

I first discovered my interest in historic preservation during the summer of 2011 when I was living and working in Spartanburg, South Carolina. Each day as I drove to work I would pass by a large, vacant hotel that, to me, continued to possess the grandeur of its past. I found myself mentally repurposing this space and imagining what it could be and how it could be brought to life in order to once again serve and better the community. To me, this building's life existed in what it once was, as well as in what it could be. Although it took me until that summer to truly realize it, historic buildings and historic preservations are not new interest but merely ones that I had not previously considered as a career option. I grew up in a small city in Georgia with a visually idyllic downtown. At least in my lifetime, businesses moved in and out as the commercial and residential activity moved away from the town center to the periphery as new large-scale developments overpowered the smaller, local establishments. This created a separation and tension between the two areas that ran deeper than location and as a result, few businesses stuck around for long. It seemed to me that a similar thing had occurred in Spartanburg. The widespread growth of national chains as well as many residents' desire for the suburban ideal of a single-family home on a large plot of land left what had once existed and flourished – this old hotel and many other out-of-use buildings – to exist only as wasted space.

From this experience, I became aware of a desire to restore importance to these spaces by bringing them back into use. I feel that, in many cases, working with a building that already exists brings about a greater reward than a new construction because of its roots to the community. Working in this way can refocus a place to a previously defined center, lead to economic growth, and benefit the environment through reuse. When looking at options for how I could spend the summer after my senior year, I searched for internships that would allow me to explore these ideas and newly-realized interests by working with people in the industry to find out what steps they took to get to their current position, what their job required of them, and how their work benefited their communities.

I was lucky enough to find the perfect fit working in New Orleans, Louisiana, with Rachel Robinson, college class of 1998, at the Felicity Street Redevelopment Project, an ACE internship. Initially a part-time job, Rachel extended her offer to full-time, with the week split between this organization and the Friends of the Vieux Carré Commission. I am so thankful to have received funding through the Career Exploration Fund at Sewanee, a resource that made my internship possible. Even the application process allowed me to look into this field by conducting interviews with experience in historic preservation and development.

As previously mentioned, my week was split between the two organizations. Although Rachel was the only link officially connecting the two, my work with each complemented the other. The Felicity Street Redevelopment Project (FSRP) works in the Lower Saint Charles corridor of the Central City neighborhood of New Orleans, a historic district. This was an active area of the city until the mid-twentieth century, at which point the streetcar line that once ran down Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard was removed, causing a decrease in the neighborhood population. The FSRP works through the use of a “revolving fund for purchasing, stabilizing, renovating, and marketing properties” in order to “strengthen the residents’ collective voice” and revitalize the area through repopulation.<sup>1</sup> In association with another New Orleans historic district – the French Quarter – the Friends of the Vieux Carré Commission (FVCC – name changed to the Vieux Carré Commission Foundation in August of 2012) works to “support and further the charge of the Vieux Carré Commission in order to protect and preserve not only the French Quarter’s invaluable and historical architectural heritage, but also the ‘tout ensemble’ of the Quarter’s distinctive environment.”<sup>2</sup> While the FSRP works to revitalize an area that has lost much of its livelihood in the last half-century, the FVCC works to support the group charged with protecting the integrity of the French Quarter so that it may remain vital for years to come.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.felicityproject.org](http://www.felicityproject.org)

<sup>2</sup> [www.friendsofvcc.org](http://www.friendsofvcc.org)

My work with these two groups complemented each other and allowed me to better understand the operations of organizations in two very different areas of the city, and the accomplishments of each brought me hope for the future of the city, as well as my future in the field of historic preservation.

When working at the Felicity Street Redevelopment Project, my main duties included general office work and non-profit management, requiring a great deal of organizational strategy in order to help make everything run as smoothly as possible. On a few occasions, I had the change to visit homes that had been bought, stabilized, and sold through the FSRP. Seeing the end products in these visits was very rewarding, especially when I had the chance to meet the homebuyers and see their excitement about their new home and neighborhood. My favorite task of the summer was a detailed history of a property that the FSRP was looking to acquire, which required that I work from the City Hall Annex's Conveyance, Real Estate, and Notary Offices. Working from the most recent purchase of the land back to the 1850s – moving from typed notes to handwritten, English to some French – was a thrilling experience as I placed names and dates together to understand the full history of the area. Although my initial assignment was to research one small plot of land, I worked through most of the block as my property was once included in a much larger plot owned by a single family in the mid nineteenth century. I was then able to see the block today – what buildings still exist, which have been torn down or lost in time – and imagine the revitalized structure made useful once again.

Much like my time at the FSRP, at the Friends of the Vieux Carré Commission, my main duties included office management, including an inventory of the Commission's library, and non-profit management, including endless solicitations to previous and prospective Friends members. The most valuable aspect of this portion of my internship was the area in which I worked and the people I worked with. I now have a greater understanding not only of the French Quarter but also of the struggles dealt with and the rewards that come from working in such a

historically significant area. Each week, I would sit in on meetings of the Commission and Architectural Committee and hear business owners and residents propose changes to buildings, working, for the most part, within the guidelines set forth by the VCC. I also had the chance to go on inspections of properties in construction or to check on violations of ordinances.

Working with the architects and historic preservationists at the VCC and meeting others during my time in New Orleans allowed me to understand the differences between each respective degree and position and which would put me on the best track to my intended career. The greatest value of my internships was the reaffirmation of my passion for finding a career in this field. It also gave me a better idea of options for grad school. Going into the summer, I thought that my only choice was a Master of Science in Historic Preservation degree. Now, I am exploring more options including a Master of Science in Architecture, Urban Planning and Development, and even American Studies with a concentration in architecture and architectural history. My experience this summer – with the gracious help of the office of Career & Leadership Development, the Career Exploration Fund, Rachel Robinson, Lary Hesdorffer (Director of the VCC), and everyone else that I had the chance to meet and work with – strengthened my desire to work in this field and provided me with the assurance that this is something that I could do and, so importantly, would love to do.