

THE WORK OF EDMUND H. HARDING AND THE RESTORATION OF HISTORIC BATH

Edmund Harding's earliest associations with historic Bath came about as a result of the ministerial duties of his father, the Rev. Nathaniel Harding. As rector of St. Peter's, Washington, the elder Harding was also responsible for serving the small congregation at old St. Thomas, Bath, some sixteen miles from his parish church. These duties brought him regularly to Bath, especially on Thursday evenings; and even as a boy Edmund accompanied his father on these trips, frequently driving the buggy in later years after his father's health had begun to fail.⁷² These early trips to Bath were never to be forgotten by Edmund Harding; and over a period of many years, long after his father's death, Edmund's interest in North Carolina's oldest town grew into a passion to see it restored, preserved, and properly interpreted.

It is of interest and significance to note that Edmund Harding was also connected with St. Thomas and Bath through the ministry of his father's brother, the Rev. Israel Harding. This kinsman had, as a young man, been a farmer and carpenter at nearby Chocowinity, but he had later prepared for the Episcopal ministry and subsequently served numerous congregations in Beaufort County during a career spanning thirty-five years. His service as rector at St. Thomas came during the horrendous and pivotal years, 1857-1866.⁷³

It is, in fact, quite probable that Edmund Harding's ancestral ties to Bath dated back to its very formation and initial settlement in the early years of the eighteenth century, although this has not been established with certainty. Mention has already been made of the fact that Edmund H.

Harding was directly descended from one Stephen Harding, who, according to family tradition, came south from Providence, Rhode Island, settled near present-day Washington, and followed the occupation of shipwright.⁷⁴ But there were almost certainly ties of kinship between this Stephen Harding and the early Bath shipwright and prominent citizen, Thomas Harding. Thomas may even have preceded Stephen Harding southward from Rhode Island to settle in the area which is now Beaufort County. He was one of nineteen men to sign a letter to Governor Alexander Spotswood of Virginia, pleading for protection against the "inhuman barbaritys" under which Bath was suffering during the Tuscarora War of 1711-1715.⁷⁵ He was also one of four commissioners appointed by the General Assembly in 1715 to resurvey the infant town of Bath and, indeed, served as a member of the General Assembly in 1715-1716.⁷⁶ Of even greater interest, perhaps, are the several documentary references to his activities in Bath as a shipbuilder. In various deeds of the 1710s and 1720s, Thomas Harding was repeatedly referred to as a shipwright or ships carpenter.⁷⁷ One document of special interest was an agreement of 8 January 1710 between Harding and colonial Governor Thomas Cary:

I Thomas Harding Ship Carpenter hath covenanted bargained and agreed with the aforesaid Thomas Cary, Esq., to build him at his landing in Bath, Team Creek, one sloop, forty six foot by the keel, eighteen foot by the beam, and eight foot in the hold, the said Thomas Harding hereby obliging himself to do all the carpenter's work belonging to the said sloop workmanlike.

And the aforesaid Thomas Cary Esq. for his part doth hereby bargain with the said Thomas Harding ship carpenter to pay unto him for the said sloop, one hundred and forty Pounds, the which payment is to be made, the one half in corn, pitch and tar, and to find him and his men meat, drink and lodging, during the time of building the said sloop, and to find plank, iron, pitch, tar, cask and all other necessaries for the building of the said sloop, and to bring them to the Landing, where the said sloop is to be built, and to find horse and cart, with help to cart the same to the Landing; to which performance of each and every the aforesaid articles, the parties aforesaid have herunto bound themselves in the penal sum of two hundred pounds, in witness whereof they have herunto set their hands and seals the day and year abovescriben.⁷⁸

It is apparent that Thomas Harding not only built and repaired ships but, at least on occasion, sailed and traded in their cargoes as well. In a deed of 20 November 1719, Thomas Williams, "Mariner late of Philadelphia," granted power of attorney to his "trusty and loving friend Thomas Harding, Master of the Sloop Thomas and John." Only one week later another Philadelphian, Samuel Perez, granted power of attorney to, in this case, his "trusty and loving friend Thomas Harding of North Carolina, Merchant."⁷⁹ Again, there is no certainty that Thomas Harding of Bath was related to Stephen Harding and hence to Edmund Harding, but the probability is very high.

Organized efforts to restore and preserve the decaying properties of historic Bath had begun in the mid-1930s with the formation of the Bath Association Restoration Committee, formed in cooperation with the Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina and the North Carolina Historical Commission. But little had been done over the course of the next two decades except to partially restore St. Thomas Church and keep the Glebe House (or Williams House) in reasonably good repair.⁸⁰ The limited success of these early restoration efforts had resulted largely from a limited vision and inadequate public support. It would fall to Edmund Harding to supply what these previous efforts had lacked through his energy, influence, and dedication.

Although Edmund Harding had been fond of and interested in Bath since accompanying his "preacher daddy" there as a boy, it was not until after the death of his first wife in December of 1954 that he wholeheartedly took up the work of its restoration. Over the course of the next fifteen years, this work and Edmund Harding's name would become virtually synonymous.

On 7 March 1955 the Beaufort County Commissioners directed the formation of a committee to study the prospects of gathering historical data and establishing a county historical society. Edmund Harding was one of five men appointed to this committee. In little more than two months this appointment

led to his election as president of the Beaufort County Historical Society at its first meeting on the 12th of May. He was to hold this position for the rest of his life. On 24 June 1956 a meeting was held at St. Thomas, Bath to formalize the structure of the society, adopt its bylaws, and elect its board of directors.⁸¹

In a closely related development of May 1955, Harding was asked by the mayor of Bath, Mr. B. A. Brooks, to act as temporary chairman of a committee to plan a pageant for Bath's upcoming 250th anniversary. On the 24th day of the same month, at a meeting attended by sixty people, acting chairman Harding was able to present ambitious tentative plans for a two-day celebration to be held in October at a projected cost of \$4,000. In close conjunction with this meeting and with Harding's tentative plans, a bill was introduced in the North Carolina General Assembly calling for a commission of ten men and a state appropriation of \$2,500 to help organize and finance the celebration.⁸² On 23 July, following the passage of this bill, Governor Luther H. Hodges appointed Edward Harding to the newly created commission; and there followed on 11 August a proclamation by the governor which acknowledged Bath's great historical importance to the state and designated October 1-4 as the period during which the 250th anniversary celebration was to take place.⁸³

Under Harding's tireless and enthusiastic leadership, this celebration was to set in motion the long and ultimately successful drive to restore historic Bath. Open houses, exhibits, a dance, church services, a mock pirate invasion, a concert, picnics, and, of course, speeches, all played their parts in the anniversary celebration as it was finally held; but the climax of the celebration, and far and away its most important and successful event, was the fabulous and highly-acclaimed production of Edward Harding's

historical pageant, "Queen Anne's Bell," which took as its theme Queen Anne's gift of a bell to the fledgling colonial town and the continuing significance of that bell throughout the community's long history. Indeed, the production of "Queen Anne's Bell" was perhaps the most celebrated event ever to occur in Bath or Beaufort County as a whole; and it is almost beyond question that such an extravaganza could not have occurred without Harding's leadership and tireless labors.

It is remarkable enough that a single man could conceive, write, and produce a pageant such as "Queen Anne's Bell" in so short a period of time; but Edmund Harding also attended personally to countless details of casting, financing, costuming, staging, promotion, ticket sales, and myriad other things. Moreover, he was able to enlist the interest, assistance, and participation of many men and women of influence, who would continue to lend their support to the restoration of Bath long after the production was over.

When, after all the planning and hard work, "Queen Anne's Bell" was finally performed on the evening of 4 October 1955, it featured a cast of 500 people, including members of the North Carolina Council of State, Governor and Mrs. Luther H. Hodges, and numerous other notables and dignitaries. Music was provided by a choir of sixty-five voices, an organ, an orchestra of sixty pieces, and a Marine band of seventy-five pieces. Harding himself played the central role of town crier and narrator. The production was staged in a specially constructed outdoor amphitheater on the shores of Bath Creek and only a short distance away from old St. Thomas Church--permanent home of the bell itself.

