In 1912, the suburb of Sunset Park was laid out by the Fidelity Trust and Development Company. The suburb was originally designed by developers to contain only the most exclusive housing models. The developers of the subdivision quickly responded to the increasing needs of the Wilmington area for housing by expanding their design of Sunset Park to be more inclusive. This increasing need for housing had been created by a booming shipping industry at the onset of World War I. The most significant demand for housing in Wilmington came in the early 1940s when the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company expanded its facilities on the Cape Fear River to meet the need for ships during World War II. These events plus moments of economic downturn during the 1920s and 1930s directly affected construction in the suburb.¹

The streets and boulevards in the neighborhood give visitors and residents alike the feel of a rural area apart from the hustle and bustle of city life. To honor early United States presidents the developers named the streets in the suburbs after Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Monroe, Jackson, Van Buren, Harrison, Tyler, Polk, and Taylor. Tyler street was later renamed Burnett Boulevard as a tribute to County Superintendent of Roads, R.A. Burnett. The streets of the suburb still reflect the original design of landscaped plazas that extend along the main thoroughfares of Northern and Central Boulevards. There are remnants of the magnificently designed pergolas that mark where Northern Boulevard intersects with Carolina Beach Road.² These pergolas stand as a reminder of the trolley system that once connected the suburb with downtown Wilmington and Greenfield Lake. The architecture of the homes in the suburb is significant to the nation’s history because it embodies architectural styles and materials which span more than three-quarters of a century. The preservation of this neighborhood is important not only to telling the history of Wilmington but also to telling the history of the United States.³

The Sunset Park suburb is significant to the field of community planning and suburban development. Its picturesque location along the river makes it the earliest known subdivision on the Cape Fear River.⁴ The preservation of the suburb of Sunset Park is a case study of residents interacting with preservation organizations on the local, state, and national levels. The main leaders in the movement to preserve Sunset Park were Johnnie (president of the neighborhood association) and Ilse Henagan, and the Sunset Park Neighborhood Association. In order to better understand the success of the preservation of Sunset Park it is important to examine the background history of preservation in Wilmington.
In 1937, the women of the North Carolina chapter of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America purchased the Burgwin-Wright House in an effort to preserve the history of "the most considerable house in town." Efforts by some of these same women to create a historic district in Wilmington were ignored by the city attorney, and they were unable to get any legislation proposed or passed.

In 1955, the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company announced its five year plan to leave Wilmington. Wilmington was a significant commercial port city on the Cape Fear River and a major railroad hub. The decision by the railroad to leave forced the city to wake up from its economic slumber. Wilmington needed to come up with a new backbone for its economy. The railroad’s announcement of its departure inspired the city to create the Committee of 100 to oversee the recruitment to Wilmington of a more diversified group of industries. The Committee brought in companies like General Electric (GE) and Dupont.

The growth spawned by these new industries threatened the historic downtown as well as the surrounding properties. In 1956, in response to this industrial growth and the threat on the "sense of place" in Wilmington, the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society was organized in an effort to preserve the history of Wilmington. The Society was chartered as a 501 (c) (3) non-profit corporation and has dedicated its work to the preservation and study of the history of the Lower Cape Fear region. In 1962, the Wilmington city council approved the historic district zoning of thirty-eight blocks of Old Wilmington and the establishment of the Board of Architectural Review, which later became the Historic Districts Commission.

In 1966 the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society sponsored the formation of the Historic Wilmington Foundation.
It was the goal of the Historic Wilmington Foundation to “rescue and restore architecturally significant buildings” which they hoped would stop the flight from the historic downtown residential districts and would “renew the neighborhood.” Thanks to a generous contribution of $3,500 by the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, the Foundation was able to fund many of its early preservation projects. A revolving fund, the first of its kind in North Carolina, was established which allowed the Historic Wilmington Foundation to rescue historic properties by purchasing them and placing protective covenants on the properties that would ensure their protection. Then the Foundation would sell the properties to buyers with the stipulation that the purchaser would rehabilitate the building. Over the course of the Foundation’s forty-six years in preservation, approximately eighty buildings have been saved directly by the Foundation’s revolving fund or have been protected through preservation covenants and rehabilitation agreements. The protection and restoration of these buildings upholds the standards of the Foundation’s mission which is “to protect and preserve the irreplaceable historic resources of Wilmington and the Lower Cape Fear region.” Homes that have been saved by

