

Downtown preservation highlighted in MOA talk

BY REGGIE PONDER
Editor

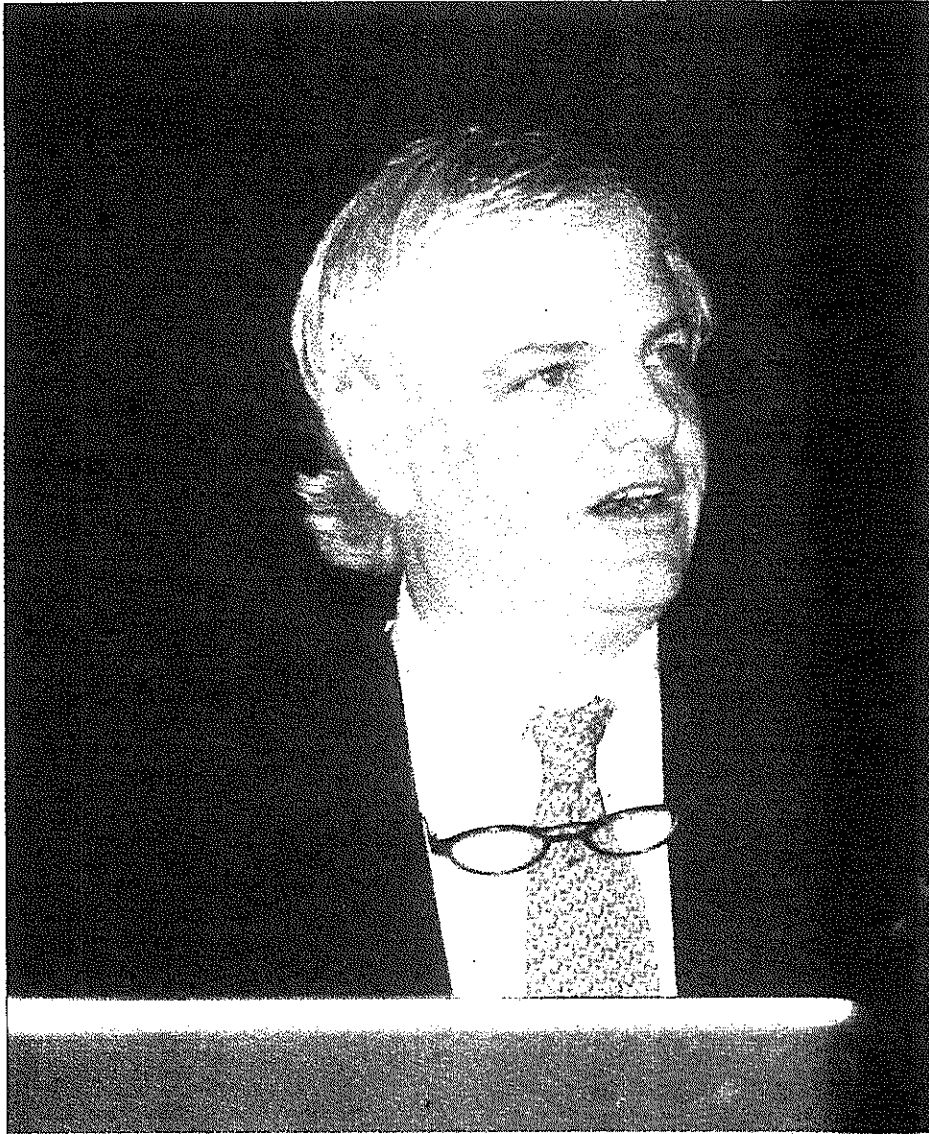
A leading preservationist from Edenton told an audience in Elizabeth City recently that Edenton has something to teach the rest of the world about supporting and preserving a downtown district.

"We have a thriving downtown, and it's something that we all look after like we're looking after a family member," Sambo Dixon, a local attorney and member of the Edenton Town Council, said during a Jan. 2 presentation at Museum of the Albemarle.

Dixon last year was awarded the Ruth Coltrane Cannon Cup, the state's highest award in historic preservation. His talk at MOA dealt with Edenton's efforts in historic preservation and also the positive economic impact that preservation has had in the community.

Dixon told the MOA audience that when the Belk store left downtown Edenton — as it did in downtowns everywhere — the town did a tax credit project and found Peebles to go into the building and continue operating a department store there.

"That is the lesson for the rest of the world from Edenton," Dixon said. "We have kept a downtown depart-



Locals to be featured on UNC-TV program

From staff reports

UNC-TV (PBS) will air a segment Jan. 30 on antiquing in Historic Edenton as part of its "Collecting Carolina" series on UNC-TV's "NC Weekend."

The program starts at 8 p.m.

During the segment, which features collectors and historians Tom Newbern and Sambo Dixon of Edenton as well as Mu-

seum of Early Southern Decorative Arts Chief Curator Robert Leath, the program will explore historic Edenton and how residents of the town preserve and treasure its homes, buildings and antiques in traditional settings.

Leath will also explain to viewers how to research their own furniture items to find their provenance.

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"This has been an enormous boost for our downtown," Dixon said, referring to the preservation of Pembroke Hall.

Another boost is on the way, he said, from the discovery of the oldest known house in North Carolina on East Queen Street in Edenton. Dixon called that the biggest story from last year.

The house was built in 1718 and the renovation has proceeded very slowly under the supervision of state historic preservation authorities.

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Hayes Plantation is "one of the best houses in America," Dixon said. "I grew up in and out of that house, and it is one of the reasons that I am so passionate about my town."

As valuable as historic preservation might be for the sake of the history itself, Dixon pointed out that there also is a direct economic benefit from preservation projects.

