

**A Historic Railroad Town: The Planning and
Revitalization Process of Downtown Opelika**

by

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Abstract

Downtown Opelika, Alabama has recently marketed themselves as a, “Historic Railroad Town.” My research focuses on the process that Opelika has begun in effort to rebuild the downtown’s economy. The city of Opelika has partnered with several planning organizations in addition to the nationally recognized Main Street Program with the goal to revitalize downtown Opelika, to rebuilding a sense of place and community based upon the history of the city.

My research is strongly influenced by the ideas of New Urbanism and Cultural geography. I explore from urban sprawl, and decentralization; revitalization; community; historical preservation collective memory; and historical authenticity. I argue that Opelika has turned their city’s past into a commodity by creating a historic image in effort to market themselves to the community, new businesses and restaurants.

Qualitative research approaches allowed me to stay flexible in my research here. In effort to understand Opelika’s revitalization process; I collected my data through interviews with members of the community, businesses and public figures. In addition, I attended downtown social events and became an active member of the downtown community.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to Thesis

1.1 Introduction

Historically, downtown spaces within cities have acted as economic hubs for the city. Generally, the downtown is where local and regional businesses, financial institutions, restaurants, and entertainment venues are located. As cities' began to evolve through time, they began to sprawl towards the cities' peripheries which are today known as the suburbs. Advancements in transportation technology made it more feasible for Americans to buy homes and automobiles allowing them to leave the downtown areas. Slowly, downtowns were becoming abandoned spaces.

In light of the current world economy crisis, urban and rural cities are now left to their own devices in attempt to rebuild their local economies. Residents in the affected cities have found relief in their economies by restoring their sense of community. In this sense, community is a group of similar cultures that have come together to create a sense of belongingness. A community can then be viewed as shared values that bring together certain elements like trust (Frazer 1999). Social and physical boundaries are constructed around the shared values and communities emerge within the space.

Revitalization of the abandoned downtown spaces has been the primary method used to rebuild the physical and social aspects of communities. Revitalization is a new phenomenon that can be described as a "back to the city" movement from the suburbs

(Schwirian 1983). These abandoned downtowns are being upgraded in order to build a shared space for new residents (Greenberg 2000). To work, this phenomenon needs a strong organization to support it and sense of community identity (Schwirian 1983).

There are several critiques when approaching this method. For example, Evan McKenzie in his book *Privatopia*, argues that these programs are built upon some notion of what a community should be and the programs only serve fragment American cities even further (McKenzie 1994). Stuart Aitken (1998) in his book, *Family Fantasies and Community Space* critiques how these programs can target the monolithic notions of what constitutes a family and a community. Family and community are constantly being defined as white middle to upper class husband and wife with children. These false notions have spatial implications that segregate and isolate members within a community. (Aitken 1998, Low 2003, McCann 1995). They also form nucleated “created communities” that focus on a specific targeted group (McCann 1995). However, for this thesis I focus on how communities use collective memory and claims of historical authenticity to create images of historical towns.

Historical preservation and claims of authenticity are being used as identity fronts for the revitalized communities. City planning committees believe that the re-creation of historical places will enhance the quality of life within the community and generate income for city overall. Historic preservation societies are formed to define and maintain the authenticity of the place. However even authenticity is subject to debate as people choose to remember certain facts and historic events, but only elect to represent what they find worth remembering (DeLyser 1999, Lowenthal 1985).

These historic revitalized downtown areas are once again functional commercialized spaces. The selling of goods and services within the new revitalized space begins the town's economic recovery. Realistically, however historically authentic spaces are fading and appear more inauthentic, complete with a McDonald's and Starbucks on every corner (Cheng 1986).

The primary focus of this thesis is to examine the process of revitalization occurring in downtown of Opelika, Alabama. With the shift and displacement of textile plants to the developing world, Opelika has been in economic turmoil. In effort to save their struggling economy, downtown Opelika has partnered with the Main Street Project to revitalize its downtown space. Opelika has labeled itself an "Historic Railroad Town" and declared a motto of, "Rich in Heritage with a Vision towards the Future."

Opelika has adopted the idea of turning the town into a historic railroad downtown community. Downtown Opelika has dedicated itself to fostering a sense of place centered upon reinserting a small town community pride from the past into present time. Opelika planners see it as a small community that should restore a sense of place and community to their residents and make available a variety of goods and services within an historically authentic downtown area.

This thesis focuses on the revitalization process that downtown Opelika has adapted in effort to increase economic activity. First I will explore how the theory of collective memory is tied to creating a historically authentic railroad town. I will examine the impact that community organization such as, Opelika Main Street and the Opelika Historic Planning Commission have on the look and feel of the historic railroad

town. I will also examine whether or not Opelika is truly attempting to preserve a historic railroad community or bending to the demands of consumerism to help rebuild their downtown. Is Opelika's revitalization project a means of turning back time and focusing on the historic and authentic details of the town or a method to hide and save a deteriorating downtown space?

1.2 Format of Thesis

This thesis will take a chronological approach. This means, I will begin with the historical aspects of Opelika and move forward in time and concluding with the result of the present data. In Chapter 2, I introduce the qualitative methodology used when gathering my data. The chapter will illustrate the geographical theories and methods that were used within the research. Chapter 3 will provide a historical context for my research. It provides a detailed account on the historic background on the city of Opelika. This historical portion of my thesis is not a comprehensive account of the whole city. It provides an historic overview and focuses primarily on the downtown space of the city.

The theoretical framework is included within Chapter 4 and 5. Specifically, Chapter 4 focuses on literature associated with urban form. I will focus on literature concerning decentralization, urban sprawl and revitalization, as well as the example of a larger city that is in the process of revitalizing their downtown. Chapter 5 will examine how communities use collective memories to preserve the authentic historic physical elements in their towns.

Chapter 6 will chronicle my case study of the downtown area of Opelika. This chapter will begin with an example of how downtown Opelika has rebuilt their community into a historic railroad town. The chapter gives a detailed account of all the community organizations that have partnered in the revitalization of downtown Opelika. These associations include: Opelika Historical Preservation Commission, Opelika Main Street, Envision Opelika, Chamber of Commerce and Historical Possibilities. The primary goal of this chapter is to assist in my research question that asks of whether Opelika is truly attempting to preserve a historically authentic downtown community or using collective memory to address the demands of commercialism and rebuild their struggling downtown economy. I will also show how downtown planning guidelines have informed the physical characteristics of the buildings and open space to foster a better sense of place and community.

The last chapter, Chapter 7, summarizes the conclusions of my research. I argue that the revitalization project in Opelika is primarily a means to save their deteriorating downtown. Additionally, the process has changed the sense of place within the downtown community. Residents are now able to enjoy a historic communal space and share experiences within the boundaries of the downtown area. At the end, I will address what future studies done.

Chapter 2: Geographical Themes and Methods

2.1 Introduction

The geographical themes I drew upon were those associated with New Urbanism and Cultural geography. Both theoretical approaches are important to my thesis because I am researching the revitalization planning process of historic downtown Opelika. The thesis examines how the components of collective memory and historical authenticity are embedded into the town's planning process.

In 1993, New Urbanism was developed through the formation of the Congress of New Urbanism (Congress for New Urbanism 1993). New Urbanism is a design method that focuses upon rebuilding a community. Some of the planning efforts involve creating a pedestrian friendly environment and a continuous aesthetic typology. New Urbanism believes that communities can be created and encouraged by physical design (Talen 2000). This directly ties to my research because I will be studying how Opelika's planning process attempts to create a uniform physical appearance among the buildings. New Urbanism is a qualitative approach prioritized the relationships and the feelings of a city (Hubbarb 2006). In relation to Cultural Geography, I will look at how the city has drawn upon collective memory and commoditized past in the interest of strengthening its economy (Zukin 1992, Harvey 2006).

2.2 Methods

In the introduction to the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Denzin and Lincoln define qualitative research as: “The studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artifacts; cultural texts and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives.”(Denzin and Yvonna 2000, 3). This method of research allowed me to put myself within the context of downtown historic Opelika because I was able to situate myself within the community. I researched the planning process of creating an authentic historic place. The data I collected is rich in describing the processes, people, place, documents and conversations within the community of downtown historic Opelika (Bogdan and Biklen 1998).

My research process was strengthened by two particular aspects of qualitative methods. First, I referenced a naturalistic qualitative approach to my research. This approach allowed me to interpret materials to help make the community more visible since the community of Opelika is a full-functioning town (Denzin and Yvonna 2000). As I situated myself within the community I studied the present aspects of the town while collecting data. This allowed me to observe the setting of the community as it occurred.

The second feature of my research that suggested the appropriateness of a qualitative approach was the availability of descriptive data (Denzin and Yvonna 2000). My data was collected through written words rather than statistical numbers. This data included interviews and field notes, official records, newspaper, archival data and other

records. This will allowed me to evaluate the interrelationships between the various forms of data. It also allowed me to ask such questions as: who, what, where and why and study how they were all connected.

Overall, the qualitative method allowed me to enter into my data collection and field work with an open mind. I proceeded with a clean slate of knowledge about downtown historic Opelika to attempt to loosen any preconceptions of what I would find, since I did research in my hometown (Bogdan and Bilken, 1998). The data was used to help structure and guide me within my research process.

2.3 Data Collection for Historic Chapter

I first researched on the history of Opelika. This allowed me to structure a framework around the downtown's present attempt at creating an authentic community. By collecting archival data, I was able to explain why downtown Opelika has chosen to create sense of place based around the ideal of a historic railroad town. I acquired much of this data through the State Archives Department located in Montgomery, Ralph Brown Draughon Library special section department, at Auburn University, and Lewis Copper Library archives, in Opelika. I utilized the Ralph Brown Draughon Library's microfilm section to systematically review the old *Opelika Times* and *Opelika Observer* newspapers. The Ralph Brown Draughon archives also supplied me with historic pamphlets and articles. The data I used the most extensively were the manuscripts written by Winston SmithT and my interview with his wife Vera Smith T. Winston's family is known to be one of the first settlers in Opelika. They are also known to have helped contribute to the economic growth in downtown Opelika. While researching this

data, I took detailed descriptive field notes and I photocopied any available documents. It was essential in my research to know the past to understand the present.

2.4 Data Collection for Case Study

Interviews were also very beneficial to my research. Interviews allowed me to gather descriptive data in a research subject's own words. I conducted the interviews with past and present local officials of Opelika, members of the Opelika Historical society, downtown historic district business owners; members of the community and employees at the Opelika Planning Commission office. Prior to conducting any interviews, I obtained Human Subjects Research approval from the Auburn University Institutional Review Board which authorized my interview methods.

Before each interview I contacted my subject via email or phone to inform them of my research and schedule a time that best fit their schedule. Due to schedule conflicts, most interviews were conducted via phone. For the face to face interviews, I asked each interviewee for permission to tape the conversation however none of my interviewees felt comfortable with that idea and requested that we chat in a more relaxed setting. This obstacle led me to ask the interviewees if they would allow me to take detailed notes during the interview, and all of them agreed. I began the interviews by explaining the overall goals of my research project. I then added open ended general questions to make the subject comfortable. I followed with more specific questions that were relevant to the subject's position within the community. For instance, when I was interviewing Luis Gallardo, from the Opelika Planning Commission I started with general questions about downtown Opelika. Once I grasped what his specific job function entailed within the

Planning Commission office, I began to ask specific questions about the Historic Commission and annual planning guides. I attempted to avoid questions that have answers such as: yes or no. This allowed me to analyze the data more accurately because it will be more descriptive. I limited the interview lengths to 30 minutes. This helped me to “think short,” by limiting the respondent’s answer and preventing it from wandering all over, and kept us centered on a particular subject (Denzin and Lincoln 2000).