with local citizens R.V. Asbury, Kelly W. Jewell, Jr., Thomas Wright, Jr., and Wallace C Murchison. It was the goal of the Historic Wilmington Foundation to “rescue and restore architecturally significant buildings” which they hoped would stop the flight from the historic downtown residential districts and would “renew the neighborhood.” Thanks to a generous contribution of $3,500 by the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, the Foundation was able to fund many of its early preservation projects. A revolving fund, the first of its kind in North Carolina, was established which allowed the Historic Wilmington Foundation to rescue historic properties by purchasing them and placing protective covenants on the properties that would ensure their protection. Then the Foundation would sell the properties to buyers with the stipulation that the purchaser would rehabilitate the building. Over the course of the Foundation’s forty-six years in preservation, approximately eighty buildings have been saved directly by the Foundation’s revolving fund or have been protected through preservation covenants and rehabilitation agreements. The protection and restoration of these buildings upholds the standards of the Foundation’s mission which is “to protect and preserve the irreplaceable historic resources of Wilmington and the Lower Cape Fear region.” Homes that have been saved by

the Foundation’s mission-driven preservation exist as a reminder of the success of the preservation movement in Wilmington. The Greek Revival style Wright-Murphy house, located at 212 South Second Street, was the first house purchased by Historic Wilmington Foundation in 1967. In October 1967 the house was sold to Chester R. Smith with preservation covenants ensuring the preservation and maintenance of the architectural integrity of the house. In 1975, the Historic Wilmington Foundation took on one of the most extensive and significant projects yet, the purchase of the DeRosset House for $25,000.

In 1973, a group of activists within the membership of the Historic Wilmington Foundation established the Residents of Old Wilmington. This group wanted to focus their attention on both the problems and the opportunities that “bedeviled and beguiled” the residents of downtown, such as the degradation of the downtown’s central business district. This organization was created to give residents “political visibility” in issues of zoning and development in the downtown area. In 1975, the Historic Wilmington Foundation, the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, and the Residents of Old Wilmington joined together to organize the first and only statewide convention of Preservation North Carolina to be held in Wilmington. Attention was raised during this meeting to the fact that the Bellamy Mansion was in dire need of restoration; as a result the Bellamy Foundation was formed. In 1976, the Downtown Area Revitalization Effort, Inc. (DARE) was established to coordinate local citizens and organizations in revitalization efforts in downtown Wilmington. In 1979, the citizens/residents of the Residents of Old Wilmington joined DARE.

In 1997, the State Historic Preservation Office awarded a certified local government grant to the Wilmington Historic District Commission for the Development

Photograph of the DeRosset House taken before restoration began in 1975. Photograph from the LCFHS Photograph Collection.

Photograph of the Wright-Murphy house at 212 South Second Street, purchased by the Historic Wilmington Foundation in 1967.
of “comprehensive design guidelines” for the city.\textsuperscript{18} These guidelines were updated in 1999 and still serve to protect the historical integrity of the historic architecture of Wilmington. In 1999, the Residents of Old Wilmington supported the northward expansion of the historic district. \textsuperscript{19}

The preservation of Sunset Park was similar to some of the earlier preservation movements in Wilmington. Residents took charge early in the preservation movement in Wilmington because they saw industry and time changing their sense of place. In 1993, after decades of fighting development issues like port encroachment and outside developers the residents of Sunset Park gathered their forces and began the formation of a neighborhood association. It was an effort initially headed by Tony DeCarolis and later taken over by Johnnie and Ilse Henagan.\textsuperscript{20} On April 8, 1993, the first formal meeting was held by Sunset Park residents and the Sunset Park Neighborhood Association was formed. For the residents who felt their neighborhood
was a kept secret, the encroachment by city growth was threatening to destroy their community. For this very reason the Sunset Park Neighborhood Association, spearheaded by the Henagans, sought to get the neighborhood placed on the National Register. A National Register nomination was intended to encourage people to renovate their homes because of tax credits available. Nomination also assisted residents in their fight against developers by giving them a 90 day delay period before any buildings or structures within such a district could be torn down.

The Sunset Park Neighborhood Association sought the assistance of the Historic Wilmington Foundation to help apply for a certified local government grant to conduct an architectural survey of Sunset Park. A certified local government grant is funding created to assist certified local governments, which were created by the 1980 amendments to the National Historic Preservation Act. These amendments improved the formal structure of preservation programs in each state by aiding the establishment in each state of relationships between the local governments. A certified local government grant is usually small, often ranging between $5,000 and $10,000 and is meant to aid local communities in important preservation work.

The Historic Wilmington Foundation (HWF) with the assistance of Beth Keane applied for such a grant from the city of Wilmington. HWF applied for $4,800, and the city of Wilmington planned to contribute $3,200. The architectural survey was completed in September of 1996 and laid the foundation for the application for the National Historic Register District.