In all quarters, the production of "Queen Anne's Bell" was greeted with transports of enthusiasm. Governor Hodges, Senator Sam J. Ervin,

Secretary of State Thad Eure, Congressman Herbert C. Bonner, and numerous others of both high and low station wrote letters of extravagant congratulations. "Superb," "marvelous," "amazing," "brilliant," and "magnificent" were among the adjectives commonly used; and several correspondents expressed the opinion that "Queen Anne's Bell" had surpassed "The Lost Colony" as both entertainment and spectacle. Moreover, the production had generated an enormous amount of interest and enthusiasm for the work which lay ahead. It is indicative of Edmund Harding's style and flamboyance that "Queen Anne's Bell" and the other activities comprising Bath's 250th anniversary celebration cost slightly more than \$17,000--far exceeding the original estimates. When all bills had been paid and all accounts settled, the gala celebration had netted only \$654.22; but the purpose of the celebration had been amply fulfilled, and the movement for Bath's restoration had been launched.⁸⁴

Although the impetus for Bath's restoration came in October of 1955 with the anniversary celebration and especially with the production of "Queen Anne's Bell," progress during the early years consisted mainly in the formulation of long-term plans for property acquisition and development. On 11 January 1957, William S. Tarlton of the North Carolina Department of Archives and History made a preliminary historical survey of Bath as a basis for formulating such plans, with the more immediate purpose of identifying which of Bath's early structures yet remained. Whether by design or coincidence, Tarlton's preliminary findings comport closely to the historical program which is still being developed. Six structures were found to have potential for the type of historical program contemplated by Edmund Harding and others: St. Thomas Church, the Globe (or Williams) House, the Bonner House, the Buzzard Hotel, the Palmer-Warsh House, and the Van der Weer House, which

at the time of Tarlton's survey was referred to only as "the early house on Ferry Point at the north edge of town."⁸⁵ Because some restoration work had been done at St. Thomas Church since the mid-1930s, and because the historic structure was under the control of the Diocese of East Carolina, Edward Harding and his followers turned their attention and energy toward the Palmer-Marsh House--still Bath's premiere attraction. In time, their efforts would achieve success.

In 1959, largely as a result of Edward Harding's hard work and influence, the North Carolina General Assembly established the Historic Bath Commission "to acquire title to historic properties in or near the Town of Bath, and to repair, restore or otherwise improve such properties, and to maintain them until the work of the Commission shall be terminated." The commission was originally to consist of fifteen members appointed by the governor, with the mayor of Bath, the chairman of the board of Beaufort County Commissioners, and the director of the Department of Archives and History serving *ex officio*.⁸⁶ At the first meeting of the Historic Bath Commission, held in Raleigh on 21 October 1959, Edward Harding was unanimously elected chairman; and he took this occasion to present specific goals toward which the commission should work: acquisition and preservation of the Korner House and the Buzzard Hotel; the construction of an Indian village at Bath, with bona fide Indians in residence at least during the summer; develop Flan Point, the reputed site of Blackbeard's home; publish new promotional material on Bath; repair the exterior of the Palmer-Marsh House (acquired during the previous year); and publish a sequel to Herbert Paschal's A History of Colonial Bath (1955).⁸⁷ In the fullness of time, some of these goals would be achieved and others would not; nevertheless, Harding would serve as chairman of the Historic Bath Commission for the remaining eleven years of his life, and he would do so with conspicuous distinction.

Although the members of the Historic Bath Commission were at least nominally appointed by the successive governors of North Carolina, it need hardly be said that Harding was consulted or at least considered regarding changes or additions to the commission's membership. Throughout the years of his chairmanship, Harding hosted many of the commission's meetings and less formal gatherings in his own home, and he both led and participated in virtually all of its various activities and endeavors. When, for example, he was reappointed chairman of the commission by Governor Dan K. Moore in 1962, he was also serving as chairman of three of the commission's five committees.⁸⁸

Of all the projects which the Historic Bath Commission undertook with Harding's leadership, none was more important than the restoration of the Palmer-Marsh House. This had been a project of the highest priority since the success of "Queen Anne's Bell" in October of 1955. The 250th Anniversary celebration had made a profit of only \$654.22; but interest had been generated and other funding followed. Indeed, even before the anniversary celebration Edmund Harding had begun to make discreet inquiries concerning the purchase of the grand but sadly dilapidated structure. In a letter of 21 July 1955 to Charles Wade of the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, Harding made what may have been the first written inquiry in the matter:

I am informed that you and your family own the Marsh house in Bath. In connection with the celebration of Bath's 250th Anniversary, it has been suggested that we try to purchase the Marsh House and restore it. Of course, we could not expect to raise the money to buy it if the price was too high.

I thought before I said anything to the ladies of Bath, that I would write you and find out if the family would sell the house and if so at what price. I am told that the house is in bad repair and this would certainly be a good time for you to sell it if you and your family are interested, because it is probably the last chance to make an appeal for its purchase.⁸⁹

Finally, in 1958, three years after Harding's initial inquiry and one year before the actual formation of the Historic Bath Commission, the Beaufort County Historical Society purchased the Palmer-Marsh House and four acres of surrounding land for \$31,000.⁹⁰ The money had come from the County of Beaufort, the North Carolina General Assembly, the North Carolina Society for the Preservation of Antiquities, private donations, and from numerous fund-raising projects inspired and supervised by Edmund Harding. Indicative of Harding's influence and ability to generate public support was his successful effort to gain financial backing from the Beaufort County Commissioners--an effort which resulted in a donation of \$7,000 out of an initial promise of \$10,000. Harding himself recalled his solicitation of the county in the following manner:

In 1955 after Bath's 250th birthday party we had about \$500 left after all the bills were paid . . . and we found it was possible to obtain an option on the Marsh House. . . . The County Commissioners were meeting the next Monday and we asked for a chance to tell our story.

A call was sent out to the citizens of Bath to come to the meeting. People from Washington and all over Beaufort County came. Mr. Forbes sent 50 from the Bath school. The meeting had to be changed to the courthouse to accommodate the crowd. We told our story. . . . The Board of Commissioners were impressed by the courthouse filled to overflowing. They were interested in our proposition . . . [and] promised us \$10,000.⁹¹

Once acquired, the long, arduous, and enormously expensive task remained of restoring and furnishing the Palmer-Marsh House. In this work the Beaufort County Historical Society was joined by the Historic Bath Commission immediately following the latter's creation by the General Assembly in 1958. The house had been altered drastically since its construction by Michael Costach in the 1740s and the subsequent periods of residence by Robert Palmer and his son William; but awakened interest in the colonial heritage of Bath would finally lead to its complete restoration and furnishing.⁹²

Funds for this work came from the State of North Carolina, the Richardson Foundation of Greensboro, private donations both large and small, and from numerous fund-raising projects including parties, shows, band concerts, turtle races, and the sale of fountain pens and cypress shingles. Harding himself described the often hand-to-mouth efforts which at last achieved success:

We started to restore the house without funds, without an architect, without blueprints, but with Donald Carrow as master carpenter, we went to work. We never knew where the week's payroll would come from but . . . the treasurer never failed to pay off.⁹³

In 1958, the same year in which the Falser-Marsh House was acquired, the Beaufort County Historical Society also began to show an increasing interest in the purchase and restoration of the Bonner House. Unfortunately this house was ensnared in a web of legal complexity and its several owners were demanding \$30,000--far more money than was available on the local level. When, during the following year, the Historic Bath Commission was formed by the General Assembly, the purchase of the Bonner House stood high on the list of its goals; still, the asking price continued to pose a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. Moreover, it was well recognized that the acquisition of the property would be merely a start in the work to be done. For the house required extensive restoration and repair.