Throughout the interview processes, I kept in mind that the interview was a qualitative research method, and allowed it to take a shape of its own (Burgess, 1984; Fontana and Frey, 1994). At first, my interviews were very formal, however the more I embedded myself in the downtown community I began to build relationships with my interview subjects.

The richest data that I received came from becoming an active social member of the downtown community. I attended several town meetings and if I was not able to make the meetings, I downloaded the meeting minutes from the Opelika website. I also attended monthly planning commission meetings that were held on the first Tuesday of each month. I have also attended every community function that the downtown area had on their calendar, including Christmas in a Railroad town, Touch a Truck, Easter on the Square, Farmers Markets, Wine Trails and various parades. My participation in these events allowed me to speak freely to the community business owners and residents. For example, the majority of the residents that I talked to strongly believed that Opelika was on the right path in rebuilding their community. One Opelika resident stated, “The look and feel of the downtown area makes me feel at home, the events such as Christmas in a Railroad town and Easter on the Square help encourage me and my family to spend a lot

of time in downtown Opelika” (Opelika Resident 2010). These events also led me to see the relationship that residents have with the downtown area. Opelika’s future is not only driven by planners, political officials and business owners, but also the residents. The residents truly love the downtown area. They want to see it grow and have a future.

2.5 Field Notes

Due to the fact, that the most valuable data I received was by situating myself within the community, I turned to using field notes. “Field notes are the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study”(Bogdan and Biklen 1998, 121). Thus, throughout my data collection process I continued to take notes on what I observed. I described within my notes the people, objects, places, events, activities, and conversations (not scheduled interviews) that I came in contact with while I was in the field (downtown Opelika). Through these descriptive notes I recorded ideas, strategies, and reflections that helped my research go forward. This method of keeping notes strongly aided in the development of my research.

2.6 Documents: Official records and other documents

The method of using private city documents within a qualitative research study provided very descriptive data. These data sources were much more limited in availability. These city documents included the planning guidelines and design guides. As I read and interpreted the documents I asked myself questions suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1998):

1. What is it that I can find out that cannot be revealed using other materials or even doing a different study all together?
2. Is there enough information within the document?
3. Does it relate to my research?

Official records and documents are considered to provide a very subjectiv picture of how the organization of the particular records function (Bogdan and Biklin 1998). Thus, official records are usually viewed as biased in qualitative research because the researcher is focused understanding the processes and relationships of the organization in relation to the research topic (Bogdan and Belkin 1998). For this research, official records were important because they highlighted the image that is desired or planned. I analyzed internal documents including: census data, meeting minutes, memos, budgets and planning guides. I acquired the meeting minutes through the City of Opelika website and the budgets from the City of Opelika's Economic Development office. These helped provide clues to the internal organizational politics involved in the downtown Opelika Community.

2.7 Interpretation of the data

Due to the fact that none of my subjects were comfortable with me recording their interviews, I collected my field notes through free hand writing. I used descriptive field notes because it allowed me to interpret the setting, people, actions and conversations involved (Bogdan and Biklen 1998). To adhere to the IRB guidelines all my field notes and data collected were stored in a filing cabinet located in a locked departmental office. I then went into an in depth analysis of the data to record my research findings. I did not

use a coding system to interpret my data. Coding systems are more easily accomplished if the field notes consist of many paragraphs (Bogdan and Biklen 1998). The descriptive data I collected was however organized by general subject; for example, history, planning guidelines and historical preservation, to help me organize my data.

2.8 Conclusion

My research approach was qualitative in nature. My topic involved examining the planning process that Opelika has used to save their downtown. They have created a sense of place (Tuan 1977) to build a stronger community. By situating myself within the community I was able to learn why Opelika was revitalizing the downtown and identify the factors guiding the project. By taking detailed field notes and immersing myself in archival data I was able to determine that in an effort to improve the downtown economy, Opelika has created a place that is largely sculpted by perceived historic events. The next chapter will examine the history of Opelika to help better understand why Opelika has branded itself to be a historic railroad town.

Chapter 3: History of Opelika

3.1 Introduction

Downtown Opelika has promoted an image of, “A Historic Railroad Town.” As the introduction shows, my thesis researches the planning process of creating a historic railroad town through the use of collective memory. Collective memory is developed by molding, shaping, and agreeing upon what to remember from the past (Shackel 2001). My research suggests that key players involved in the current revitalization project of downtown Opelika, such as the Opelika Planning Commission, Main Street Program and others have promoted a particular past of downtown Opelika. This past is the focus of the revitalization efforts.

This chapter will provide an historic overview of downtown Opelika. It will be organized by looking at major events that occurred during Opelika’s history. The research within this chapter will document that parts of Opelika’s history that have been omitted to promote Opelika’s image as a unique historic railroad town.

3.2 Emergence of a Town

The state of Alabama was admitted to the Union in 1819. Originally, the area that became Opelika was occupied by the Creek Side Indian from the Northern Great Lakes. In 1832, the Treaty of Cussetta, an agreement between the United States and Creek Nation pushed the Creek Side Indians out of their home territory. Luckily, for the

white settlers, the Creek Side Indians were known to be less aggressive than other northern Indian tribes and by 1836, white settlers had become the majority of the space (Cherry 1953).

Villages began to grow with a majority of white settlers after the Treaty of Cussetta. The city of Opelika was initially named Geneva until one of Opelika's first white settlers suggested changing the name to Opelika, which came from the Creek Side Indian word, "Opillako." Two different interpretations of the word exist: large swamp and owl's roost (Lambert 1954).

3.3 First White Settlers

In 1837, Daniel Bullard, a Methodist preacher commonly recognized as a key figure in the founding of Opelika built the first house of worship, one and a half miles southeast of Opelika. The original church was named Lebanon Methodist (See Figure 1) and was a cabin of split logs and boards (See Figure 2) that cost around \$220, with a membership of 22 people. In 1857, the church grew out of their cabin and relocated to Opelika proper (Nunn 1983). The growing congregation of the Lebanon Methodist church therefore contributed to the population growth of Opelika. Several renovations were made to the church to keep up with the growing congregation. Lebanon Methodist church eventually changed its name to Opelika First United Methodist Church so that it would be recognized as the first religious organization of any denomination in the area (SmithT 2004). The church that is recognized for the initial growth of Opelika is now located on the corner of Avenue A and South 7th Street in the downtown area (See Figure 3).

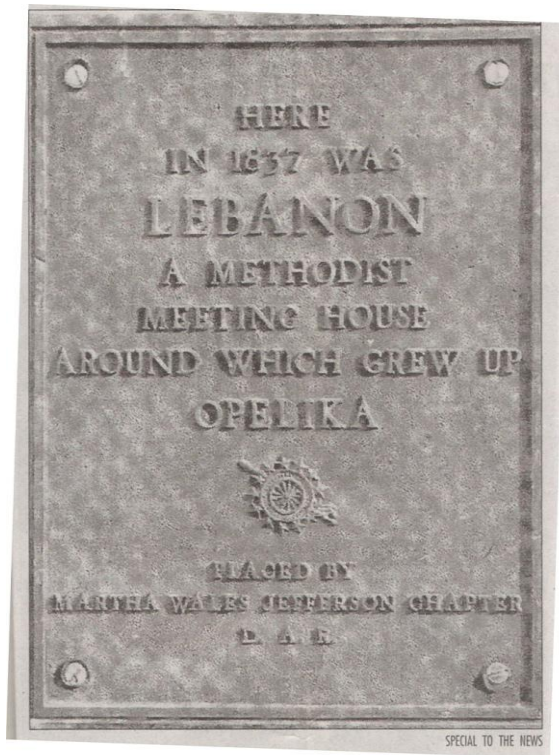


Figure 1. Historical Marker of Lebanon Methodist (SmithT 2004).



Figure 2. Representation of Lebanon Methodist (Picture provided by First United Methodist Church).



Figure 3. First United Methodist Church today (Picture provided by First United Methodist Church).

Rev. Luke Mizell, Wesley Williams, Charles Byrd and L.P Grant were other residents that are credited with encouraging the development of Opelika. Rev. Luke Mizell was known as an upright and exemplary man according to Winston Smith T (2004). During the period when white settlers were living alongside the Creek Side Indians, Rev. Mizell was often used as a mediator between to the groups. Wesley Williams was the first man to put Opelika on the map by opening the first Post Office in 1840.

It has been said that Opelika owes their existence to the area of Oak Bowery, which is located 15 miles north of Opelika. Oak Bowery was initially a front running regional candidate for the railroad lines. Oak Bowery is said to have “snubbed” the railroads being built in their community in fear of the effect it would have on their refined community of churches, academies, and plantation life. The rail line then by-passed Oak Bowery and came straight through the smaller, poorer and much more obscure village of Opelika (SmithT 2011).

In 1848, Charles Byrd and L.P Grant caught wind of a potential railroad line coming into the area. While Byrd and Grant surveyed the land for the upcoming railroad lines, they also purchased 160 acres of land. In effort to keep the town respectable and growing, they granted one acre of land for each religious denomination to erect a church. Opelika was on the verge of growing into now what is presently called a historic railroad town.

3.4 The Railroads Come to Town

The slogan, “A Historic Railroad Town,” that downtown Opelika has created for itself is historically accurate. Opelika owes its existence to the growth of the railroad lines that crossed through it. The Montgomery Railroad Company was the original company to travel through Opelika. In 1843, the company was sold to the Montgomery and West Point Railroad company (Lambert 1954). It was the construction of a second line between Columbus and Opelika that helped in the creation of a railroad junction point. As history shows, it was this specific railroad junction that caused General

Sherman to order General Rousseau to destroy the railroad lines between Opelika and Lochapoka during the Civil War.

In 1864, General Rousseau was ordered by General Sherman to destroy the railroad junction located in Opelika that connected the main lines from Columbus to Montgomery, to Atlanta. On July 7, 1864 General Rousseau traveled from Columbus, Georgia to the railroad city of Opelika. Winston Smith T, an Opelika native wrote in a manuscript based on detailed accounts of past Opelika residents, that the Rousseau's troops described Opelika as, "a pretty country town with apparently some importance (SmithT 2004). At the time, Opelika was home to express office, three large confederate warehouses, two depots, a turntable and the main junction to Montgomery and Atlanta. Union Units arriving from Columbus destroyed everything along their path, burning depots and switching yards. As I researched Rousseau's Raid, I noticed several accounts of how Rousseau on the orders of Sherman only destroyed the warehouses and rail lines. He avoided destroying civilian private properties or any other property that was not specifically associated with the railroads (Nunn 1983). Thus, we should acknowledge Rousseau for not destroying the whole town of Opelika; otherwise I would not be writing about a historic railroad town.

As Rousseau and his troops forced themselves into Opelika, their path of destruction continued. After Rousseau and his troops completed their orders they continued their march northward to Georgia. Looting and vandalism by Opelika residents however continued the destruction of the warehouses and rail lines in Opelika.