In 2002, the efforts of Mr. Johnnie Henagan and the Sunset Park Neighborhood Association and Historic Wilmington Foundation finally saw success in the form of a grant approval from the State Historic Preservation Office. The grant was for $4,500 and the city contributed $1,000, while the Sunset Park Neighborhood Association provided $1,300 of the remaining costs for the National Register application. Beth Keane, who had worked with Edward F. Turberg on the Sunset Park architectural survey, was hired by the city of Wilmington to complete the National Register application. On September 29, 2003, the city and the state historical department staff held a public meeting to discuss the nomination of Sunset Park for the National Register of Historic Places. The meeting’s agenda included a dialogue about the meaning of the National Register of historic places. Then Beth Keane gave a presentation about Sunset Park’s National Register Nomination, which was followed by an open questions-and-comments portion. According to a letter addressed to Maggie O’Connor at the Wilmington City Planning Office from Jeffrey J. Crow, an officer of the State Historic Preservation Office, the city had a right to comment on the proposed nomination within 60 days of the notification.

There are several homes in Sunset Park that have been given plaques by the Historic Wilmington Foundation in recognition of their historical significance to the neighborhood and to the city of Wilmington. The Chadwick-Teague house is one of the homes that makes the Sunset Park neighborhood significant. This craftsman style house was one of the first residences in Sunset Park. The house was built for David Nicholas...
Chadwick, Secretary-Treasurer of Fidelity Trust and Development Company, Developer of Sunset Park, and his wife, Ethel Hopkins. The house was purchased in 1957 by Arthur Franklin Teague, Master Mason of the Wilmington Lodge 319, A.F. and A.M, and his wife, Elizabeth Ann Cutchin. Another of the important homes is the 1930 Watts-Easton House on Central Boulevard. The bungalow was built as a rental property for Sarah Catherine Davis. An interesting home built during the Second World War is the Harper House on Jefferson Street. It is a one-story, ranch style home in an L-Shape. The property was purchased October 1, 1954 by Wade H. and Ingrid Harper.  

The residents of the Sunset Park Neighborhood Association drew support of the local, state, and federal organizations in order to get Sunset Park placed on the National Historic Register. The suburb of Sunset Park has a diverse architectural range of residences erected from 1912 to the 1960s. A majority of the houses were built from 1940 to 1943 when the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company expanded its facilities along the Cape Fear River. The success of preservation in Sunset Park can be seen in the homes that still retain their historical integrity, and the streets which are laid out in much the same way as the developer platted them in 1912. The Sunset Park Neighborhood Association has proved that it is possible to achieve their preservation goals by working cohesively with the local, state, and federal preservation organizations and government entities.

NOTES

1 Sunset Park Neighborhood Architectural Survey, Wilmington, NC, Researched and Compiled by Edward F. Turberg, with the assistance of Beth Keane, City of Wilmington, Historic Wilmington Foundation, Inc., North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, (September 1996), i-iv.
2 Ibid.
3 Turberg, i-iv.
4 Ibid.
6 Dr. William D. Moore, Historic Preservation Class Notes Taken by Julia Yannetti (October 15, 2008).
8 Cashman, 91.
10 David Brinkley, Old Wilmington Guide Book (Wilmington, NC: The Junior League of Wilmington, North Carolina), 84.
15 Seapker, 8-9.
17 Residents of Old Wilmington.
19 Residents of Old Wilmington.
20 Mark Robinson, “Neighbors Organize to Advocate Improvements in Sunset Park,” The Wilmington Morning Star, 10 February 1994, 2B.
21 Ibid.
25 “Sunset Park Architectural Survey Grant Applied For.”
27 “Sunset Park Architectural Survey Grant Applied For.”
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 “Agenda: Sunset Park National Register Information Meeting Fellowship Hall of the Church of St. Peter the Fisherman,” Sunset Park Historic District Vertical Files, Planning Office for the City of Wilmington, Wilmington, NC.
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33 Turberg, iv.
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Julia Yannetti is a graduate student in the Public History program at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Julia works at the Battleship North Carolina as an educational instructor designing programs for school and Boy Scout groups. Julia has recently finished an internship with the Historic Wilmington Foundation, where she designed a proposal for an educational opportunity for third graders in the area. When Julia graduates she will pursue a career in historic preservation or education of historic preservation. Julia wishes to educate the public on the importance of preserving and protecting the historic buildings and other architectural treasures of the United States, because these structures are physical ties between the past and the present.