

Anniversary Feature

An Interview with John A. Parker

Carolina Planning Staff

To commemorate the fact that the Department of City and Regional Planning at UNC-Chapel Hill has been publishing Carolina Planning for fifteen years, staff editors thought it would be appropriate to explore the early history of the department. In this interview, John A. Parker, the department's founder and its chairman for twenty-eight years, describes how the early planning efforts in the southeastern United States provided the framework for the founding and evolution of the department.

Q: *What was the status of planning in the South when you first arrived at the University of North Carolina? How did the planning needs of the South differ from those of New England, where you had studied and worked previously?*

A: The depression was behind us and World War II was just over when the Department of City and Regional Planning (DCRP) was established in the fall of 1946. The federally funded program of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), established in 1933, was well underway. TVA had powers of direct action in navigation, flood control, and power in the seven Valley states (including North Carolina), as well as programs designed to assist the states in a number of areas, including local, state, and regional planning. By the mid-1940s, state planning agencies and local planning assistance programs had been set up in several of the states, including Tennessee and Alabama. But there was no such program in North Carolina.

In 1945 President Frank P. Graham of the University of North Carolina invited me to come to Chapel Hill the following year to initiate a graduate program in planning. During the intervening year, in preparation for this assignment, it was agreed that I should pursue graduate study in planning at MIT. It was also arranged and agreed upon by President Graham and Frederick J. Adams (head of MIT's City Planning Department), in consultation with TVA, that I should join the community planning staff of TVA for a three-month period during the summer of 1946 before reporting to UNC. During that time I was introduced to all aspects of the TVA program at its headquarters in Knoxville, and was given an opportunity to visit a number of the TVA-supported programs in the seven Valley states.

While at TVA I met F. Stuart Chapin, Jr., an MIT planning graduate and a member of TVA's community planning staff. There was pressure from Chapel Hill to start the graduate planning program that September--so, needless to say, every spare moment of my time during that summer at

TVA was devoted to developing the program. Fortunately for me, I found Stu as interested as I was in developing the planning curriculum. He gave generously of his time and was responsible for much of its contents. Little did we realize at the time that within three years Stu would be joining us at Chapel Hill to begin his outstanding career of education and research in planning.

Another outcome of my rewarding summer at TVA had to do with James M. Webb, a California architect and classmate of mine in the planning program at MIT, where he quickly emerged as the outstanding student in all aspects of the program having to do with design, architecture, engineering, and site planning. Jim and I had many discussions relating to plans for the new program at Chapel Hill, and it soon became apparent that his expertise would fill a much-needed gap in the program. Fortunately he was interested in teaching--especially if it could be combined with practice. At that time UNC had funds for only one faculty member--me. But TVA devised a plan where Jim would be employed by TVA to devote part of his time to the university and part to providing local planning assistance to the Tennessee Valley area of western North Carolina. Jim accepted the offer and arrived at UNC on January 1, 1947. Among his architectural and planning projects, Jim's firm, City Planning & Architectural Associates (which he formed with two DCRP alumni, Bob Anderson '60 and Don Stewart '54), developed the site plan for the Research Triangle Park.

In answer to your question regarding the difference in the planning needs of the South as compared to New England in the mid-1940s, I would say that the South was (and largely still is) rural with relatively few metropolitan areas. Many small communities were unable to afford the services of a full-time planning staff or even part-time consulting services. As viewed by TVA, the answer to the problem was to encourage the states to establish state planning commissions, whose responsibilities would include a community planning program staffed with professionals who would be

made available to the state's communities on request. North Carolina had no such program, and one was badly needed. It was hoped (and soon proved to be true) that the new graduate program would--by its very existence--encourage the state to make local planning assistance available.

For some time the state universities in the South had played a major role in providing services to the state's communities, and the record of the University of North Carolina had always been outstanding in this respect. While the new department at Chapel Hill was not a service organization, from its beginning students were assigned to communities on demonstration projects which always involved local citizens and officials. These projects were generally enthusiastically received, and the results were given serious consideration--more so than I would have expected under similar circumstances in New England at the time.