3.5 Post-Civil War

As the Civil War ended, the city was in desperate need of rebuilding. The Alabama State Legislature created a new county out of parts of Macon, Russell, Chambers, and Tallapoosa counties naming it after the Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Opelika was then voted the county's seat (Lambert 1954). The construction of a northern rail extension from Opelika began and reached Birmingham in 1888 (Nunn 1953). There were two major regional rail lines that crossed into downtown Opelika. The first was the Central of Georgia rail line company that had purchased the original Columbus and Western rail line in 1895. The second was the Western of Alabama, which was a link from New York to New Orleans (Smith T 2004).

There were also several rail lines that ran from Opelika to Lafayette and Opelika to Auburn. The original ticket office for the dummy lines was located at the corner of North 8th Street and North Railroad Avenue, with fares ranging around ten cents (Nunn 1953). In addition to the major rail lines and local lines there were regional trains that crossed through town. These "daycoaches" went back and forth between Atlanta and Montgomery and Columbus and Birmingham (SmithT 2004). In addition, with Auburn Polytechnic Institute right around the corner, let us not forget about the special "Game Day" trains. These were special excursion train trips called, "War Eagle Specials," that carried Auburn fans to Grant and Legion Fields to see Auburn football games.

Opelika owes it past to the railroads and is now dedicating its future vision to the railroads. However, the rail lines were not always a positive factor to the growth and

economic success of the town. Historically, Opelika was not always a safe place to live and experienced many difficulties in keeping its city charters.

3.6 The City of Many Charters

Opelika had numerous rail lines that crossed through the downtown space. Many businesses, such as bars, restaurants and hotels began to cater to the passengers, staff and crew of the rail lines. Overtime, Opelika became a scene of prostitution and crime. Salesmen began to avoid the city and passengers were advised to get under their seats when traveling through the town. Due to these unlawful activities, Opelika's city charter that had been initiated in 1866 was revoked on March 26, 1873 (Lambert 1954). After being reinstated in 1872, in 1882 the city charter was revoked again due to crime and unlawful activities and the Montgomery Greys, the police force in Montgomery were armed and sent into Opelika to improve the conditions. The situation improved and a new charter was reinstated in May of 1899 (Nunn 1953). Not only did Opelika have crime and prostitution, there were also many political riots. For example, Opelika taxpayers felt cheated and surrendered their charter to become a district under government rule; it was not until March 3, 1970 that a new charter was established for the community under the name of, The City of Opelika (Lambert 1953).

The history of Opelika suggested that it is sometimes necessary to reconstruct the past and draw upon only selected events. While bars and brothels met a demand for entertainment, there have been other past attempts to financially strengthen the city through entertainment.

3.7 The Opera House

After the Civil War like much of the US South, Opelika was attempting to rebuild their community physically and socially. In an effort to raise money, the High School Chapel hosted a series of entertainers. The money raised from visiting entertainers eventually made enough money to open an auditorium, called Dunbar's Opera House (Lambert 1954). Dunbar's Opera house became so popular that in 1878 a new opera house opened by John Renfro and John SmithT. Performances were booked on a continual basis. John SmithT, once scheduled an all female show of singers and dancers. Word got out that the performance was a bit "racy." Nonetheless, word circulated about town about the upcoming unethical performance, that night they had the biggest crowd they ever had for a performance at the Opera House; it was standing room only (SmithT 2011). In 2004, the Opera House collapsed. However, it is a great example of how Opelika has in the past looked at entertainment venues to make their town more viable.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter provides a glimpse back to the past of downtown. Opelika's past is in fact a railroad town. The town owes their existence and growth to the railroads. However, Opelika has also fabricated their past through collective memory to only portray the town's positive events through history. This section was an effort to illustrate that Opelika has created a motto reflective of its past, but selective in remembrance of a historic railroad town. The next chapter will begin my literature review and discuss how a city changes spatially through time. It will also look at literature associated with decentralization, urban sprawl, and revitalization.

Chapter 4: Literature Review Part I

4.1 Introduction

Opelika and most cities have become reflections of the economy. The current economic crisis has sparked a phenomenon of revitalization among urban downtowns. This thesis examines how Opelika has become a part of this phenomenon within their downtown in attempt to boost their city's struggling economy. This chapter will broadly describe the path that led to revitalization within downtown spaces in the United States including the historical context of American cities, downtown characteristics, and how decentralization and urban sprawl led to the revitalization phenomenon. In addition, the chapter will briefly discuss how revitalization projects have common themes across urban settings. To support this argument, the prominent global city of Atlanta, Georgia will be used as an example. Outside revitalization projects, the demographics of these two cities are distinctively different. However, Opelika and Atlanta both use private programs that play strong roles within their revitalization efforts. These programs use comparable strategies that lead to the distinctively different downtowns using similar guidelines to revitalize.

Louis Wirth, an American sociologist described cities as relatively large, dense and permanent settlements of socially heterogeneous individuals (Wirth 1938). He believed that a city's dense population cannot foster the same relationships and bonds that were seen in more close knit rural communities. He wrote:

Large numbers involve...a greater range of individual variation. Furthermore, the greater the number of individuals participating in a process of interaction, the greater is the potential differentiation between them. The personal traits, the occupations, the cultural life, and the ideas of the members of an urban community may, therefore, be expected to range between more widely separated poles than those rural inhabitants...The bonds of kinship, of neighborliness, and the sentiments arising out of living together for generations under a common folk tradition are likely to be absent or, at best, relatively weak in an aggregate of the members of which have such diverse origins and backgrounds. (Wirth 1938, 22)

Wirth felt that it would be impossible to have the same bonds and relationships in a large urban setting. The city was viewed as the polar opposite of rural environments; it was dense, large, spontaneous, unsafe and unfriendly. Yet, it served as a major economic agglomeration and provided linkages to other cities to support production and transportation flow of products (Brenner and Keil 2006, Beaverstock, Smith and Taylor 2000). Cities grew as nodal centers that influenced the urban core and rural periphery regions. At the heart of the city was the downtown area. Downtowns provide social cohesiveness that helped unify a heterogeneous larger urban area.

4.2 The Downtown

Downtowns house economic, cultural and social activities. In terms of the downtown area Grady Clay notes, “there was a time when everything that was important in a region happened in its center; when all roads led to the center; and when the importance of one’s home, business, office, showroom and activities was measured by its proximity to that most central of all points, the old city center, the old downtown” (Grady 1973, 34). The downtown evolved by acting as a nodal point for all transportation routes. They were the centers for the distribution of economic goods and services (Fellman, Getis and Getis 2007). There was a time when being located in the downtown area was

the only way one could efficiently buy, sell, or trade (Grady 1973). Everything had to flow through the central market places(Grady 1973).

Downtowns have a long history of expansion, redevelopment and change (Bearwald 1978). They are built environments that change based on the economic and social trends of city and its hinterland (Mosher, Keim and Franques 1995). They allow for pedestrian mobility and as a nucleus linked to the rest of the hinterland through transportation routes (Bearwald 2007). It is impossible to define the downtown space without mentioning Walter Christaller. At the heart of these ideas was Christaller's (1933) notion which held that a city's central function stabilizes its importance in the larger urban hierarchy. Bowden notes that Christaller defined centrality as, "the central place's 'relative importance, the amount of central functions necessary to serve a complementary region, i.e. the population and activities outside the bounds of the central place'" (Bowden 1971). It is a collection of functions concentrated together to serve the existence and growth of the city. Bowden writes:

Given this theoretical basis for identifying central business uses, what activities would be classified as central business in, say, American cities in the last century? It is clear, first, that all establishments that retail goods and services for a profit or that perform various office functions are central business in character. These are regarded as central business uses. Also included are those central functions serving the CBD itself. Examples are the accountants and advertising firms with clients among the businesses located in the central area, and eating establishments serving the daytime population of the CBD. (Bowden 2007, 122)

The above quote demonstrates how downtowns are used as agglomerations of goods and services that target the social, economic and cultural trends of the city. Historically, it serviced the entirety of the city's businesses and residents.

The central role of downtowns changed dramatically during the twentieth century. The Fordist mass production of automobiles led to a demand for periphery beltways that acted as access routes into the city. Automobiles highlighted that the same roads that led into the city also led away from the center (Grady 1973). This pulled businesses and residents to the periphery regions of the city and decentralization of downtowns.

4.3 Decentralization of a Downtown

Throughout the twentieth century, Americans were moving out of the city. Through globalization and diffusion of media, the old notion of the downtown area is loosening (Grady 1973). Downtowns were feeling the effects of decentralization, social process by which population and industry moves from the urban centers to the outlying districts (Godfrey 1995). The downtown was no longer the only point of interaction.

Innovations in automobile production were significant contributors to downtowns. The standardized production of Fordism created an economy of scale that made the purchase of automobiles more accessible. In 1905, there were approximately 8,000 automobiles registered in the United States, by 1945 the number had escalated to 26 million, or approximately one automobile for every four people (Jackson). The automobile was changing American cities. By the 1920s, about 30 percent of people entering the downtown were driving their own cars. As new cities in the US west emerged, over 60 percent of people were driving their own cars into the downtown (Knox 1994). The cities were beginning to sprawl. By the 1920s, for the first time suburbs were growing faster than the downtowns (Knox 1994), resulting in urban sprawl.

4.4 Urban Sprawl

For hundreds of years, powerful groups had sought to tighten the reins on the downtown space. This was intended to force the public to travel through the center to build high densities and not sprawl at a distance (Grady 1973). The old concept that bid rent intensifies the closer it gets to the downtown was no longer accurate (Garner 1966). Janelle (1968), coined the term “time –space convergence which looked at how transportation technology enhanced economic development and decentralization over time. Thus, as transportation technology increased, spatial elements of the city would disperse outward and new centers would emerge.

The term urban sprawl was first used in 1937 by Earle Draper, one of the first city planners in the southeastern United States (Black 1996). There are several definitions of urban sprawl, such as an excessive metropolitan decentralization, business activities that take place outside the central business district, to dispersed outward extension development outside of compact urban and village centers along highways and rural country sides (Wassmer 2002, Planning Commission Journal 2002 and Downs 1998).

Urban sprawl has been taking place in the United States for over 75 years. In 1950, 57 percent of the population lived in or around the downtown and 70 percent of the employment took place in the downtown, and by mid 1990s these statistics declined 35 and 45 percent (Wassmer 2002). Quickly, urban sprawl was decreasing downtown densities and changing a sense of community. F. J. Osborn explained that:

These new forms of transportation...were used... to facilitate the sprawling of suburbs, a type of urban growth wasteful from the economic standpoint and disadvantageous socially. Coupled with the rise of real incomes, rapid transport has enabled the people moving out from the centers to find open residential surroundings they desired. But they and the numerous immigrants from rural areas have obtained these surroundings at the expense of long and costly daily journeys to and from work.

Local community life has been weakened or destroyed, and access to the country made more difficult for the large numbers of residents still left in the city centers. (Osborn 1965, 15)

Urban sprawl was progressively modifying the landscape of the American city.

There have been several spatial models designed to help illustrate how urban sprawl affected the landscape. During the 1920's, the first urban morphologist, from the Chicago School of Urban Sociology, Ernest Burgess, designed the concentric zone to describe the lay out of urban cities. (Burgess 1924). Burgess' model was arranged by concentric rings based on decreasing land value (See Figure 4). The concentric zone model placed the downtown in the center of the rings. The concentric zone model was designed to work outward from the downtown: wholesale zone, lower class residential, medium class residential, higher class residential and finally the suburbs (Burgess 1924).

