

Robert Edwin Stipe, 1928 – 2000

Principal Founder of the Chapel Hill Historical Society (1966)



Robert E. Stipe (Bob) was born on July 18, 1928 in Easton, Pennsylvania, the son of John Norwood Stipe and Ethyl May Rockafellow Stipe; his father was a heating engineer/salesman for Warren, Webster & Co. of Camden New Jersey. Bob had an older brother and a sister, John Norwood Stipe, Jr. and Frances C. (Smute) from his father's previous marriage, as well as a younger brother Richard D. Stipe currently of Orlando, FL.

Bob studied economics at Duke University and received a Bachelor's degree in 1950. While an undergraduate, he also pursued other studies, including art history, which may have stimulated his interest in architecture. He then went on to earn a Juris Doctor degree in 1953. While at Duke he met Josephine (Josie) Davis Weedon, and they were married in Duke Chapel in 1952. After graduating, Bob returned to Pennsylvania to take a job as a law clerk, but according to Josie "It didn't suit him", so they returned to North Carolina where he enrolled in Urban and Regional Planning at UNC and studied with James Webb,

receiving his Masters in 1959. That year, he took a position at UNC's Institute of Government where he served as assistant director and as a professor of public law until 1974. During this time the couple had two children: Daniel Weedon Stipe and Frederick Norwood Stipe. In 1968-69, Bob was a Senior Fulbright Research Fellow at the University College of London where he studied problems of historic preservation, amenity planning, and countryside conservation in England. At UNC's Institute of Government, Bob's public policy leadership and his drafting of legislation laid a foundation for North Carolina's public history program and help propel the nation's historic preservation movement.

In 1974, Bob became the director of the then Division of Archives and History within the N. C. Department of Cultural Resources. In that capacity he was able to carry out the programs he had helped create. In 1976, Bob joined the faculty of the School of Design at North Carolina State University where he developed a specialized curriculum combining elements of community design policy, historic preservation law, and landscape and townscape preservation. He was awarded emeritus status in 1989.

Bob was recognized worldwide for his work in historic preservation; he was an organizer and speaker at many international meetings and symposia on historic preservation as well as a prolific writer of articles and essays. He edited two definitive works on historic preservation in the United States, *The American Mosaic: Preserving a Nation's Heritage* (1987) and *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century* (2003). Both books serve as basic texts in historic preservation degree programs throughout the United States. He served on national and international preservation boards including the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions as well as on state, regional, and local boards. He also received many awards for his work in preservation, but the award of which he was most proud was the Louise DuPont Crowninshield Award for Superlative Lifetime Achievement, the highest award presented by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Bob was the principal founder of the Chapel Hill Historical Society. When asked to tell what it was that brought about the first action toward its establishment, he recalled:

"My memory is a little hazy. I guess I got the idea for a local preservation group as the result of a conversation I had one Sunday after church with Maryellen Bowers about what might be done to

insure the preservation of the Presbyterian Manse. This fuss was on then about the Cone House, too, and preserving was much on everyone's mind. Everybody was saying somebody should do something, but nobody was, so I decided I would. With Maryellen's help and encouragement, we called a community meeting at the Town Hall. Lots of interested people turned out, offered to help, and you know the rest. I guess the main thing on my mind was what a shame it is that nobody ever gets heated up about the loss of old places until it is too late for effective action. Just seemed like a good idea to have a permanent local group that would have the potential of heading off some of these problems before they become insoluble. I don't feel that I can take any credit. Just a case of the time being right for an idea" (CHHS Newsletter #1, April 4, 1967).

While Bob never served as president of the Chapel Hill Historical Society, he immediately took on the role of first Preservation Officer, and after the death of Judge Luther Phipps in 1969, Bob took over as vice-president and served in that office through 1973. Bob also was a member of Preservation Chapel Hill.