Q: *Why was the University of North Carolina such an attractive place to locate a new planning program?*

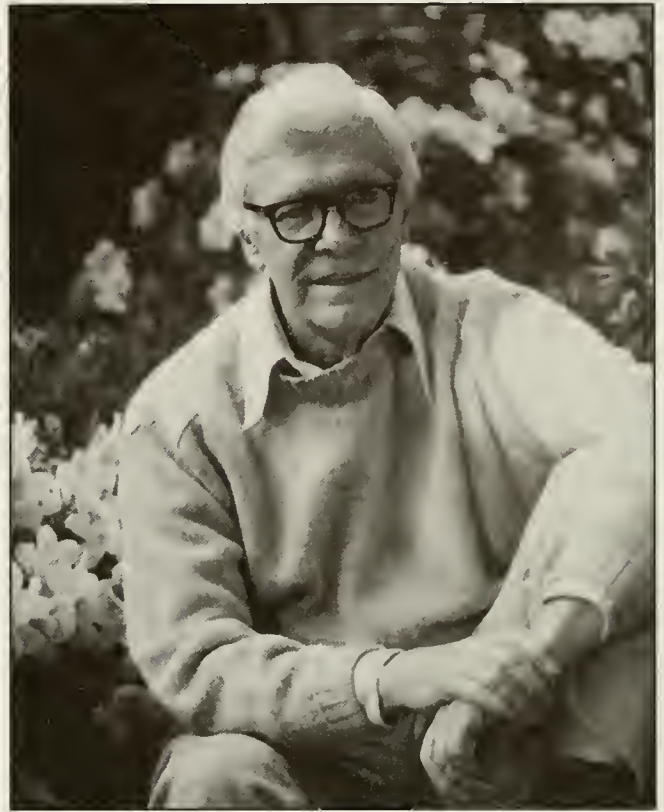
A: There were a number of reasons. At that time there was no educational program in the South offering courses in city and regional planning. UNC-Chapel Hill was one of the region's outstanding educational institutions, with an enviable reputation of service to the state and its neighbors through the efforts of Howard Odum, Rupert Vance and others on the staff of the Institute for Research in Social Science. Chapel Hill had become the South's center for regional study and regional research. In addition to these assets there were two more: (1) UNC's attractive campus and the Chapel Hill community; and (2) probably more important than all of the above, the leadership of UNC President Frank P. Graham, who had received national and international recognition as an outstanding, courageous, imaginative educator, and whose enthusiasm and support for the establishment of a planning program were irresistible.

Q: *When the Department of City and Regional Planning was started at UNC, was the focus primarily on land use planning?*

A: Land use planning was the major focus and continued to be for the first twenty years--into the mid 1960s. By that time several changes were taking place which would have their effects on departmental course offerings and program requirements.

The introduction of the doctoral program brought with it new course offerings in theory and methodology. New faculty members Ralph Gakenheimer and Maynard Hufschmidt developed new courses to provide greater depth in the areas of transportation planning, and regional and environmental planning. And new training grants brought new course offerings in social policy planning and comprehensive health planning.

In order to provide additional flexibility that would enable students to pursue special interests in greater depth, and reflecting trends in the planning profession, it was in-



John A. Parker

evitable that requirements in the core courses would be reduced, and that additional areas of concentration would become available.

Q: *Of the many visiting lecturers and advisors brought to the department (exclusive of DCRP alumni) during your years as chairman, who in your opinion made the most significant contributions?*

A: From TVA: *Gordon Clapp*, chairman of the board; *George Gant*, general manager; *Aelred J. Gray*, chief community planner; and *Rudolf Mock*, chief architect. From New York, by way of N.C. State: *Lewis Mumford*, author, and *Matthew Nowicki*, architect. From Washington: *Bertram Gross*, President's Council of Economic Advisors; *Joseph L. Fisher*, Resources for the Future; and *Carl Feiss*, Housing and Home Finance Agency. From England: *William A. Robson*, London School of Economics, and *F.J. Osborn*, Town and Country Planning Association.

From Harvard, *John M. Gaus*, Littauer Center, and *Arthur Maass*, Center for Public Administration. From MIT: *Kevin Lynch*, *Lloyd Rodwin*, and *Larry Susskind*. And from other parts of the country: *Catherine Bauer Wurster*, Berkeley; *Dennis O'Harrow*, executive director of ASPO; *Harvey Perloff*, UCLA; *Hugh Pomeroy*, Westchester County, New York; *Hans Blumenfeld*, University of Toronto; *Louis Kahn*, University of Pennsylvania; and *Jean Canaux*, International Federation for Housing and Town Planning. □