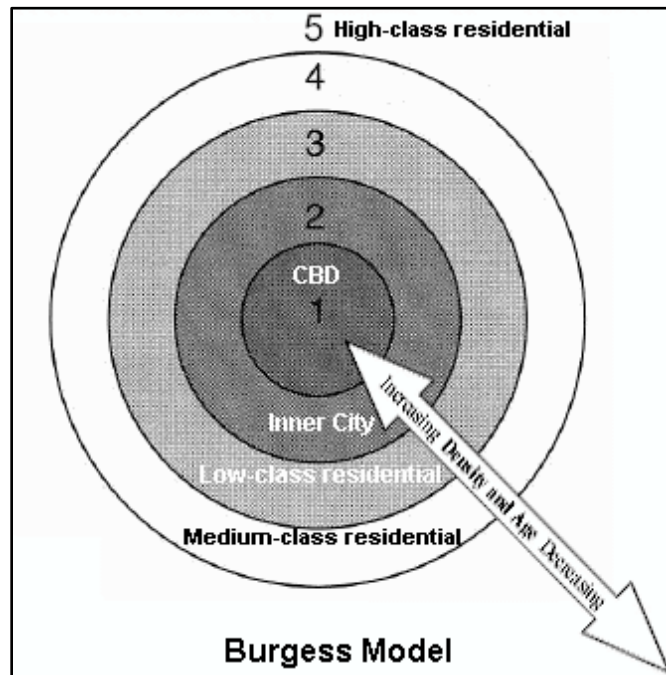


Figure 4. Burgess Concentric Zone Model (1924).

Urban sprawl increased with the innovation of the automobile. New transportation beltways were created for the automobile. This in turn affected the landscape of the city. The second model, by Homer Hoyt (1939), designed the sector model which rearranges residential and commercial patterns. The sector model accounted for new transportation beltways (See Figure 5). It also shows the increase in the suburban residential rings. Businesses and residents were now able to operate and live outside of the downtown.

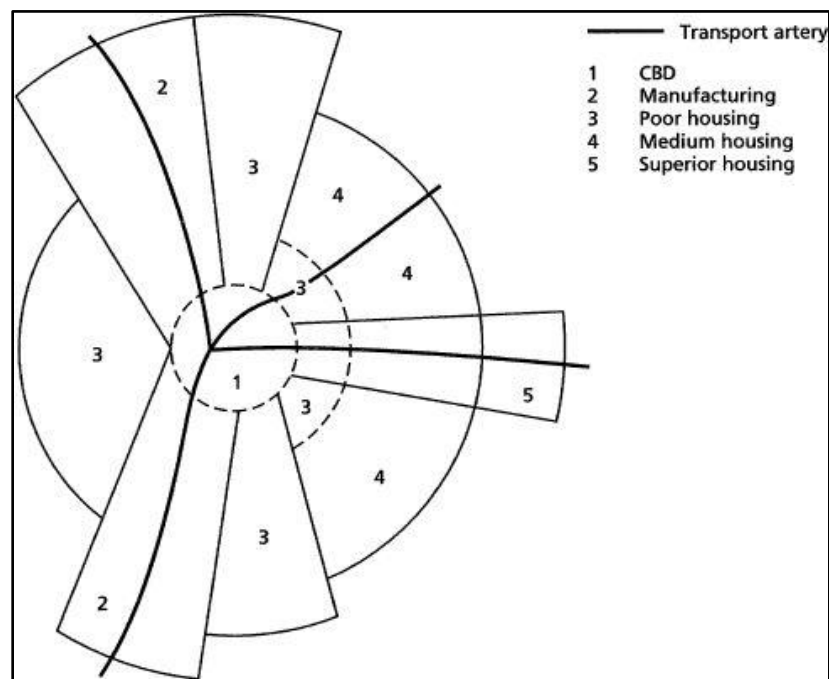


Figure 5. Sector Model (Hoyt 1939).

Eventually, the post-industrial era eliminated the need to have a central downtown location. Technological changes allowed businesses and residents to avoid the commute into the downtown area. Like the automobile, these new innovations changed the city's landscape. To account for these changes there was a third model by C.D. Harris

and E.L. Ullman (1945), named the multiple-nuclei model. Their model illustrates these new technological advances (See Figure 6). Suddenly, many commercial centers formed throughout the city. These small self functioning areas were known as edge cities. Overall these models help clarify how urban sprawl caused the decentralization and decay of the downtown (Burgess 1924, Hoyt 1939 and Harris and Ullman 1945).

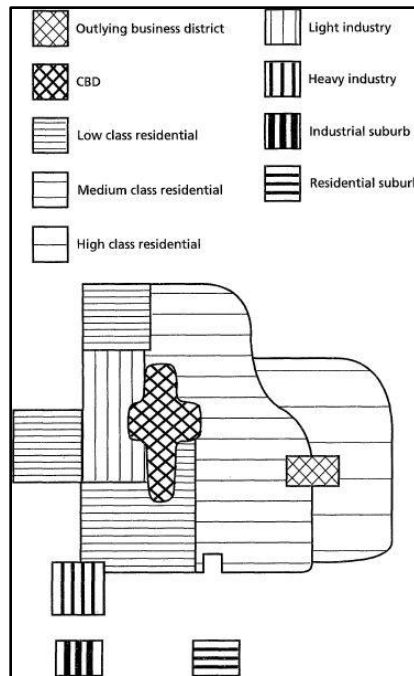


Figure 6. Multiple-Nuclei Model (Harris and Ullman 1945).

Urban sprawl has led to segregation, congestion and environmental issues. First, the only people who could move out of downtown were social and economic classes that could afford to make the move because they could afford the transportation back into the downtown. The lower classes were left in the core of the city. This polarizes social space, especially in the downtown areas, resulting in fragmentation (Godfrey 1996). Fragmentation between downtowns and suburban communities as Godfrey states, “leads to demographic changes, employment shifts, social and ethnic polarization,

concentrations of wealth and poverty, and exurban growth pressures” (Godfrey 1996, 437). Urban sprawl has also led to congestion of roads, high levels of car pollution, and the loss of open space in cities (Nechyba and Walsh, 2004).

Urban sprawl is not always perceived as a negative issue. As Ned Levine (1997) points out, “What to one person is “sprawl” to another is his/her home” (Levine 1997, 280). Many American households prefer low density living, spatial separation from other with lower incomes and social status; one-stop shopping; a location near open space; and travel by private car rather than mass transportation (Wallace 2002). Businesses also prefer to move to less densely populated sites for ease of employee, customer and market access (Wallace 2002).

Urban sprawl can be looked at as either good or bad in connection with the transformation of American cities. Urban sprawl steered the decentralization and ultimately the decay of downtowns, at the same time it allowed residents to live in a lower density region. Recently, these decayed downtowns like Opelika have been focal points of discussion. Presently, it is believed that by revitalizing these decayed areas and creating a new vibrant downtown community will help solve cities’ current economic crunches by bringing in new businesses. These revitalization programs, will then lead once again to healthy and vibrant downtowns that in hopes will boost the economy and recreate a strong sense of community.

4.5 Revitalization Programs

Urban Sprawl contributed to the decay of downtowns. Now, these decayed areas are being used to increase a city’s economic decline through revitalization. Kent Robertson (1983, 314) notes that, “A recurrent theme in recent years has been the

supposed revitalization of downtowns or central business districts in many large American cities that were characterized by physical deterioration and economic decline during much of the twentieth century.” Historically, revitalization programs began with the recognition of urban decay. This resulted from the movement of population, retail trade, and manufacturing jobs to the suburbs (Teaford 1990). Revitalization programs began in the 1930’s in hopes of reversing the trend of urban sprawl and have adopted various strategies.

Revitalizing a downtown means strengthening the social, physical and economic value of a community’s traditional central business district. The primary goal of revitalization efforts is to improve the livability and quality of life in a community by expanding and attracting employment, shopping and social activities (Fields and Farrigan 2001). Downtown revitalization allows cities to rediscover their urban centrality and raise the profile of the city (Amin and Graham 1997). Revitalization programs are able to create a new image that will bring businesses and residents back into the downtown. (Sohmer and Lang 2001, 5) believe, “In a lot of ways, the story of downtown is a counter trend of what is happening to the rest of urban America.” Meaning, it is the revitalization of the heart of America’s downtowns that will hopefully boost the current economic crisis.

Similar to urban sprawl, there are controversial issues that are associated with downtown revitalization. Revitalization projects are never just about improving the downtown space; rather, as processes, they involve making decisions about who are the most desirable tenants for a downtown with a newer revitalized image (Smith 1996). Governmental policies have been developed initiatives to address these concerns. For

example, in 1978, President Carter's Urban and Regional Policy group report declared (March report 1978, 23):

Today's widespread population loss in the Nation's central cities is unprecedented...the thinning out process has left many people and places with severe economic and social problems, and without the resources to deal with them...Our policies must reflect a balanced concern for people and places...to achieve several broad goals: to preserve the heritage and values of our older cities; maintain the investment in our older cities and our neighborhoods; assist newer cities in confronting the challenges of growth and pockets of poverty...and provide improved housing, job opportunities and community services to the urban poor, minorities and women...if the administration is to help cities revitalize neighborhoods, eliminate sprawl, support the return of the middle class to central cities...We should favor proposals supporting: 1. Compact community development over scattered, fragmented development; and 2. Revitalize over new development.

This addresses the issues that revitalization programs have on decayed downtown areas.

It represents how these programs need to preserve the heritage and values of the downtown but also to adhere to recognize social diversity in the revitalization process.

4.6 Reasons to Revitalize Downtowns

Downtowns have become focal points to save failing economies. Sohmer and Lang (2001, 9) write that, "Downtowns throughout the country are capitalizing on their historic character. Downtowns offer a niche market for those seeking a sense of place."

This in turn develops a healthy and strong downtown that will encourage consumers to spend their money in the area and it turn it back into a healthy and vibrant community. In Shields and Farrigan's, "A Manual for a Small Downtown" (2001, 5-6), offers a short list as to why downtown should revitalize to once again become a prominent and important role in the city:

1. It will improve the image of downtowns
2. Makes use of existing building
3. Develops a sense of community
4. Provides residents with retail and service centers

5. Increases employment
6. Expands tax bases
7. Prevents the reoccurrence of urban sprawl and abandonment
8. Keeps dollars in the community
9. Programs and assistance is always available

This list highlights the benefits of revitalizing a downtown community. It is also crucial to make sure that the town has residents that are committed to these efforts.

Revitalization attempts are long term commitments that require a substantial amount of time and effort, however according to Shields and Farrigan, it is a worth while investment.

4.7 Where to start?

In addition to the benefits of a city choosing to revitalize their downtown, it is also important to understand where to start. According to Shields and Ferrigan (2001), before the revitalization process starts it is mandatory to create an image that will rebrand the city. The image selected by the city should incorporate the image throughout their project. For example, in reference to my research, the city of Opelika, decided thier downtown vision would be “Rich in Heritage with Vision for the Future.” This vision will help future businesses and community residents understand what the town has to offer during their revitalization process.

The creation of partnerships is also needed for a downtown to be successful in its revitalization efforts. Downtown revitalization encompasses a wide range of activities (Robertson 1999) and requires the support of planning committees, chambers of commerce, and private corporations. As I described in Chapter 1, the downtown of Opelika uses a private corporation, Main Street Program, to assist with their revitalization

efforts. This leads into my next section that supports one of my arguments that cities of all different demographic features share similar revitalization methods.