Very early in 1960, however, after several months of negotiations by Edward Harding and others, Mrs. Oscar F. Smith, her daughter Mrs. Roy Charles, and the Oscar F. Smith Memorial Fund, all of Norfolk, Virginia, contributed \$75,000 toward the purchase, restoration, and furnishing of the Bonner House. This money was given in memory of Mrs. Smith's deceased husband, Oscar F. Smith, a Beaufort County native who had felt a special fondness for Bath throughout his lifetime, and who had been a personal friend of Edward Harding.

In separate transactions of January and February, 1960, the Bonner House was finally obtained for \$30,000; and during the next two years the major phases of exterior and interior restoration were completed, always under Harding's close supervision and with his encouragement and leadership. Even after the major phases of restoration were completed, the tasks remained of furnishing the house, reconstructing its kitchen, and landscaping the grounds. These things too were accomplished under Harding's watchful eye.⁹⁴

Finally, on 5 May 1962, after several years of patience, expense, and extremely hard work on the part of Edmund Harding and many others, the Palmer-Marsh and Bonner houses were formally opened to the public. In a triumphal letter to the members of the Historic Bath Commission of 26 March 1962, Harding announced the upcoming opening by paraphrasing one of his heroes from history: "As General Robert E. Lee once said, 'after four years of arduous service marked by unsurpassed courage and fortitude,' two houses in Historic Bath are to be opened to the public."⁹⁵ Senator and Mrs. Sam J. Ervin, Jr., Congressman and Mrs. Herbert C. Bonner, Mrs. J. M. Broughton, and Justice and Mrs. William B. Rodman were among the dignitaries who participated in the opening ceremonies and festivities.⁹⁶ During the previous month, Edmund Harding, always heavily dependent on the services of local citizens and volunteers, had issued a personal plea for 500 women to act as hostesses and guides for three hours each month. Of course, nowhere near this number came forward, but Harding was never guilty of setting his goals too low. Beginning on 6 May, the day following the opening, there was to be a charge of \$1.00 for adults and 50¢ for children for a tour of the two houses, with a visit to historic St. Thomas Church included for no charge.⁹⁷ By 10 June it was reported that already more than 2,000 people had visited the two houses.⁹⁸

Throughout the 1940s, when so much of the restoration work at Bath was being carried on under Edward Harding's leadership, Harding and others were keenly interested in the strong possibility of former Indian habitation in the area. Specifically, a determination was needed on the question of whether an Algonquian village should be reconstructed to represent the Secotan of the late sixteenth century. Indeed, in July of 1941 the Beaufort County Historical Society went so far as to purchase a Negro cemetery lot near Hardy's Point as a possible site for the reconstruction.⁹⁹ In the early months of 1945, Edward Harding and Congressman Herbert C. Bonner were even able to induce a wealthy Texan and former North Carolinian to donate \$10,000 for the proposed Indian village project.¹⁰⁰ During the summer of 1946, Harding and others made a trip to Jamestown, Virginia, in order to view the Indian village which had been reconstructed there; and at the meeting of the Historic Bath Commission on 3 October 1946, plans were presented for a partial reconstruction which would include a dwelling house, a burial house, a palisade, a lookout post, and several other features, the whole of which was to cost an estimated \$10,000. It was, in fact, reported at this time that the area of the proposed reconstruction had already "been cleared, dirt hauled, leveled, and seeded."¹⁰¹

But the Indian village project had never received such encouragement from the North Carolina Department of Archives and History, for strong doubts remained concerning the authenticity of an Algonquian reconstruction at Bath. At last, in March of 1948, a thorough archaeological investigation was conducted to determine whether such a reconstruction could be justified by surviving evidence, and the results of this two-week survey finally put the project to rest. It was found that very little evidence remained of Indian occupation, that the few Indian materials found gave no indication

of prolonged occupation, and, finally, that the identification of Hardy's Point as the site of Secotan was "impossible."¹⁰² The ultimate abandonment of the Indian village project was one of only a few major disappointments for Harding in connection with his work at Bath, for he had supported the project from the outset and always believed that its completion would have added greatly to Bath's ability to attract, interest, and educate visitors.¹⁰³

It has already been mentioned that some restoration work had been carried on intermittently at St. Thomas Church since the mid-1930s; nevertheless, Edmund Harding always regretted that he, the Beaufort County Historical Society, the Historic Bath Commission, and later the North Carolina Department of Archives and History were not able to play a more active role in restoring the historic little church and presenting its history and significance to the public. Still and all, Harding was appreciative of the work accomplished at St. Thomas under the leadership of the Rev. A. C. D. Noy, and on Sunday, the 19th of November 1967, he joined with others in observing a day in the Rev. Noy's honor.¹⁰⁴ Though Harding was not in a position to spearhead the construction of the library building at St. Thomas, it is known that he and the Historic Bath Commission favored its construction on the site chosen by the Rev. Noy and the St. Thomas Restoration Committee.¹⁰⁵ It is also known that Harding was pleased by the restoration and furnishing of the Glebe (or Williams) House--work which had nearly been completed by the spring of 1969, due largely to the generosity of Mr. Sam Jones of Ocracoke.¹⁰⁶

As early as February of 1960, Edmund Harding was interested in reconstructing the old courthouse and jail which had stood in Bath during her brief period of prominence as a colonial port and seat of government. In a letter to members of the Historic Bath Commission at that time, he requested their authorization to spend a small amount of money on related historical research:

I would like to ask you to O.K. the expenditure of \$100.00 to do some research work in the courthouse. There is a lawyer here who is very good and is not particularly busy and I think would do us a most valuable job of digging up what information there might be in the records of Beaufort County. My idea is to let him search the deeds to see what we can reconstruct of the village in those early days.¹⁰⁷

By the spring of 1962 Harding's interest in the courthouse and jail was reaching a high pitch, and he went so far as to ask North Carolina Supreme Court Justice William B. Rodman to "preside over the committee" to be established for this purpose.¹⁰⁸ Not content with securing Justice Rodman's promise of assistance, Harding was even thinking at this time of launching a statewide campaign involving the whole of the legal profession: "There are approximately 6,600 lawyers in North Carolina and I am going to try to interest them in doing this job of reproducing the Bath Court House."¹⁰⁹

In the final event, the courthouse and jail house projects had to be abandoned due to a paucity of historical and architectural information and the consequent lack of support from the Department of Archives and History. In Harding's mind, however, they were "still in the hoping stage" as late as the fall of 1963.¹¹⁰

Another of the relatively few projects which proved disappointing was the proposed acquisition and restoration of the so-called Buzzard Hotel, one of the six structures identified in 1957 as being of potential value in the overall scheme of historic Bath. Even at this early date it was apparent to the trained eye that the Buzzard Hotel was essentially a badly deteriorated "mid-nineteenth century structure with extensive twentieth century alterations." But the possibility existed that "the skeleton of an earlier eighteenth century house" might be contained within its core.¹¹¹

By early 1959 Harding had begun his efforts to purchase the Buzzard Hotel; but during the ensuing years obduracy and frustration plagued these efforts

and at last thwarted them altogether. The property was under the joint ownership of three women, one of whom was an occupant; and their asking price of \$16,000 was seen as an outrageous one in light of the structure's condition and its dubious historical value. After several years of trying unsuccessfully to acquire the building, Harding was almost ready to throw up his hands:

I thought we were getting somewhere with the Buzzard Hotel and two of the women are ready to sell but the price they talk about is just pure crazy. The lot is 100 feet wide and goes all the way through the block. Unless something is done within six months the old house is going to fall down. They talk about \$16,000. Before Ruth Cannon ~~Mrs.~~ Charles A. Cannon⁷ died she told me to offer them \$8,000 for it. It is worth about \$4,000. ¹¹²

The Buzzard Hotel did not quite "fall down" within six months as Edmund Harding had predicted in frustration; but the old house, long unoccupied, is now a complete shambles, and what might have been a restoration project has become a Kufus-ridden eyesore.