Projects such as the cotton mill, cotton mill village and peanut mill restorations have greatly expanded Edenton's tax base, Dixon said.

"The tax value of these buildings is just remarkable," he said.

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St. Paul's Episcopal Church is probably Edenton's most important structure, Dixon said. "And it was built as the cathedral for the colony, so it's y'all's church, too," he said.

He talked about the 1767 Chowan County Courthouse, St. Paul's Church, the Cupola House, the James Iredell House, the Barker House and other historic buildings in town.

"All of these buildings have contributed to the community's sense that we are a very different place," Dixon said.

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Restoration work provides jobs, Dixon said.

If history and economics are two sides of a preservation triangle, the third might be community spirit.

Dixon told the audience that the community had restored Hicks Field, and now one-fifth of the town is at the field on summer evenings to watch the Edenton Steamers in a rare small-town, historic setting.

"It's really been a source of great pride for our community," Dixon said.

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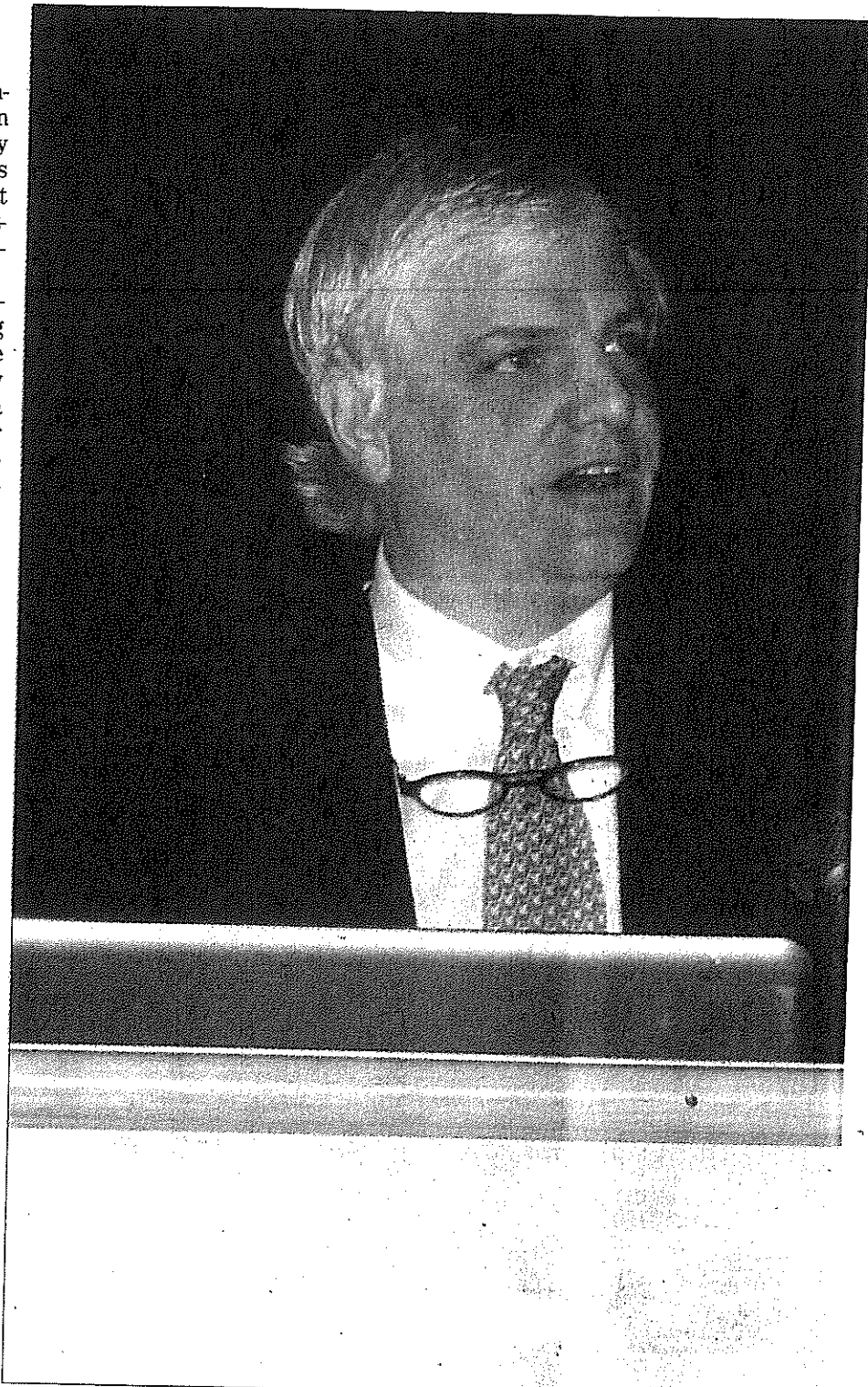
"That is the lesson for the rest of the world from Edenton," Dixon said. "We have kept a downtown department store ever since then."

While the Belk-Peebles story might be the most instructive for people in other communities, Dixon said the Taylor Theater might be the most heartwarming preservation story in Edenton.

People got together to save the theater, he said, which is how it works in Edenton.

"I'm the spokesman up here, but it's an army of people in Edenton," Dixon said.

Because of the efforts of local people to save the the-



STAFF PHOTO BY REGGIE PONDER

Sambo Dixon addresses an audience at Museum of the Albemarle in Elizabeth City on the topic of historic preservation in Elizabeth City.

ater, people are able to see first run movies in a theater on a downtown main street in a small town, he said.

The town has preserved the Roanoke Lighthouse, a

process that has taken two decades, he said.

He also noted that people in town raised \$1 million to save Pembroke Hall when the bank wanted to subdi-

vide the property and take down the building.

Dixon pointed out the economic impact of hundreds of people coming to town for a wedding at P