4.8 Atlanta, Georgia

Opelika is restoring their downtown's sense of place. They have adopted the image of a historic and authentic railroad town in hopes of revitalizing their downtown. Cities and communities of all population densities are using the same techniques to revitalize their communities. To help support this argument I will use the example of the prominent global city Atlanta.

Outside revitalization projects, the geographical demographics of these two cities are distinctively different. Opelika and Atlanta both use private programs that play a strong role within their revitalization efforts. The private programs partner with the city to generate a vision or image that will help revitalize the downtown. These images are focused around rebuilding the community, history, economic, and safety. It is the use of these private programs that Opelika and Atlanta that help decrease the risk of investment loss during the revitalization projects.

Atlanta is the largest metropolitan area in the Southeast. The Atlanta Regional Commission defines the Atlanta metro area being comprised of ten counties. There are no large bodies of water, mountains or federal land holdings to limit the outward growth (Bullard 2000), so sprawl is rampant. Atlanta's current population estimates are approximate 4.1 million (Bullard 2000). While this growth has diversified and strengthened Atlanta's economy, it has also contributed to the decentralization and decay of the downtown area (McCrary and Kundall 1997).

Authors such as, Saskia Sassen (1991, 1994) and John Friedman (1995) have examined the importance of large cities as key command and control centers. These control centers should be located within the downtown spaces. They should serve within the interlocking globalizing dynamics of financial markets, service industries, corporate headquarters, and other industries such as: telecommunications, media, transportation and commerce (Friedman 1995). Thrift (1995), finds that global cities need to reassert their local power and centrality. Over the years, Atlanta has opted revitalize their downtown in effort to turn it into to a globalized control center and to reestablish the sense of place within the downtown community.

Atlanta has attempted to bring the luster back to the downtown area on several occasions. In the mid 1980's, the downtown section of Underground Atlanta was the first revitalization attempt. Underground Atlanta is considered the oldest part of the downtown. Underground Atlanta was created after the construction of a system of viaducts that raised the street traffic to a second story. The first story, which would later be called Underground Atlanta was used as a service center. In the 1960's, the area was historically preserved and underground Atlanta partnered with a private firm. The firm was run by two Georgia Tech alumni and who formed the project Underground Atlanta Inc. (Shavin 1970). The original store fronts were restored to their original condition. Underground Atlanta was slowly transformed into an agglomeration of restaurants, bars and retail stores (Shavin 1970). Rapidly, Underground Atlanta starting pulling people back into the downtown area. Unfortunately, the revitalization project was ultimately unsuccessful as urban sprawl within the city was still pushing people to the periphery of the city. Underground Atlanta could not compete with the burst of outward growth.

In 1980, a second revitalization effort was made to bring people back into downtown Atlanta. Underground Atlanta was once again re-examined for revitalization. A vision was created to make Underground Atlanta the new center market of the city. This effort would hopefully rebuild their financial, entertainment, and cultural hub in the city center. Again the city partnered with several private companies to fund the project. Yet again, the revitalization failed. Low attendance and poor project planning aided in the project's decline. Presently, Underground Atlanta is in their third stage of revitalization in effort to rebuild the downtown (Underground Atlanta 2010).

There have, however, been successes associated with other Atlanta revitalization projects. Before the 1990 announcement of Atlanta winning the bid for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, the downtown was in complete decay. Hotels, event venues, residential housing, businesses and restaurants were physically deteriorating. Public and private companies funded the revitalization of downtown Atlanta to prepare for the games. New construction of entertainment and sporting venues, hotels, and restaurants were restored to support the visitors that the Olympics would bring into the downtown. The 1.7 billion dollars of privately funded investment ultimately saved the decayed downtown (Greiner 2009). According to the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce this was directly related to Centennial Park which was constructed for the Olympics. The park was the anchor for more than \$1.8 billion in hotels, office buildings and high-rise apartments built since the games (Greiner 2009).

In both Opelika and Atlanta, large corporations and private programs play a large role within the revitalization phenomenon. In addition to the private programs and corporations that had a strong hand in funding their Underground Atlanta attempts and

their preparation for the 1996 Olympic games, Atlanta is also partnered with large corporations to help fund their current revitalization projects. Atlanta and Opelika's landscapes are completely different. Yet, each city and others across the country is revitalizing their downtown spaces through similar practices.

4.9 Conclusion

The current economic crisis has started a new revitalization phenomenon within downtown areas of cities. In the nineteenth century, a shift in the population occurred from the rural spaces to urban spaces. For the first time the majority of the world's population began to inhabit cities. The downtown spaces of the city were the most densely populated. Before the automobile, everything that was important happened in the downtown space because all roads and railways led to the center of the city. Through technological innovations, such as the automobile, the downtown spaces began to decentralize. It was now possible for roads, railways, and beltways to lead away from the downtown space. This decentralization ultimately led to urban sprawl.

Urban sprawl resulted in businesses and residents moving to the periphery of the city. It also changed the landscape of the original city model. The city began to shift outward. Historically, the city's businesses were agglomerated within the downtown area. Urban sprawl helped create many additional functional regions, contributing to decentralization and the decay of downtown. Recently, decayed downtown spaces have become focal points for revitalization. Cities are now looking to rebuild and repopulate their downtowns.

It is important for cities to reverse the urban sprawl and revitalize the decaying downtown to help improve their economic status. Revitalization programs are intended

to strengthen the social, physical and economic value of a community's traditional central business district. This will create an economically strong center that supports the city's core and periphery spaces. Regionally, revitalization programs are being used. Cities, like Atlanta are partnering with private and corporate companies to help fund their projects.

The center of this research is focused on the revitalization project that downtown Opelika, Alabama is currently using. Opelika's downtown has always been in a state of economic crisis. Recently, the downtown area has felt the effects of globalization. In effort to rebuild their downtown community, the town has created a vision of being an authentic railroad town. Through community events, they are attempting to rebuild their sense of community by drawing upon the past. The next chapter will explore issues related to the commercialization of heritage.

Chapter 5: Literature Review Part II

5.1 Introduction

Opelika has transformed their downtown into a commodity by fostering a historic image that city planners and key leaders feel will promote businesses and restaurant investment in the area. The development of such an historic identity occurs through the promotion of a particular collective memory in which a shared past is reinterpreted to meet present needs.

The previous chapter focused on the emergence of cities and how urban sprawl led to decentralization of the downtown space. Eventually, to save their struggling economies, cities created revitalization plans. This thesis evaluates the public and private attempts to revitalize and create an historic downtown community. Therefore, this chapter will discuss the literature associated with the preservation and recreation of historic sites and events. These theoretical components will provide a scholarly context to assess whether Opelika has adopted a main focus of consumerism rather than historical accuracy.

5.2 Rebuilding a Community through Collective Memory

A community is shared space where there is a sense of attachment due to common values and beliefs. That space takes on a sense of place through shared personal experiences and memories and the sense of place it evolves in (Tuan 1977). The term

place then will be used to refer to a social space embedded with meaning and emotion (Cresswell 1996). Downtown historic Opelika has created a sense of community and place by building a community based upon history. The town is attempting to heighten their sense of place, by recreating a historic railroad town to help maintain its economic vitality and community.

A community is a group of people brought together by certain shared traits such as trust (Frazer 1999). A community is also characterized by people working together for the common good, united by ties of family and neighborhood and bound by a common language and tradition (Hubbard 2006). It is comprised of group of similar cultures that have come together to create a sense of belongingness. Communities draw people together within a given location (Cohen 1985). These shared spaces help develop a sense of place and help develop a socially networked place. This new found sense of place then provides the impression that shared values have boundaries.

Opelika is a relatively small town with a population around 25,000 residents. A downtown community, like downtown historic Opelika presents an outlet for all residents to share and publicly express shared values. These interactions enable people to commit themselves to one another and create a social fabric (Beem 1999). Many people today do not view the immediate local area in which they live as shared community, but rather only a network of social relationships (Bott 1957). The link between people and place is weak. This situation allows residents to stay within their private spheres at home, but then enter an interconnected public sphere within their community when they choose.

Members may create memories that form the basis of how a community should be preserved. The memories represent and foster shared practices that have been passed down and eventually form a sense of place that helps keep the community active (Bellah 1985). Downtown Opelika has been built around these assumed memories of an historic past. P. Shackel (2001) wrote,

Towns develop a collective memory by molding, shaping, and agreeing upon what to remember, although this process may not always be consciously planned. This collective memory becomes public when a group has the resources and power to promote a particular past. These histories mask or naturalize inequalities through material culture, such as memorials, museums, and the built landscape. (Shackel 2001, 655)

Collective memory is a selective memory premised upon social power that can reconstruct cultural landscapes.

Emerging from the collective memory, the image of a railroad town has helped fashion Opelika as a sellable historic commodity. Businesses, restaurants and residents want to be a part of a historic community. A resident of the historic railroad town explains, “I love living within history, Opelika has a great feeling and it is amazing to be a part of such a strong past.” (Opelika resident 2010). This sense of history the resident feels is the part of history that Opelika has opted to brand. Within this thesis I argue that specific memories of Opelika are used primarily to address downtown economic decline by the commoditization of place.

5.3 Communities being Built Around Consumer’s Needs

To find a truly unique community today that is different from all others, may indeed be impossible to find. In the post modern era, the world of markets, media and neo-colonial economies— “historically authentic community distinctions were fading and

more similar to looking more inauthentic, these new communities were complete with a McDonald's and Starbucks on every corner" (Cheng 1987, p. 5). Consumerism was once based on the premise outdoor periodic markets where consumers would purchase goods and services based on the quality. Eventually, outdoor markets began to be replaced by indoor stationary stores where consumers could purchase products throughout the year. Americans were began to see their common heritage defined by goods and leisure rather than by historical figures. Spending became a form of national citizenship and luxury. With this new ideology of consumerism, explicit political and civic language, images, and practices that equated voting with buying shaped common understandings of consumption (McGovern 2004).

Concurrently, downtown general "mom and pop" stores were being converted to department stores. These department stores focused on the mass consumption of products rather than product quality (Zukin 2004). Consumer demand for mass amounts of new products were driving merchants to innovate new concepts and ideas (Horowitz and Muhon 1998). This movement toward greater consumption of commercialized goods was driving American communities away from preserving their historic past and placing greater emphasis upon capitalism. People were leaving their private spheres within their homes to envelope themselves within the mass consumption of goods and services. America's economic power was in the hands of the consumer.

Historical communities today are being reconstructed around the commercialized needs of the consumer. For instance, the town of New Salem, Illinois has increasingly become a tourist town based on the history of Abraham Lincoln. The town though has relinquished its historic authenticity to better serve the tourists paying to see the historical

replications of the town. Restrooms, park benches, gift shops, paved sidewalks and air conditioned facilities were added to accommodate the tourists rather than abiding by the historical authentic facts of the town's past (Bruner 1994).

Consumers are often influenced by corporations when it comes to their consumption choices (Schein 1997). Consumers can be manipulated by aesthetically pleasing places that encourage their purchases. The market is continually in the process of altering the array of products available within the network of consumption (Schein 1997). A successful business or community seeking to grow will continually base their physical space around the consumer's taste.

This thesis researches the historical authenticity of Opelika's downtown development efforts. By creating this sense of historic place is Opelika adopting their true past or the demands of capitalism and commercialism? This leads me to discuss the notions of historical preservation and authenticity.