By February of 1967 it had been decided to restore the small, late-nineteenth century structure to the rear of the Korrer House which Harding and others had dubbed the "Fisherman's Cabin." Indeed, Harding had been working for some time to clarify the troubled chain of title to this property. The cost of restoration was projected at around \$2,500 and the work was to be directed by the Department of Archives and History.¹¹³ This structure had not been one of those identified in 1957 as an impressive remnant of Bath's historical heritage, and the plans regarding it were never grandiose in any respect. Harding and others simply wished to restore and interpret the structure for what it was --the home of a late nineteenth century resident of Bath who, like several of his fellow citizens, made his living by a combination of farming and fishing.¹¹⁴

In August of 1963, four years before restoration of the "Fisherman's

Cabin," Edmund Harding saw through to its completion the building of "Harding's Landing," a 250 foot pier jutting out into the waters of Bath Creek. This pier was constructed and named in honor of Thomas Harding, Bath's first known shipwright and, as has been noted, a probable relation of the Stephen Harding from whom Edmund Harding was descended. But this pier was intended to promote Bath's future as a tourist attraction as well as commemorate its past, for it was meant to serve as a point of arrival for those visitors who preferred to come to Bath by water rather than by land. Here again Edmund Harding's ingenuity and imagination produced an attractive and useful result.¹¹⁵

As early as January of 1857 and the preliminary historical survey of Bath at that time, attention was drawn to "the early house on Ferry Point at the north edge of town"—the structure now known as the Van der Veer House.¹¹⁶ This house had originally been constructed in the 1750s, but had been drastically altered in the 1920s by its owner during that period, Charles W. Bowen. Among these alterations were the conversion of the original gambrel roof structure into a full two-story dwelling, the addition of two single-story wings, and a major alteration of the interior floor plan. When Charles Bowen died in February of 1960, the house was inherited by his daughter, Ruth Bowen Smith, and during the next several years Mrs. Smith expressed a growing willingness to donate the house to the Beaufort County Historical Society, with the provision that it be moved to a different location. On 15 July 1968 Mrs. Smith conveyed the house to the society; and at a special meeting of the Historic Bath Commission one year later, on 24 August 1969, the final decision was made to proceed with its relocation at an estimated cost of \$9,500.¹¹⁷ The site upon which the Van der Veer House now rests was obtained by the State of North Carolina on

2 February 1970, seven months before the death of Edmund Harding; but the house was not actually moved to this permanent site until December of that year, some three months after his death.¹¹⁸ Since that time the protracted work of restoration has been going on with the idea in mind of dedicating at least a portion of the house to his memory.

Only barely did Edmund Harding live long enough to witness the completion of another of his dreams for Bath--an adequate visitors center for what he hoped would be an ever increasing flow of tourists. For years the only visitors center in Bath was a diminutive frame structure which had been built about 1920 and had served as a blacksmith shop.¹¹⁹ Money for a new visitors center was authorized by the General Assembly in 1967, but a good deal of delay and discussion ensued as to exactly what sort of building it should be. In the event, Edmund Harding was a good deal disappointed in what became the final product, even though he had favored and actively supported the idea of a new visitors center from the outset.¹²⁰ In a letter of 25 April 1968 to the members of the Historic Bath Commission, Harding rather reluctantly asked for their approval of the building plans which accompanied the letter, "even though," he acknowledged, "they are just not what we might have expected."¹²¹ Harding's disappointment was given more than passing mention in a letter written by a good friend shortly after Harding's death:

As you know, my life-long and good friend, Edmund Harding, . . . now deceased, was really sick about the kind of building that was built for the Visitors Center. Edmund and Brother Nee were invited and did attend the breaking of ground for the new Visitors Center and Edmund said next thing he knew--there was the building which looked like a bus or railroad station which was not in keeping with the restoration of Bath and I agreed with him.¹²²

The new visitors center was dedicated by Governor Robert Scott on 17 October 1970, almost a month to the day after Edmund Harding's death. It is ironic

and rather sad that the last major project to be completed at Bath during his lifetime should have been a disappointment to him.

Before passing to a discussion of the general characteristics of Edmund Harding's work at Bath, some mention should be made of the several other specific projects and concerns which drew upon his time and energy there through the years. These matters, though rather mundane and undramatic, also played their roles in protecting Bath's past and in shaping its future.

During the late 1950s Harding expended a great deal of time and energy in seeing that a new bridge be built across Bath Creek and that neither the bridge nor the highway leading to it be located so as to intrude upon the historic areas of Bath. While intent upon improving the accessibility of Bath to visitors, Harding was also sensitive to the fact that Bath's quaintness and historicity were vulnerable to complete and rapid destruction if not carefully protected. In attempting to shape the course of events concerning the bridge and highway, he wrote numerous letters to decision makers and men of influence, including several to Governor Luther Hedges; and it is further indicative of Harding's style that when the new state bridge across Bath Creek was finally opened on 7 August 1960, he turned the event into a gala occasion, including a group of visiting dignitaries, a concert by the Washington High School Band and fund-raising activities which brought in approximately \$500.¹²³

As early as January of 1957, William S. Teriton of the Department of Archives and History had recommended that a building code and zoning program be established at Bath to insure the preservation of the quaintness and historical character of the town, especially of the Main Street and waterfront sections.¹²⁴ Harding too recognized the necessity of controlling the development of Bath, and with varying success he worked for the implementation of

measures which would make this possible. By May of 1958 he had already made inquiries among state officials as to how restrictive zoning might be instituted at Bath, and in the spring of 1960 he was again investigating its feasibility.¹²⁵ Finally, on 5 October 1964, largely at Harding's instigation, the Board of Commissioners of the Town of Bath passed an ordinance to cover the matter of historic zoning and the related formation of a Bath planning commission. This ordinance (no. 25) had as its stated purposes "to enhance the historical appeal of the Town through the development of appropriate settings and harmonious outward appearances of buildings," to preserve "the quaint, village-like atmosphere of the Town," and "to preserve the historical heritage of the Town for the pleasure, welfare, and education of its residents and tourists." On the very next day there was a meeting of the Historic Bath Commission in Raleigh at which Bath's mayor, Wilton Smith, formally announced passage of the ordinance to chairman Harding and the others in attendance.¹²⁶ Not long afterwards, ordinance 25 was used successfully in blocking the location of a proposed trailer park within Bath's historic area; and in October of 1966, at a meeting of the Historic Bath Commission, Harding stressed the importance of its continued and rigorous enforcement.¹²⁷ While this ordinance may not have been entirely successful in protecting Bath's historic character and village-like atmosphere, it was, nevertheless, an important measure and one for which Edmund Harding deserves a large amount of the credit.

Harding's concern for the historic character of Bath and for compatible design in new construction was also demonstrated in his successful efforts to influence the plans for the post office and A.B.C. store which now stand on the outskirts of the town. His efforts in behalf of appropriate colonial designs are especially evident in the case of the post office. Prior to its

construction, he wrote several times to officials in Raleigh; but he also took advantage of his friendships and connections in Washington, D.C. In a letter of 27 June 1946, for example, he made his wishes known to United States Congressman Walter Jones, who evidently had already been of assistance in the matter:

I was glad to see that you had secured a new post office for Bath and I was to be sure that you have in mind a suitable design for the building. It would be a shame to build a squat flat roofed building out of cinder blocks or the like when we are trying so hard to make Bath a show case.

Please let me know if there is anything I can do as Chairman of the Bath Commission to see that we get the right thing done.¹²⁸

During the next two years Harding secured the help and support of several other men in public life, including Senator B. Everett Jordan; and in 1948 the new post office at Bath was constructed according to a design which had received Harding's approval.

In 1962 Harding was instrumental in having erected a highway historical marker to the Palmer-Marsh House in Bath, and in 1968 he was also successful in securing markers to the Rev. Alexander Stewart and to Blackbeard.¹²⁹

It should be noted, with regard to Blackbeard, that Harding would like to have seen much more emphasis placed on the notorious pirate's association with Bath during its early years, not only because of its historical significance but also because its power to attract and fascinate tourists. At the meeting of the Historic Bath Commission in October of 1946, for instance, Harding announced that the Weyerhaeuser Company had almost been persuaded to donate five acres of land on Plum (or Teach's) Point, where the home of Blackbeard reputedly had stood. Harding further expressed the hope that boat excursions might be started to take advantage of the "great popular interest in Blackbeard."¹³⁰ In the event, these excursions were never begun, and Edmund Harding's hopes for a full development of the

Blackboard theme at Bath are still to be realized.

