

# **Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission Local Historic Landmark Designation**

## **How to Research a Historic Property**

For the purposes of the Historic Landmark Preservation Commission, you do not have to write a volume on the history of the property for which you seek Local Historic Landmark designation, but you must prove to the Commission that the property is so important that materially altering or demolishing the structure would be detrimental to the architectural and cultural history of Randolph County. You must document to the Commission that your facts are true and correct. In many cases, legends and stories about properties become handed down as fact after a number of years. Your job is to weed out legend from fact for the Commission and to prove the historic and/or architectural value of your property. Keep in mind that after the Commission recommends a property for Local Historic Landmark designation the application is passed on to the appropriate governing board for final approval. Therefore, you are providing information by which a public body of elected officials will determine whether or not to approve an ordinance. Achieving Local Historic Landmark designation depends in part on the completeness and validity of your research. The following information is intended to assist you in researching your property. Historic Landmark Preservation Commission staff will be happy to address any questions you may have but cannot do research for individual applicants.

## **Research Steps**

- The most important first step is to find out everything you can that anyone knows about the property. Older family members or previous owners are a good start. Write down everything they tell you—uncritically—and ask where they found or heard each item. Then find out who else might be helpful to talk to (older relatives, other people who may have been associated with the property, people who may have worked for the company if you are researching a business, etc.). Do not try at this point to sift out fact from tradition, just write it all down and keep asking questions. You can go through the information later when you are able to establish some documentation. Ask to see any old papers, deeds, photographs or any other helpful aids that these people may possess. Often family or local traditions are correct, although you may never be able to prove it. Include some statements of tradition in your report if they seem important, but identify them by the preface: “Local tradition says . . .” or “Family tradition says . . .”

- Documentary research is the next step. You should expect to search deeds and wills to establish a chain of ownership for the property. Even if you have been told who lived in the property and when, you will need to substantiate this information with deeds and wills. The Historic Landmark Preservation Commission does not care whether there is a clear title or a title free of liens, as a lawyer would. This issue is who really owned the property through history and establishing a true, documented history of ownership of the property.
- Information contained in the Randolph County Register of Deeds and the Randolph Room at the Public Library may be helpful to you in your historic landmark research.
- It will also be helpful for you to research primary and secondary sources to find out about the events and people associated with the property. Newspapers, estate papers, private collections and other sources are extremely helpful.
- Often there will be newspaper articles that give a great deal of history. These are good to begin with, but not as “final authorities.” Often these articles are incomplete or erroneous. Check them out thoroughly.
- All major information should be footnoted as to source, and this does not mean only direct quotations. Put the footnote as you go, rather than saving up and doing one big footnote at the end of each paragraph. We need to know where the facts come from! Land transfers should show deed or will book number and page number.
- You must include a bibliography or list of sources at the end of your application.

**REMEMBER:        The Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission will not approve incomplete or undocumented applications!**