5.4 Historical Preservation and Authenticity

Historical preservation has become a popular means by which communities attempt to market themselves. Historical preservation itself is the act of protecting buildings, landscapes, or artifacts that have a historical significance. The Advisory Council of Historical Preservation (ACHP) believes that communities seek this path because they "desire a tangible sense of permanence and community, or to know about and embrace America's heritage in a direct and personally meaningful way" (ACHP 2002). Communities are also dedicating themselves to historical preservation because of

economic reasons, they believe that the creation of historical places enhance the quality of life within the community and generate income as well.

Until the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the Federal government was often blamed for the removal or loss of historic resources. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (amended in 2006) provided that the Federal government would become a partner to communities rather than an adversary (U.S.Congress, House 2006, 16.U.S.C 470). Under this act the federal government is to provide encouragement to communities and help them in support of their historic preservation goals. In 1997, the city of Opelika formed the Historical Preservation Commission which had similar guidelines and expectations as the Federal Historic Act. It was created to help stimulate, protect, preserve and provide for the local historic business districts and neighborhoods.

Both National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and the efforts of Opelika's Historical Preservation Commission of 1997, also draw attention to the interpretation and maintenance of authenticity in historic communities. This term authentic describes something genuine and that acquires historic truth. Edward Bruner (2004) writes that for a community, resource or any tangible item to be historically authentic it must positively answer four questions:

1. Does it have verisimilitude; meaning is it credible and convincing?
2. Is the authentic simulation correct?
3. Does it still have originality?
4. Is it completely accurate?

This list will be used to help me evaluate Opelika's practices. Historical authenticity can be tied to collective memory. Meaning, people choose to remember certain facts and elements of the past but only represent within authentic historical landscapes what they find worth remembering (DeLyser 1999, Lowenthal 1985). Through the act of collective memory we may in turn eliminate the accuracy that would define an authentic historic landscape.

Richard Schein (Schein 1997, 672) writes that: "Historical veneration (respect), preservation, and a quest for architectural authenticity in the United States is very popular." This historical preservation movement therefore, has tended to emphasize the preservation of highly respected places; such as, Monticello and Williamsburg. This movement was the beginning of towns preserving their past to create a historical presence within their communities.

Ashland Park, Kentucky also represents a fully functioning residential community trying to balance the demands of mass consumerism with historical preservation. Ashland Park is a suburb in Lexington that has created a shared set of ideas, memories, and feelings that bind a people (community) together through historical preservation efforts directed toward their homes (Schein 1997, Meinig 1979). Public efforts allowed it to become a federally registered historical district in 1986 (Schein 1997).

Ashland Park is regionally and internationally recognized for its historically authentic architecture. Designed from the 1910s to the interwar era, the architectural patterns include California bungalows, American foursquares, Colonial Revivals, and

Craftsmen style homes. The planning of this highly acknowledged community is locally determined through local preservation groups, neighborhood associations, and real estate agents and maintained by the Ashland Neighborhood Association (Schein 1997). The constant local regulations of the Ashland Park community provide the residents with the rules for preserving the aesthetic historical authenticity of the community. Ashland Park provides a potential framework for examining how the historic downtown of Opelika is being recreated. .

Another study that will shed light on Opelika's downtown preservation is DeLyser's (1999) research on the historical preservation of the ghost town Bodie, California. DeLyser studied how communities are historically authentically preserved to create a sense of historical past to for tourists. In contrast to Ashland Park and Opelika, Bodie is no longer a town. As an historical park Bodie has been redesigned to provide a glimpse into the United States Western past. The historic reconstruction of the town was shaped by collective memory and consumerism (DeLyser 1999). When the California Department of Parks and Recreation began to restore Bodie, they decided that they wanted it to resemble a "ghost town." They did not take into consideration the true historical events and characteristics of the community because the most important consideration was that the town have a "western" feel that would match visitors expectations. Due to mass media, popular audiences have come to believe that all old western towns look like the "ghost towns" that are portrayed in movies rather than the living, vibrant places they may have been. True historical authenticity was replaced with the commercialized memory of a "ghost town." Artifacts were strategically placed throughout the town to give Bodie a more "historically authentic" tourist feel. Bodie was

no longer attached to its historic past, rather it was set up to interpret what our society wanted to see and remember (DeLyser 1999). It was set up based on collective memory to make it more marketable to tourists.

5.5 Conclusion

Downtown historic Opelika has grasped all the elements of community, collective memory, mass consumerism and preservation to revitalize their downtown space.

Rebuilding a sense of place through community was an effect of urban sprawl.

Communities help bring people back together. It is a community's collective effort that can rebuild a sense of place. Cities are preserving their historic downtowns in attempt to save themselves economically. Historic downtowns are becoming commodities through the collective memories of the city's residents. The town's historic authenticity is being replakgnitjko5k9tyh7ced to help better market the downtown to future businesses and residents. This leads me into my next chapter which examines how Opelika has revitalized their downtown into a historic railroad town.

Chapter 6: Case Study: An Historic Railroad Town

6.1 Introduction

The Christmas season is a period of time full of family, shopping, traveling and faith. It is the time of the year where families join as one, businesses meet their annual budgets, airports are packed and delays are prominent. The westernized world has turned the Christian holiday into a period of mass consumerism and stress. Temporary markets are set up to sell seasonal goods such as Christmas trees, lights, garland, and decorations. The time called the “Season of Cheer” is now a season of stress. Yet, amongst this hustle and bustle, imagine being able to take a long pause and immerse yourself into a place of Christmas past. A place that makes you feel as if you have walked into the Main Street of the classic Christmas movie, “It’s a Wonderful Life.” This pause pulls you back into a timeless place surrounded by our perceptions of another time and place.

The historic downtown area of Opelika, Alabama has adopted this idea and transformed its city for one night to let people step back into history and walk the streets of a historic Christmas railroad town. This annual event provides a glimpse into how places might have looked during past Christmas seasons. For one night, the town is open for everyone to walk through the streets, while listening to carolers and watching a small train move up and down the streets. The downtown buildings are decorated with garland and lights to promote an aesthetic sense of a historic Christmas scene just like the old classic movies. Elaborate window displays are erected to evoke the feeling of an

authentic Christmas in a railroad town. Street vendors are located throughout downtown to provide hot chocolate and seasonal treats. In the middle of town, children are able to meet and get their pictures taken with Mr. and Mrs. Clause. It is a night dedicated to fostering a sense of place centered upon reinserting a small town community pride from the past into present time. For one night, Opelika reopens the doors to the past of a historic Christmas in a railroad town.

Christmas in a Railroad town is just one event that the downtown area of Opelika organizes for its residents. Other events include: Easter on the Square, Wine Trails, Farmers Markets, parades and dining and shopping experiences that offer year round opportunities for residents to gain a glimpse of the downtown community.

6.2 The Case Study

This thesis examines the revitalization efforts that the town of Opelika, Alabama is currently implementing within their downtown. The city of Opelika is located in east Alabama along I-85 and situated between Montgomery, AL and Atlanta, GA (See Figure 7).

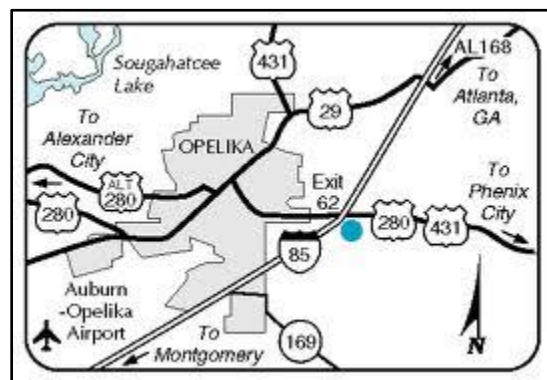


Figure 7. General Map of Opelika (Chamber of Commerce 2011).

Opelika is part of the Auburn-Opelika Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and according to Forbes Magazine (2008) was the 6th fastest growing small MSA's in the nation. In addition, it was declared #5 on the Top Ten Small Cities for doing business by INC Magazine (2008).

So, what makes this small town with a population of just 27,000 (US Census 2010) so popular? I would credit part of it to the recent revitalization process that the town has begun, to boost the town's economy. While part of this growth may be attributed to expanding retail and industrial parks at the periphery, the impacts of the changes taking place downtown should not be dismissed. In 1987, Opelika partnered with the Alabama Main Street Project, to start the process of revitalizing the downtown area into a historic railroad town.

This chapter primarily focuses on the partnerships and planning processes associated with the revitalization of the city's historic downtown. I began my research by examining how downtown Opelika turned their town into a commodity by creating a vision of a "historic" railroad town. My case study predominantly examines the elements of the revitalization and planning process of creating a sense of historical authenticity. Opelika has delimited six areas that contain a significant amount of historic resources as the focal area for their efforts: Geneva Street district, Auburn Street district, Railroad Avenue and Central Business District, Northside District, Opelika Manufacturing Mill Village and Pepperell Mill Village.

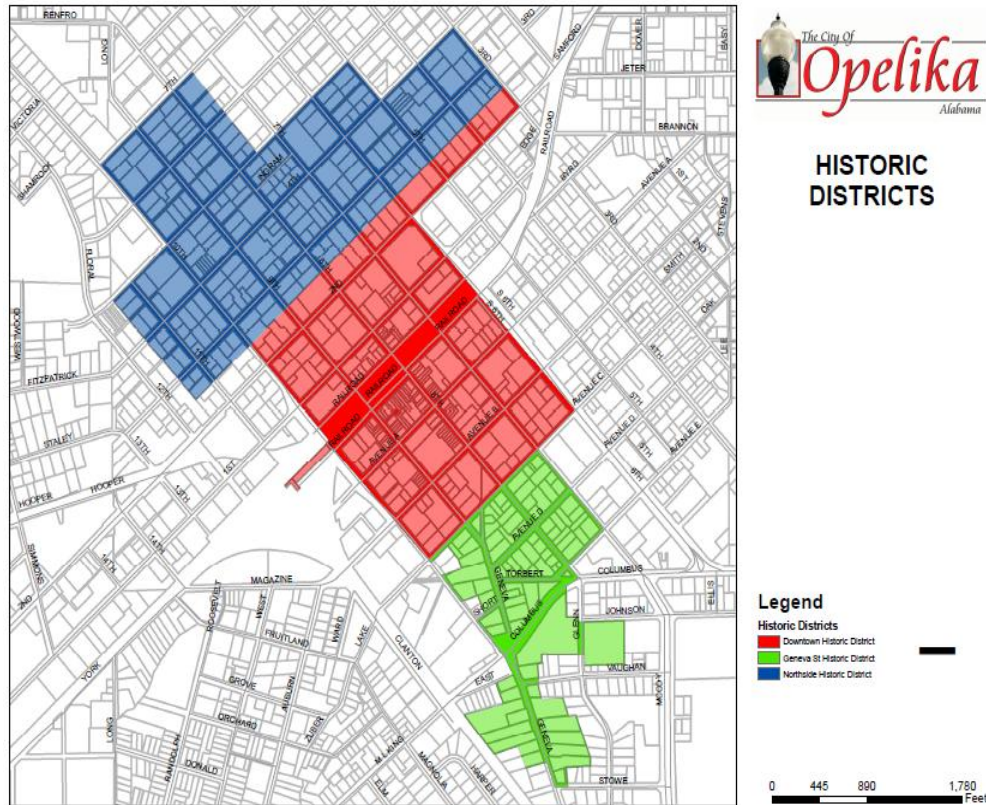


Figure 8. Downtown Historic District highlighted in red (Opelika Planning Commission 2011).