From the beginning there was a close relationship between Harding's work at Bath and his career as a professional speaker, humorist, and entertainer. On the one hand, he was often terribly busy with his constant traveling and numerous speaking engagements, so that too little time remained for the work at Bath. In a letter of 15 November 1961, for example, written while he was on the road and far from home, Harding alluded to the work which had been accomplished at the Palmer-Marsh and Bonner houses and to the conflicting demands on his time and energy:

I did the best I could and with the little knowledge of such things looked after the construction, labor and materials with very meager help. I have gone to Bath nearly every day that I was at home since we started in 1958.

.
Since I left home I have traveled 13,748 miles and have talked to 4,975 people. I'll be glad to get back and line up our annual meeting (Of the Historic Bath Commission,⁷ and get that behind me.¹¹¹

A subsequent letter of 9 June 1963 also conveys some sense of the pressures under which Harding frequently worked: "This morning I'm off to Jekyll Island, Ga., French Lick, Ind., Chicago, Virginia Beach, and Morehead City, N.C. and before I go I thought I would report on Bath."¹¹²

On the other hand, however, it was largely through his travels and speaking engagements that Harding was able to raise the money and create the widespread public support which made the work at Bath possible. Very frequently, regardless of the location or the audience, there were warm references to his home town, to Beaufort County, and to his hopes and plans for restoring historic Bath. Moreover, these references to Bath often elicited financial as well as morale support. In May of 1960, for example, Harding received a letter of thanks for a talk he had recently given to a Wilmington meeting of the Colonial Dames of America:

Your talk certainly popped up the 'old girls' and created a great deal of interest in historic values. I certainly hope that when the members get home they will not forget their enthusiasm and will respond with a nice check.¹¹³

Perhaps more surprising than the support expected from the "old girls" of Wilmington was the generous check for the restoration of Bath sent by a bourbon distiller of Anchorage, Kentucky, in response to the "humorous and scintillating talk" which Harding had recently given to the North Carolina A.B.C. convention in Virginia Beach.¹¹⁴

Occasionally Harding's talks were made before groups which were tailor-made to support the restoration efforts at Bath. On the evening of 4 October 1963, for example, Harding addressed a joint meeting of the American Association for State and Local History and the Society of American Archivists.¹¹⁵

It was also through his career as a humorist and entertainer that Edmund Harding gained the acceptance and friendship of men and women of wealth and influence—the sorts of people whose support was essential for a project such as the restoration of Bath. This had been readily apparent at least as early as October of 1951, when he was able to involve numerous prominent individuals from across the state in Bath's 250th anniversary celebration and the production of his historical pageant, "Queen Anne's Bell." Throughout the next fifteen years of his work at Bath, he carried on a voluminous correspondence with men and women from every walk of life, including those who had achieved prominence in religion, the arts, the preservation movement, business and industry, civic and charitable work, and politics. To attempt a listing of these individuals by name would be to subject both the readers of this report and its author to an excess of tedium. Suffice it to say that Edmund Harding was the sort of man who could ask his congressmen and senators to look after Bath's interest in the nation's capital; who could obtain sizeable grants and donations from foundations, industries, and individuals; and

who could often obtain direct and immediate action for the cause of Bath's restoration by writing brief and informal letters to the governors of North Carolina and the members of its General Assembly.

One example of Harding's influence and his unfettered willingness to challenge men and women to work for Bath can be seen in his formation of the so-called Committee of Fifty early in 1960. The very general responsibility of this group was simply "to help create interest, to make suggestions, to raise money, or do anything that would help with the work of the Bath Restoration." To each of the fifty prospective members whom he had selected, Harding wrote a form letter which both notified them of their selection and informed them that more precise instructions would follow suited to their individual talents:

On the back of this letter you will find The Chairman's Committee of Fifty that I have appointed, and on which I ask you to serve.

You will not have to come to any meetings unless you so desire, but I have appointed each of you for a special reason. There is some particular task I wish you to do, about which I will write you later.¹²⁶

Harding's ability to recruit and organize people for the benefit of Bath is well illustrated in a letter which United States Congressman and Beaufort County native, Harbert C. Bonner, wrote from Washington, D.C. shortly after a recent meeting of the Historic Bath Commission:

Yes, I really meant everything I said about you at Bath. In my lifetime I have not known any citizen in our hometown who has offered a greater contribution to the town of Washington, Beaufort County and our state than you. No one could have gathered together a more prominent and influential group of people than those assembled at the Historic Bath Commission meeting last week.¹²⁷

Perhaps the best illustration of the relationship between Harding's speaking career and his connections with those of political prominence is provided by a letter of thanks which he received from Governor Luther Hodges

following the former's bravura performance before the Southern Governor's Conference of 1959):

Dear Ed:

I am deeply grateful to you for your wonderful help in making the Southern Governors' Conference at Asheville such a success. Many people told me that your performance as a substitute cut shown anything our mutual friend Andy Griffith could have produced.¹³⁸

It was at Harding's instigation and under his influence, together with the help of Senator Sam J. Ervin, Jr. and others, that the Washington Committee for the Preservation of Historic Bath, N.C. was formed in the nation's capital in March of 1960. This select group of 50 Tar Heels and former Tar Heels residing in Washington, D.C. was headed by Mr. and Mrs. Fred W. Morrison, who generally hosted its meetings in their home. Through the coming years the Washington Committee promoted the restoration of Bath not only on the local and state levels but, at least to some extent, on the national level as well.¹³⁹ In any overall assessment of Edmund Harding's work for Bath, his influential connections, persuasiveness, and political astuteness should be taken into account.

Notwithstanding the charm and warmth of his personality and his considerable skills as an organizer and diplomat, it can easily be understood that one of the most difficult roles played by Harding during his work at Bath was that of coordinator and mediator. Harding was able to attract to the movement for Bath's restoration many people from every walk of life and from stations both high and low. All had energies and abilities to contribute to the cause; but personalities varied widely, responsibilities became confused, and egos and motivations clashed. Standing at the center of a potential storm was always Edmund Harding--unflappable and patient, yet enthusiastic and forceful. In a letter of 10 May 1962, for example, a mildly beleaguered Harding made a brief survey of the largely interpersonal

problems which currently faced him with regard to the Bath restoration

(name omitted):

We owe \$800 for that material which I told _____ to pay.
 Thanks again for everything and lets keep the ball going.
 _____ is mad at _____, _____ is mad at _____,
 _____ didn't like the way _____ talked to him and what
 did _____ say?!

Indeed, through the years nearly everyone connected with the Bath restoration in any way came to Edward Harding with their problems, both real and imagined. It was observed by one who worked closely with him for a long time at Bath that he was, from time to time, incumbered with "everybody's burden."¹⁴¹

On one occasion at least, the problems, burdens, and inevitable bickering and criticism inherent in so large an undertaking bore down even Edward Harding's usually indomitable spirits. A slightly self-pitying but entirely understandable letter of 18 March 1963 reveals that he had become temporarily fed up after eight years of shouldering so much of the burden himself:

Well, I have been to Bath most of the day trying to get the place cleaned up and I found no one that was willing to do one thing without being paid.

I hate to say it but I have had about enough of Bath. Nothing that I have ever done suits anybody and life what little I have left is too short for me to be worried over anything and I know a lot of things that I can do with my spare time that will be much more pleasant and profitable. I shall stay on the Commission but in the early Summer I shall ask the Governor to relieve me of the Chairmanship.

I shall try to bring to completion the things that I have started and I hope the committees that I have appointed will be able to accomplish much.

