those that came before us and had spurred the community to be determined to protect its integrity and history."**

*\*An article by The State Newspaper describing the loss of the store can be found at on the Historic Columbia Foundation blog: <https://www.historiccolumbia.org/blog/historic-civil-rights-site-praised-then-razed-state-newspaper-features-recently-demolished>*



Mr. Houston stands in front of Waverly Hospital for "This Place Matters" in 2017; photo by staff

**We would like to send out a big THANK YOU to all those who participated in this month's preservation newsletter. Thank you all for taking the time to speak with us and thank you all for the work you do in protecting Columbia's historic fabric!**



We Are Columbia

This newsletter was created by the Preservation Staff of the City of Columbia's Planning and Development Services Department. If you have any questions about your specific historic property please contact your district's preservation planner. Contact information can be found on our [website](#). If you would like to be added to our newsletter mailing list please send an email to [preservation@columbiasc.gov](mailto:preservation@columbiasc.gov).