To focus my research, I only explored the downtown region of Railroad Avenue and the Central Business district, which is highlighted in red in the above illustration (See Figure 8). According to Opelika’s 2020 Comprehensive Plan (2011), Railroad Avenue and the Central Business district consist of the city's center and includes two major focal points, the railroad area through the district and the Lee County Courthouse located two blocks south of the railroad. This district is the primary target of Opelika’s attempt to reconstruct their downtown to look and feel like a historic railroad town from the 1920’s.

6.3 Opelika's Economic Development

Historically, Opelika has always been in a state of economic crisis, whether it was through war, charter issues or more recently globalization. For example at the beginning of the twentieth century, Opelika saw the arrival of its first cotton gin which became the town's starting point for becoming a textile community. Due to globalization and large industries moving to the developing world in recent decades, Opelika once again lost its major economic foundation. As a result, Opelika began formulating a new plan to bring money back into its community. Downtown historic Opelika has begun to preserve the historic appearance of its buildings to create a sense of place from the past. In 1987, in an attempt to create the impression of a railroad town and preserve its sense of place, Opelika partnered with Alabama's Main Street project. The Alabama Main Street project is a nationally recognized program for revitalizing downtown areas (Opelika Chamber of Commerce 2010). By partnering with the Alabama Main Street Project, Opelika received ISTEA (Intermodal Service Transportation Efficiency Act) grants to start the process of restoring and preserving downtown Opelika, with the two first projects being the original Lee County Courthouse built in 1896 located on South 9th Street (See Figure 9) and Opelika's Train Depot built in 1920 located on South Railroad Avenue (See Figure 10). By June 2010, the recreation and preservation of downtown Opelika was underway and continues to shape the historic community within downtown Opelika.



Figure 9. Lee County Courthouse: Before and After (Auburn-Opelika Tourism Bureau).



Figure 10. Left Picture: Train Depot before and after (Auburn-Opelika Tourism Bureau).

6.4 Creating a Historic Community

Throughout my research, I believed that historic Opelika had been built upon the theory of collective memory. I assumed that a few members of the community had used history selectively to address their present needs of rebuilding their community. The heart of downtown Opelika has always been identified as a railroad town, especially by its residents. Formal studies were conducted that led to the birth of the historic downtown

community ideal. The first studies were historic site inventory studies that were conducted in 1981 and later updated in 1989 (Gallardo 2011). This study resulted in formal historic descriptions of the downtown space and enabled the state of Alabama to provide guidelines to the city as to what it had to do to carry out their historic preservation (Gallardo 2011).

To gain the community's perspective of the downtown, in 1993, the city of Opelika Planning committee sent out over 8,000 surveys. Nearly, 1500 residents responded and 50 of these residents were personally interviewed to help formulate the city's vision of a historic railroad town (Sector Plan 1995). As a result of these surveys and interviews, the *Southeast Opelika Sector Plan: a Comprehensive Growth Plan for the Carver and Jeter Neighborhoods and the Gateway/Downtown Area* was created in 1995. This plan was presented to Opelika's city council by Soulin and Associates, Inc planning consultants. This led me to reconsider my original idea that the vision of a historic railroad town was not created solely through vision of a few key players but rather the collective memory of residents within the community.

The Historic Planning Commission was primarily concerned with the aesthetics and architecture of the buildings. Luis Gallardo, the commission development administrator, who is a liaison between the historical preservation commission and the city of Opelika, stated that, "Of course, we cannot deny the history of Opelika. I guess the only way we could show the true history of downtown Opelika would be to make all the windows bullet proof glass. We are more concerned with the physical characteristics of the historic railroad town" (Gallardo 2011). It is not purely Opelika's historical facts and events that drive the revitalization of historic railroad down, but rather the physical

characteristics of the buildings just being generally defined as historic in accordance with basic guidelines of the historic commission. For instance, if a building or object is at least 50 years old it could be considered historic. Due to this realization, I will initially focus on the physical characteristics of the town that have been used to help promote the town and increase the number of organizations that have a vested interest in making Opelika a historic railroad town.

6.5 Partnerships

In order for a revitalization program to be successful, it is essential for the city to create partnerships with national and local organizations (Robertson 1995). These partnerships generate a strong community. The Historical Preservation Commission was formed by the city of Opelika in 1997 to support the cultural and aesthetic heritage of the downtown (Opelika.org). The purpose of the Historical Preservation Commission is to (Gallardo 2011):

- Stimulate revitalization of the business districts and historic neighborhoods
- Protect and enhance local historical attractions to tourists and thereby promote and stimulate business
- Enhance the opportunities for federal or state tax benefits
- Provide for the designation, protection, preservation, and rehabilitation of historic properties and historic districts.

The Historical Preservation Commission and Chamber of Commerce has formed strong partnerships with several key players within the community to make downtown Opelika a vibrant historic railroad town.

The first organization is the Main Street Program. The Main Street Program is a National Trust for Historic Preservation program established in 1949. Main Street is a recognized private program that assists in helping decayed downtowns boost their economies through revitalization. Opelika has united with Main Street to create the Opelika Main Street Project. Opelika Main Street supports the downtown business community. It is considered the downtown historic community's own Chamber of Commerce. Opelika Main Street Project is a private program that uses a four point approach to revitalize downtown areas. These four points are organization, economic restructuring, design and promotion (Main Street 2010). The Opelika Main Street Project has a series of guiding principles that include a comprehensive approach, incremental projects, community involvement and a strong public/private partnership (Main Street Org). Opelika houses many smaller organizations that engage in strengthening these principles, such as Historic Possibilities and Envision Opelika.

A vital member of the community that adheres to Opelika Main Street's guiding principles is Historic Possibilities, owned by John Marsh. John Marsh was the first large scale developer in historic Opelika. Today, he is one of the most prolific downtown private developers. Gallardo (2011) said, "It is his attention to detail and historic guidelines that maintains the look and feel of downtown Opelika." Marsh is a significant component in Opelika's revitalization project because he buys abandoned buildings en masse and slowly restores their historic character. Marsh is also a prominent member in the community. He serves on several planning boards and is a member of Opelika's historical commission.

In addition to Historic Possibilities, Envision Opelika is a community based organization directed by Opelika's former and first female mayor Barbara Patton. Patton has always had a passion for preserving Opelika's historical past (Gallardo 2011). Envision Opelika is enthusiastic for restoring a shared sense of community back into downtown Opelika and is responsible for the compilation of Opelika's Downtown Development guide. Created in June 2010, this guide was developed to assist in furthering the revitalization of downtown Opelika by outlining recommended practices for the economic and physical redevelopment of the area (Development 2010). Envision Opelika is just one link in the community that makes Downtown Opelika successful in rebuilding their community.

It is through these strong partnerships that Opelika seeks to create a historic community. Through events organized by the Chamber of Commerce and other stake holders, downtown Opelika will continue to attract residents and businesses into the area.

6.6 Planning Guide

The city of Opelika has developed many strategic guidelines to assist in the downtown's revitalization program the help boost the city's economy. The most prominent plan was the *Downtown Opelika Development Guide: How Should Downtown Grow*, drafted by Envision Opelika. Envision Opelika originally created this guide to preserve and maintain Opelika's economy and their vision of heritage.

The guide appointed Opelika Main Street to be the leader of the downtown revitalization project. The guide did this for four reasons (2010, 2):

1. It is an existing public-private organization
2. It's current focus is strictly on downtown and not the broader community
3. It already has success in making downtown successful
4. The leadership role in common that Main Street organizations play in other cities.

The city of Opelika in partnership with Opelika Main Street had to promote the historic downtown in order to use it as a tool to boost the city's economy. Today, historical communities are being reconstructed around the commercialized needs of the consumer (DeLyser 1999). A comprehensive retail assessment was completed by Allaway Consulting to evaluate the current retail market of Opelika and identify issues that were impacting the growth of the downtown space (Development Guide 2010). This assessment concluded that there was a high demand for retail and entertainment facilities, however the downtown space needed to look more inviting. Thus, it was decided that it was vital to maintain the architectural historic character of the downtown space to make it more appealing to future businesses. This was completed by creating a guide that the building developers should in order to preserve the town's vision. It was also important to target residents into the downtown community by making the space more pedestrian friendly.

6.7 Revitalizing Downtown Opelika

Similar to Ashland Park described in Chapter 4, downtown Opelika is attempting to preserve the historically authentic architecture of their buildings, but the interpretation of what is indeed "authentic" is contested. As DeLyser's (1999) work reminds us, an authentic historic experience for visitors need not be true to historic fact. Opelika had

created a shared set of ideas, memories and feelings that they felt would bind people together through their historical preservation efforts and compiled them into their Design Review Guidelines (2010). These guidelines are used to (Design Review 2010, 3):

1. Help maintain the character of the District.
2. Improve the quality of growth and development.
3. Protect a property owner's investment by preventing undesirable intrusions such as theft.
4. Preserve the integrity (authenticity) of existing buildings.
5. Provide an objective basis for design review.
6. Serve as an educational tool for property owners, contractors, and designers.

Within this list, number four is the one I want to focus on for this example. It states that it is important to preserve the integrity (authenticity) of existing buildings. Take for example the neon light that borders one of the newest additions of the downtown space, the Irish Bred Pub. In 2007, the Irish Bred Pub submitted an extensive application to the historical commission of Opelika before they renovated their current location on the corner of 9th Street and Railroad Avenue. The neon light may not be historically authentic to downtown Opelika, but as DeLyser's research shows, it is close enough. The historic building provides enough of an authentic historic experience to provide the community with the sense of place the city seeks. While the design guide is constructed to handle issues similar to the neon light; the event also highlights the limitations of the historical commission which cannot (Design Review Guide 2010, 3):

1. Limit change or growth. They can only address the visual aspects of growth.
2. Control how space is used within a building. Only the publicly visible portion of a building or site is governed by guidelines.
3. Restrict. They can only guide.
4. Review ordinary maintenance or color selection.

Looking at this list, I point out number three, the design guide cannot restrict they can only guide. The Irish Bred Pub followed protocol and resubmitted a retroactive application for the neon sign. This subject became highly controversial issue around the neon light that glowed bright during the night. Because the review guidelines never covered neon lights and the closest guideline was over signage, the city had no explicit jurisdiction. The Historical Commission, researched whether or not neon lights were indeed appropriate to the selected 1920's era. After much research, the city found that neon lights were invented in 1920's; therefore, because they are older than 50 years old they are classified as historic (Gallardo 2011). As DeLyser (1999) and Bruner (1994) work suggests, Opelika has substituted historic authenticity with a perceptual authenticity that will meet the expectations of consumers.

The primary goal of revitalization efforts is to improve the livability and quality of life in a community by expanding and attracting employment, shopping and social activities (Fields and Farrigan 2001). This helps downtowns raise the profile of their cities and create a new image. To help raise of the profile of downtown Opelika, the town has recently passed a new overlay zone within the downtown district. This zone is called the "Hospitality Overlay District." This overlay zone is intended to provide an area in downtown Opelika with a special classification for unique mixed use of commercial and residential development. The Hospitality Overlay District will be characterized by its focus in a variety of entertainment and art venues, retail, offices and restaurants. This overlay zone includes only one block of the Downtown Zoning District. This block is the south side of Railroad Avenue between 8th Street and 9th Street. This zone is a special designation to provide initiatives for businesses and

residents. It provides tax incentives for new businesses, extended dining hours and alcohol service and it allows for tables to be located on the sidewalk. The new zone and the Irish Bred are examples of how Opelika has compromised historical authenticity to attract businesses and enhance the weak economy by appealing to consumers.