I shall always be interested in Bath and will do what I can for it but as Chairman of the Commission, I have had about enough.¹⁴²

Fortunately for the work which still lay ahead at Bath, Harding was not a man to put down easily a task which he had taken up, regardless of the aggravations and difficulties it entailed.

Throughout the early years of the restoration movement at Bath, the work of Edmund Harding and others was hobbled by the recurrent lack of adequate funding, despite their often imaginative and determined efforts to obtain it. No attempt can be made here to give a detailed accounting of all the monies taken in and expended on each of the several projects at Bath; but it must be pointed out that financial need and uncertainty were factors with which Edmund Harding was forced to contend--not only the procurement of adequate funding, but also the allocations of monies to the various projects and the accountant's nightmare of keeping accurate financial records. It is apparent that Edmund Harding, try as he might, was unable to keep a tight rein on expenditures and bookkeeping procedures: monies were transferred willy-nilly from one project's account to another; items were sometimes purchased by individuals without proper authorization; jobs were sometimes begun which could not be afforded at the time; checks were written and not recorded; and there was frequently a breakdown in communications regarding finances in general. Compounding the difficulties of finances and accounting were related and extremely complex legal and tax questions--questions which Edmund Harding was occasionally at a loss to deal with. In a letter of 4 June 1961, for instance, he hopefully sought enlightenment from the financial officer of the Historic Bath Commission, Dan Paul:

This business of making a return to the Tax Dept. is bothering me. Beaufort County Historical Society is the Tax Exempt organization that is to make the return, but the Beaufort County Historical Society has had no income as such but has received the money that you have handled. Were the checks that we received from the Smith Foundation to the Beaufort County Historical or Historic Bath.

I am confused and you are the brains of our outfit--please unconfuse me. 141

The restoration of Bath had been begun with only the small amount of

money remaining after the 250th anniversary celebration in 1955, and the records leave no doubt but that the movement during the ensuing years often proceeded on a hand-to-mouth and day-to-day basis. At times there was no clear idea of where the necessary funds would come from; but Edmund Harding somehow found the wherewithal to pay the bills and continue the work.

Through his popularity, his speaking engagements, his influence, and his persuasiveness, Harding was able to obtain several large sums of money from various sources over the years. The largest of these sums to be obtained at least partially through his efforts were several sizable appropriations from the North Carolina General Assembly, \$7,000 from the Beaufort County Commissioners, substantial challenge grants from the Smith Richardson Foundation of Greensboro, \$2,500 from the North Carolina Society for the Preservation of Antiquities, \$1,000 from the employees of Cannon Mills in Kannapolis, a \$20,000 donation from a wealthy Texan and former North Carolinian, and \$75,000 from Mrs. Oscar F. Smith and the Oscar F. Smith Foundation of Norfolk, Virginia. These and other large sums of money were of crucial importance in carrying the work at Bath forward. Also important, however, were the countless smaller sums which came from projects, activities, and contributions of every description, including the nickles and dimes donated by Beaufort County school-children. 144

In addition to seeking funds from the State Legislature, wealthy individuals, organizations, foundations, and the like, Harding was continually attempting to raise money through the distribution and sale of small items which either promoted or were directly related to the work which was going on at Bath. Especially in connection with the Palmer-Marsh House restoration, he sold cypress shingles which were then donated by their numerous purchasers for

use in the roof which was being built. In the summer of 1960, for example, he staged a concert in Bath by the Washington High School Band, to which the admission was ten shingles purchased at 50 each.¹⁴⁵ During this same year Harding was sending out ball point pens with a letter requesting each recipient to make a contribution of \$1.00 and to submit a list of 100 individuals in their communities who might be willing to make a similar contribution in exchange for a pen. Typical of Harding's optimism is the fact that he had purchased some 5,000 of these pens before beginning their distribution.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, in 1965 he was trying to arrange for the publication of a "Ye Olde Bath Town Cook Book," and he personally contacted business firms in an attempt to interest them in purchasing one of the ten full-page advertisements at a price of \$100.¹⁴⁷ About this same time he was writing to various manufacturers of commemorative plates in an effort to secure one suitable for sale in Bath.¹⁴⁸

Despite all his efforts to raise the money necessary to restore Bath, it was inevitable that a man of Harding's enthusiasm and dedication would wind up paying many expenses out of his own pocket, especially in connection with entertainment and public relations. Numerous gatherings, both large and small, were held in his own home; and Harding, always a gracious host, spared little expense in providing the food and drink necessary to make these gatherings successful.¹⁴⁹ Nor were Harding's personal expenses restricted to those for hospitality and promotion. Fleeting references make it clear that, from time to time, he also paid for such varied items as interest on bank loans, hostesses' salaries, and building materials, to say nothing of travel, postage, and telephone calls.¹⁵⁰ In a letter of 30 May 1960 to the members of the Historic Bath Commission, Harding revealed that he had just used some of his own funds to obtain materials for the Palmer-Marsh and Bower houses:

. . . this week I bought a late 1700s house in Edgecombe County that has enough weatherboarding and flooring to finish the Marsh House and what it will take for the Bonner House. . . . I paid for the Edgecombe County house myself as we do not have any money. . . . The cost of the house with its two big chimneys was \$500.00 but the man made a donation to Bath of \$300.00 so I had only to pay \$200.00. We are removing the material to Bath at once.¹⁵²

It is beyond question that Edward Harding's personal generosity came into play on numerous occasions during the course of the Bath restoration; but it is typical of Harding that his voluminous papers would contain only the most meager evidence regarding this aspect of his work.

In his unceasing efforts to promote the cause of Bath's restoration and to attract visitors, Harding wrote innumerable letters, held and attended countless meetings, conducted numerous personal tours, and wrote or instigated many newspaper articles across the state. Prior to the formal opening of the Palmer-Marsh and Bonner houses on 3 May 1962, for example, he had gotten in touch with the news bureau of the North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development, the Raleigh News and Observer, and other papers, to make certain that the event would be well publicized.¹⁵³ Also in conjunction with the opening of the two houses, Harding personally contributed a series of eleven articles to his hometown paper, the Washington Daily News, with these articles containing a great deal of information on the history of Bath and the movement to restore it.¹⁵⁴ In 1964 he participated in the taping of a radio show concerning Bath; and during that same year and again during the following year he took part in two television shows on Bath, the first produced by WTNH, Washington and the second by WUNC, Chapel Hill. Both were seen widely across the state.¹⁵⁴

Although Edward Harding had a broad general knowledge of the history of Bath and Beaufort County, he was forever trying to gain more detailed know-

ledge on specific topics of historical interest. Moreover, he was always willing to assist others in their historical research and to share with them what he had been able to learn. It has already been pointed out that he had a recurring interest in the courthouse and jail which stood in Bath during the colonial period, and that in April and May of 1962 he personally contributed a series of newspaper articles concerning Bath's history and the plans for its restoration; but Harding's historical inquiries and sharing of information extended far beyond these things. Late in 1961, for example, he was writing to the Raleigh headquarters of the North Carolina Masons, asking whether any evidence existed of a chapter of Masons in colonial Bath.¹⁵⁵ Earlier, in June of 1958, he was corresponding with the British Museum in London, and with the Lord Mayor of Bath, England, in an attempt to assist Mrs. Ford S. Worthy's research on the early connections between the English town and its colonial namesake.¹⁵⁶ In 1960 he was again corresponding with the British Museum, on this occasion requesting two copies of the Sauthier Map of Bath done in 1769.¹⁵⁷

It is apparent that Edmund Harding received numerous requests for information from visitors and others interested in Bath. More important, he was often the source of information or encouragement for those who were writing books or articles in newspapers and magazines on the subject.

Herbert Paschal's *History of Colonial Bath* issued from the press in 1965 as a direct result of a decision by the newly formed Beaufort County Historical Society to see that a history of colonial Bath be prepared and published in time for the 350th anniversary celebration in October of that year.¹⁵⁸ As president of the Beaufort County Historical Society and prime mover behind the anniversary celebration, Edmund Harding must be given a great deal of credit for the appearance of this work—still the best source

of information on colonial Bath. Similarly, in 1961, he was influential in the Beaufort County Historical Society's decision to sponsor publication of C. Wingate Roof's Beaufort County: Two Centuries of Its History.¹⁵⁹ In May of 1946 the historian Robert E. Lee consulted with Harding during the course of researching his scholarly study of the pirate Blackbeard; and during the following year Harding was prevailed upon to read the manuscript, several years prior to its eventual publication.¹⁶⁰

Just as Edward Harding occasionally sought assistance with historical research during his work at Bath, so too did he seek assistance on a broad range of things relating to the restoration of Bath. Much of the requisite surveying, for example, was done quickly and free of charge because the request for the work came from Harding.¹⁶¹ Much of the legal work--the title searches, the preparation of documents, and the like--was also done without charge or with nominal charges, because the attorney was supportive of the restoration of Bath and a close friend of Harding.¹⁶² Nor did Harding seek advice and help only from friends and acquaintances. Early in 1961 he was corresponding with the resident director at Mount Vernon concerning the proper procedures for repairing and restoring eighteenth century plaster.¹⁶³ At about this same time he was also corresponding with administrators at Colonial Williamsburg, asking for the loan of an architect to assist with the design and installation of the main entrance doors of the Palmer-Marsh House.¹⁶⁴ Harding was continually in search of appropriate materials for use in the early restoration work at Bath--appropriate flooring, paints, brick, weather-boarding, shingles, and the like. Later, when the major phases of exterior and interior restoration were complete, he was in frequent correspondence with furnishings experts in Raleigh and Old Salem and with antique dealers as far away as Florence, Italy, in an attempt to obtain appropriate furnishings and appointments.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, during the years that Harding was associated

with the restoration at Bath, he sought technical assistance on virtually every facet of the work, from archaeology to draperies. Harding was not a man to claim expertise where he lacked it; and he was neither too proud nor too shy to ask for help when he needed it.

In going through the voluminous records and correspondence kept by Edmund Harding through the years of his work at Bath, one is amazed by the number and variety of the details which he felt obliged to attend to personally--these things in addition to the larger concerns which have already been discussed. These smaller concerns, for example, included keeping records of the number of visitors at Bath and where they had come from, questions of insurance and personnel, the availability of food and refreshments, the operation of a gift shop and tea room, security measures, landscaping, and general housekeeping and maintenance. To have supervised and monitored all the various facets of the work at Bath would, in itself, have been more than enough to tax the time and energy of the average individual; but Edmund Harding somehow managed to meet this responsibility while, at the same time, meeting the obligations of his continuing career as a speaker, humorist, and entertainer.

Despite the enormous demands on his time and energy, however, Harding was seldom too busy to recognize the contributions of others or to perform small but meaningful acts of personal kindness. When, for example, Mrs. Oscar F. Smith died in November of 1962, he received the news in Houston, Texas; and he immediately wrote a letter of unmistakable tenderness and sincerity to Mrs. Smith's daughter, expressing his heartfelt gratitude for her mother's contributions to the work at Bath and the great sense of loss which her death had brought him.¹⁶⁶ When Mrs. Charles A. Cannon passed away three years later, in December of 1965, Harding took the occasion of the

next meeting of the Historic Bath Commission to deliver a touching eulogy to her memory and an appreciation for the many things she had done for the restoration of Bath.¹⁶⁷ Nor were Harding's expressions of gratitude and consideration bestowed only upon the wealthy and influential. In the Christmas greetings which he sent to all members of the Historic Bath Commission on 14 December 1964, he spent nearly the entire text of the letter explaining how Bath resident Donald Carrow had injured himself in a fall while doing carpentry work on one of the restored houses, and suggesting that money be sent to help defray his hospital expenses:

I thought it would be a nice thing to do for Christmas to send him a little money. If you will make the checks payable to me, I will deposit them in his name and send him a list of those who helped him.¹⁶⁸

In a subsequent letter to a single correspondent, Harding was pleased to report that the Christmas gift to Carrow had been deeply appreciated: "Christmas Eve day I carried Donald Carrow \$300 and you never saw any soul as grateful in your life."¹⁶⁹

Although this paper must concern itself primarily with Edmund Harding's historical interests and preservation activities at Bath, it should be noted that he was, to a much lesser extent, also involved with other sites and other projects, particularly in eastern North Carolina. In his hometown of Washington he was largely responsible for saving the old Beaufort County Courthouse, which had been slated for destruction. There is now, within this courthouse, an Edmund Harding Room dedicated to his memory.¹⁷⁰ Harding was also involved in efforts to preserve historic homes and other properties along Washington's waterfront—a waterfront which is now partially included within the local historic district.¹⁷¹ He was active in restoring at least one historic cemetery in Beaufort County, and in restoring and preserving old Trinity Church, Chocowinity, where his uncle, the Rev. Israel

Harding, had preached for many years.¹⁷² From time to time he also contributed newspaper articles on the history of Washington and Beaufort County, in addition to those specifically concerning Bath.

Outside Beaufort County, Harding was interested and active in the restoration of Hope Plantation in Bertie County, home of Governor David Stone, at least to the extent of writing letters, agitating, and making speeches in behalf of its restoration.¹⁷³ In the early 1960s he was also involved in initiatives to preserve and restore historic properties in Pasquotank and Currituck counties, especially the Gregory House near Elizabeth City, on behalf of which he wrote several letters to members of the General Assembly.¹⁷⁴ At least on occasion, Harding gave advice and information to those outside Beaufort County who wished to establish historical and preservation groups of their own. In the summer of 1962, for example, he was trying to assist members of the Swansboro Historical Association in their attempts to establish a group similar to the Historic Bath Commission.¹⁷⁵ For several years he served as a member of the Governor Richard Caswell Memorial Commission, albeit without much apparent satisfaction or sense of accomplishment. Indeed, this commission's long-time failure to actively pursue its goals prompted Harding to candidly express his frustration to Governor Terry Sanford:

Dear Governor:

Your letter about re-appointing me on the Richard Caswell Memorial Commission would have been answered sooner but I was out on the road. I shall be very glad to serve but I have done very little on the Commission, in fact I can't see that any of us have done anything.¹⁷⁶

In 1963 Edmund Harding became a charter member and vice president of the North Carolina Coastal Historyland Association. This organization, with the support and cooperation of the North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development and the North Carolina Motor Club, had as its

purpose the restoration, development, and promotion of various historic sites in the eastern part of the state. As a prominent member of this organization, Harding was able to promote the work at Bath, while at the same time working for the development of other historic sites in eastern North Carolina which interested him.¹⁷⁷

With the exception of the Beaufort County Historical Society and the Historic Bath Commission, perhaps Harding's most important organizational activities in the cause of restoring and preserving historic sites was his work with the North Carolina Society for the Preservation of Antiquities. In fact, Harding's work with this organization and his work at Bath were by no means unrelated.

The North Carolina Society for the Preservation of Antiquities had been founded in the late 1930s in close collaboration with the movement to reconstruct Tryon Palace at New Bern. Patterned after the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, its constitution was drawn by Archibald Henderson, Adelaide Fries, and Christopher Crittenden, each a prominent figure in the field of North Carolina history.¹⁷⁸ It was through this organization that Harding came into contact with many of the individuals who were willing and able to assist in the restoration of Bath, especially Crittenden, Mrs. Ernest Ives, and Mrs. Charles A. Cannon. An example of the interrelated natures of the work at Bath and Harding's membership in the North Carolina Society for the Preservation of Antiquities is provided by a letter which Harding sent to all fellow members on 18 November 1957:

You are of course interested in the preservation of our North Carolina Antiquities or you would not belong to our Society.

Enclosed you will find a folder that tells of plans to do restoration work in Bath. No spot in North Carolina is richer in history, nor is there a place in North Carolina that has been more neglected.