6.8 A “Great Street”

The city of Opelika, especially the Historical Preservation Commission is focused on preserving the physical aesthetics of the downtown. The architectural character of the buildings is representative of the plain style of a 1920’s railroad town (Comprehensive Plan 2011). Building forms are simple, with flat roofs and projecting cornices. Opelika is seeking to return to the appearance of those simpler times as other historic communities are slowly fading away. Elsewhere mom and pop stores are rapidly being replaced with department stores and monster malls. Window shopping is becoming an idea of the past, but not for Opelika.

New Urbanism planning has re-established the idea of compact, mixed use and pedestrian friendly towns (Greenberg and Dock 2003). Opelika has incorporated principles of New Urbanism into their design process by creating a downtown community where their residents can park their cars and walk down the elevated sidewalks succumbing to their consumer needs while enjoying the historic atmosphere that surrounds them. The program, “Keep Opelika Beautiful,” while following the guidelines has helped Eighth Street to stay beautiful and functional with the placement of shrubberies, benches, and light fixtures. It has been labeled as the “Great Street” in Opelika. A Great Street is a street that embodies the character and vitality of the community and contributes to the economic vitality of the

city (Greenberg and Dock 2003). Eighth Street consists of businesses, restaurants, and retail shops. Compliance with the Design Guidelines attempts to maintain this “Great Street’s” perceived historic character. For instance, the Design Guidelines suggest respecting the original design of the building by preserving and retaining architectural details and character. This is completed by repairing rather than replacing historic details (Design Guide 2010), which Eighth Street follows. The figure below illustrates an example of how to preserve a historic building (See Figure 11).

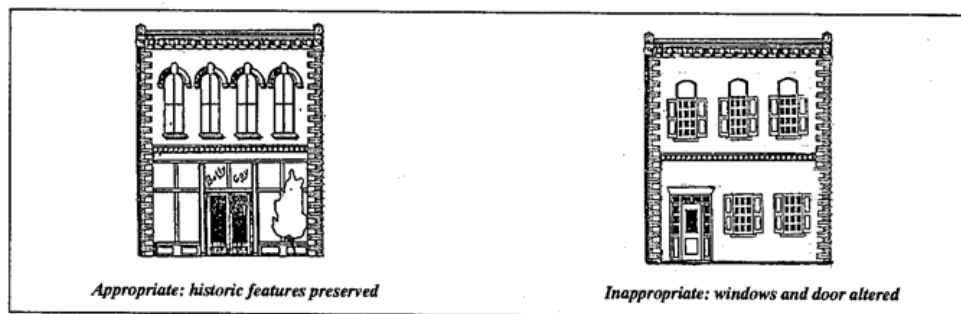


Figure 11. Preservation of historic details criteria (Design Guide 2010).

In addition to the preserving the original character of the buildings it is also important to save any distinct features they might have, such as a canopy. Presently, it is uncommon for Commercial buildings to have canopies, but when they exist they add a distinctive feature (Design Guide 2010). The original materials, details, shape, outline and roof should be retained. It is inappropriate to enclose canopies or balconies, because it takes away from the original purpose of the structure (See Figure 12).

New Urbanism suggests that you can rebuild a community’s sense of place by making the physical aesthetics of the buildings uniform. Downtown Opelika complies with this theory by employing color schemes that will compliment neighborhood

buildings and coordinate façade elements in an overall composition (Design Guide 2010). Through keeping the original architecture of the buildings, saving distinct features such as canopies and balconies and adhering to a historic color scheme the downtown will be able to create enough authenticity within the downtown to conceive a historic downtown space.

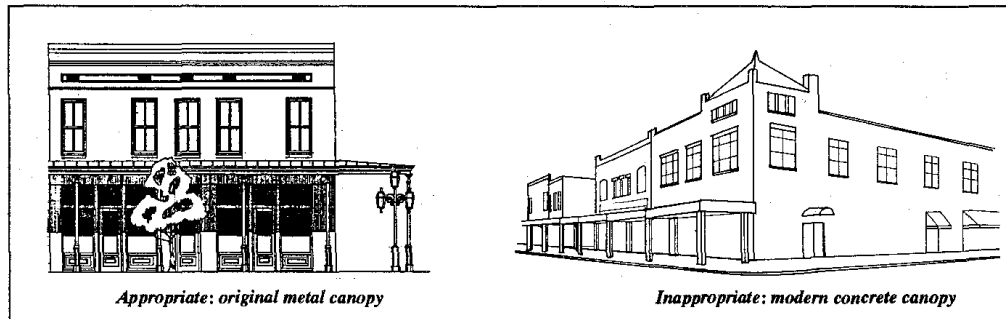


Figure 12. Canopy design criteria (Design Guide 2011).

Conclusion 6.9

Downtown Opelika is a compact area that makes up 15% of the city. This area is the home of many family oriented businesses, boutiques, antique stores, hair salons and restaurants. In collaboration with key organizations within the community, the downtown has initiated a planning process to unify the historic downtown community. This uniformity is an effort to create a shared common space and experience based on the collective memories of the community. The heart of the community is a railroad town based on their past. The railroad was a major contributor to the existence and growth of the city. Yet, this case study shows that the physical characteristics of the town are not built solely on the history of Opelika, but the idea of being a historic town.

The overall planning process is attempting to create the image of a historically authentic historic railroad town. However, this case study shows that the town is not

historically authentic, but authentic enough to meet the needs of contemporary consumers. The town does provide the sense of place to rebuild their community. In collaboration with key players within the community, the downtown has initialized a planning process to unify the historic downtown community.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Conclusion

Historically, downtowns were centralized spaces that were used as economic and cultural hubs. As cities began to sprawl, downtowns began to decay. Currently, many cities are revitalizing their decayed downtowns in effort to make their cities more viable. The small downtown of Opelika has joined this revitalization phenomenon to rebuild their community and economy. This thesis has attempted to understand downtown Opelika's current revitalization process.

The theoretical foundation of this project is based in the ideas of New Urbanism and cultural geography's engagement with collective memory. New Urbanism was a product of urban sprawl. One of the goals of New Urbanism was to rebuild downtown communities. Downtown Opelika has formed strong partnerships with community organizations to help rebuild a historic downtown community. Although, Opelika has not formally declared themselves New Urbanists, the planning efforts carried out by these partnerships had New Urbanist concepts implicitly embedded within them. One of the concepts that New Urbanism emphasizes is the maintenance and restoration of uniform aesthetics among buildings to enhance the feeling of a shared community (Talen 2000). Accordingly, downtown Opelika's design guidelines recommend that building tenants keep the original structural characteristics and choose paint palettes similar as their neighbors. Opelika has also incorporated the "Great Street" concept into their own

Eighth Street. In accordance with New Urbanist principles, a Great Street should preserve the historic character of the downtown while maintaining the economic vitality of the city. Downtown Opelika has planned a community around the collective memories of a historic railroad town.

New Urbanism draws from the idea of rebuilding a community from collective memory. Collective memories, along with community, historical preservation and historical authenticity have been explored by cultural geographers. I chose the examples of Ashland Park, Kentucky and Bodie, California to highlight geographers' engagement with these ideas. Ashland Park could be considered a historically authentic residential community. Their planning methods are designed to maintain the historical authentic features of the outside of the homes. In contrast, the preservation Bodie emphasizes historical authenticity within the framework of a tourist-only community. Since Bodie is a non-functioning town, it only has to meet the demands of paying customers. Due to this, they are able to decide what historically authentic elements they want to include within this Western ghost town. As DeLyser (1999) suggests, the town is not historically authentic, but it is authentic enough to represent what paying customers expect to see within a western ghost town. By drawing upon collective memory, downtown Opelika has created a town motto referencing a historic railroad town. However, the complete physical characteristics of the buildings are not historically authentic. Emphasis has been placed only upon building facades. This is impossible because Opelika has to accommodate for the technical modernizations and the expected shopping experience of customers that are essential when running a successful business.

Downtown Opelika has to be viable to attract businesses and customers.

Downtown Opelika has created a set of guidelines that are used to protect the original historic characteristics of the buildings. These guidelines are only used to advise businesses. For example, the guidelines suggest not adding any modern day features to the outside of the buildings. Yet, when it comes to the internal structures of the buildings there are no guidelines, allowing businesses to incorporate contemporary décor, conveniences, and practices into their daily operations.

Historical authenticity is also defined by the historic replication of past activities (Bruner 2004). Recreating historically authentic elements in a town is impossible to do when attempting to create future growth. But you can apply the perceived image of a historic downtown theme that allows for today's activities and commerce. This thesis can lead towards further study. Future study might seek to understand how the physical and cultural elements of a community can attract the right home owner, business and customer to continue the renewed growth patterns initially established by these practices. For example, the Ashland Park homes on the outside are preserved to look historically authentic, but to attract residents to live there the rules have to allow for modern conveniences, which are not historically authentic.

From a physical standpoint Bodie is not historically authentic. The replication of the ghost town and how it should look is designed around how a tourist wants to see a historic authentic ghost town. Whereas Ashland Park seeks to attract year round residents through structural restrictions, Bodie desires consumers along. So the physical historic authenticity takes a back seat to create a ghost town including dilapidated,

leaning structures that are built around the customer's expectation of a westernized ghost town characterized by mass media.

Downtown Opelika has partnered with several community organizations to create a downtown historic railroad theme. These organizations have drafted guidelines for downtown property owners to follow. These guidelines are used to keep the original physical architectural characteristics of the buildings but little else.

As I concluded within my case study, downtown Opelika is not historically authentic; rather the downtown is built on the idea of being historic. To be historically authentic the town would have to be identical to the 1920's era. This would not be viable to downtown Opelika it would be too restrictive for businesses including bars, restaurants, consignment stores, antique stores and hair salons.

For Opelika to be viable it has to attract businesses and paying customers. So Opelika has to create flexibility within their design guidelines that make it easy for a business to function within the historic railroad theme. The question going forward then asks, if the town needs to continue to be viable and grow; what historical structural elements have to exist and what spatial implications could arise such as; displacement and segregation? And can their guidelines of a themed historic railroad town attract businesses that are built upon attracting all customers? Meaning, can the downtown support more than the traditional antique stores and restaurants? Could downtown Opelika support county administrative functions that could help return other central public functions to the downtown, such as banks, post offices, dry cleaners that are key to

go beyond just shopping and entertainment businesses to rebuild their sense of community?

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Appendix: List of Revitalization Programs in Opelika

Opelika Chamber of Commerce: A private organization of Opelika's local businesses who work together to promote and protect common interests in the city of Opelika.

Envision Opelika: A community based organization that is enthusiastic for restoring a shared sense of community. It is directed by Barbara Patton that is responsible for downtown Opelika's development guides.

Historic Possibilities: A private developing company owned by John Marsh. Historic Possibilities is a major contributor to the downtown development.

Historical Preservation Committee: A committee formed by the city of Opelika in 1997 to support the cultural and aesthetic heritage of the downtown.

Keep Opelika Beautiful: A public program used to keep Opelika clean buy landscape design and holding events to the city's residents.

Main Street Program: A national Trust for Historic Preservation program established in 1949. It assists in helping the revitalization of downtowns.

Opelika Historic Planning Commission: A department within the Opelika Planning Department. It focuses on keeping the historic integrity of the city accurate.

Opelika Main Street: A private program that was developed in 1987, through partnering with Main Street Program.