Please read the enclosed all the way through and then send us a liberal check as soon as you can.¹⁷⁹

The records of the society indicate that Harding was first elected an officer in 1957, when he became a vice president under Mrs. Ives. During the following year he was chosen to be a life member of the organization, and in 1961 he was elevated to the presidency for a term of one year. It was during this year as president that Harding wrote "Christmas in Carolina: a Fanciful In Five Parts," which was presented at the society's annual meeting in Raleigh on 30 November 1961 and included as one of its parts a portrayal of "Christmas in Bath, 1734." Following his term as president, the records of the society reveal that he continued to serve as a vice president for his congressional district through the decade of the 60s; and the minutes of the annual meetings disclose that he reported on the progress of the Bath restoration on a regular basis.¹⁸⁰ At its 30th annual meeting, held on 1 December 1970, three months after Harding's death, the society adopted a resolution honoring his life and memory, and paying tribute to his considerable achievements on behalf of the history of his state.¹⁸¹

From 1955 to 1961, Edward Harding carried forward the work of restoring historic Bath with very little professional assistance and little involvement by the State of North Carolina and what was then the Department of Archives and History--this despite the creation of the Historic Bath Commission by the legislature in 1959 and the allocations of state monies totaling \$25,000. In 1963, however, the General Assembly designated Bath a State Historic Site, to be administered by the Department of Archives and History, and, at the same time, appropriated substantial sums of money for operating expenses and further capital improvements.¹⁸² During the following year the transition to predominant state control was completed when the Beaufort County Historical Society conveyed all five of its principal tracts of land to the state for a recited consideration of \$1.00. Transferred to state ownership at this time were the Palmer-Harsh and Koverer house properties, the Negro cemetery

lot (Indian village site), Harding's Landing, and the old visitors center.¹⁸³ Although welcome in many respects, these developments placed the Historic Bath Commission and its chairman Edmund Harding in a position of uncertain status and function.

Largely because of this uncertainty, the transfer of administrative responsibilities from the Historic Bath Commission to the state was not an entirely harmonious one. For more than a year there was confusion and reticence concerning the "take over" of various functions by the state. Many who had long been associated with the work at Bath felt that the Historic Bath Commission had been left with nothing substantive to do.¹⁸⁴ To Edmund Harding fell the unenviable task of smoothing the transition as much as possible, assuaging the pain of wounded egos, and of grappling with distant bureaucrats. But Harding himself was troubled by feelings of frustration and uncertainty under the new arrangement. He too had been thrown in doubt as to what specifically could now be accomplished by the commission under his leadership. As early as 6 January 1964, Harding met with officials of the Department of Archives and History in Raleigh concerning the commission's new role; and during that meeting it was noted that "Mr. Harding feels there is no justification for the existence of the Commission unless it has something to do."¹⁸⁵ In a letter to members of the commission written four months later, Harding tried to put the best face possible on the situation by reporting that "Things at Bath are moving along very nicely under the new set up"; but he also expressed something of the frustration which continued to grow on him as chairman: ". . . the commission has little or nothing to do with the operation or the policy followed. . . . I have been unable to find out what the commission is now supposed to do."¹⁸⁶ Finally, on 4 October 1964, just prior to an important meeting of the Historic Bath Commission, Harding's mounting frustration found vent in an open letter to

Christopher Crittenden, director of the Department of Archives and History:

Dear Chris:

The meeting of the Bath Commission on Tuesday may be a successful one. It may be the last one that the present Commission may have. There is still much to be done at Bath but the Commission and its committees have been entirely idle since Bath became an Historic Site.

We have tried for a year and a half to get some understanding as to the Commission's rights, privileges, duties, and functions but we are no nearer now than on July 1, 1963. Personally I have made three trips to Raleigh and met with Department heads on the subject and have talked for hours . . . and as Chairman of the Commission I know no more than I did fifteen months ago.

The Historic Bath Commission is an outstanding group. . . . If this Commission is not to be used for the purposes for which it was appointed I think the Commission should disband with this meeting and go out of existence.

.....
 I have enjoyed working for Bath these ten years since we started getting ready for Bath's 250th Birthday. I have enjoyed being a member of the Commission. As Chairman of the Commission I would certainly like to leave it in better working condition than it is now.¹⁸⁷

During the following year, 1965, Edmund Harding assisted in drafting legislation which attempted to eliminate the existing difficulties and confusion of jurisdiction. This legislation reduced the size of the Historic Bath Commission, provided for periodic changes in its membership, and defined more clearly its remaining functions, authority, and responsibilities.¹⁸⁸

Under the new arrangement provided by the legislation of 1965, Edmund Harding was able to continue working productively as chairman of the commission throughout the last five years of his life. Moreover, it was surely a source of considerable satisfaction to him that the visitation at Bath doubled during each of its first two years as a State Historic Site, and that it continued to rise steadily until the time of his death.¹⁸⁹

It was only just that Edmund Harding should be recognized and honored on several occasions for his long years of hard work at Bath. The first and perhaps the most gratifying of these honors came on 1 December 1955, when

the North Carolina Society for the Preservation of Antiquities awarded him the Cannon Cup for his work in historic preservation and especially for the authorship and production of "Queen Anne's Bell." Ironically, he was unable to attend the award ceremony at the Sir Walter Hotel in Raleigh, being far away in Texas for a speaking engagement; but the Cup was received from playwright Paul Green on his behalf by Percy ("Rusty") Hodges of Washington, Harding's grandson.¹⁹⁰ Ironic too is the fact that this Cup, so richly deserved by Harding, was later stolen.¹⁹¹

In June of 1958, the Town of Bath made Edmund Harding its honorary mayor for life, and permanently changed the name of Church Street to Harding Street in his honor. With typical humility, Harding wrote a letter of thanks to Bath's mayor, B. A. Brooks:

Dear Mr. Mayor:

May I express to you my heartfelt appreciation of the honor that you and your Board conferred on me the other night in making me Honorary Mayor of Bath and naming a street for me. I do not feel that I was due such recognition, but it was certainly pleasing to me and I hope that in the future I will be able to do something for Bath that will justify the honor you conferred.¹⁹²

Needless to say, Harding's hope was amply realized.

On at least one occasion the labor of Edmund Harding and the Historic Bath Commission received well deserved national recognition. In August of 1962 the American Association of State and Local History, meeting in Buffalo, New York, conferred an Award of Merit for the fund raising and restoration work which had been accomplished at Bath.¹⁹³

When "Edmund Harding Day" was celebrated in Washington on 6 May 1966, activities were also organized at Bath in his honor. Open house was held at both the Palmer-Marsh and Houser houses during the morning hours; and several officials from the Department of Archives and History were in attendance.¹⁹⁴ Mayor Wilbur Burch of Bath presented Harding with a key to the historic little

town; and a marker was unveiled at Harding's landing, which the citizens of Bath had placed there in his honor.¹⁹⁵ Finally, an Award of Distinguished Service was presented to Edmund Harding by the Historic Bath Commission--the organization which he had led, prodded, and inspired since its creation in 1959.¹⁹⁶ At the time he received this award, the aging but still indefatigable Harding had only four years left to him; but during those last years he continued to work toward the realization of his dream for Bath. When death finally came to him in September of 1970, in the eighty-first year of his age, the Historic Bath Commission and indeed everyone associated with Bath suffered an irreplaceable loss. Nothing could ever be quite the same again.

Within a few months of Edmund Harding's death, plans were underway to restore the Van der Veer House as his memorial. A challenge grant of \$7,500 was offered by the Smith Richardson Foundation for this very purpose; and in less than a year the Historic Bath Commission had raised more than enough funds to qualify for this grant.¹⁹⁷ Slowly, the work of restoring the house has continued since that time. By March of 1974 plans for an Edmund Harding Memorial at the Van der Veer House had begun to assume a more definite shape; and a number of specific recommendations were made at that time regarding biographical information, exhibits, and interpretation.¹⁹⁸ In large measure, this report is an attempt to help carry these recommendations into effect. It must not be forgotten that without Edmund Harding's leadership and unselfish labors, historic Bath would not have been restored, and North Carolina's oldest town would not yet have emerged from the quite obscurity into which it settled nearly two centuries ago.