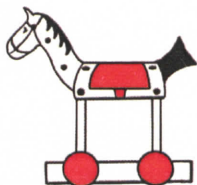


ARCHITECTS  
*in the* LIFE  
*of* TRYON

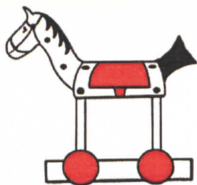


*Speech by*  
HOLLAND BRADY, AIA  
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DEDICATED TO  
*Carolyn Brady*



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*I have always felt that the physical character of a community is determined by the quality and style of the buildings that have been built there and how they relate to the land. How well-designed and how well-sited are these structures? How do we achieve a handsome townscape? I believe three criteria will affect the results:*

- 1. Interesting topography;*
- 2. Responsible property owners; and*
- 3. Responsive, capable architects.*

I think Tryon meets all three requirements successfully and, further, I believe you must agree or you might not be living here today. Why do other places with similar physical attributes not succeed in being handsome? What sets Tryon apart?

The answer, at least in part, may lie in the continuing employment of architects. In Polk County there have been well more than thirty people that I know of involved in the practice of architecture. By contrast, for example, in all of Rutherford County, with three towns, two larger than Tryon, there has never been a successful continuing architectural practice. Of course architects have worked in Rutherfordton from time to time but were typically based in Tryon, Shelby, or Charlotte. But, on the other hand, consider the beauty and quality of Tryon, where architects regularly work.

In the early days, several architects of some national fame worked here or visited Tryon frequently. The first — this in the nineteen twenties — was a lady, V. D. Van Akin, from California. She designed a fairly large house near Columbus, a superb “Storybook Style” Tudor mansion, recently in some disrepair but now undergoing restoration and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Also attributed to Miss Van Akin is the guest house/playhouse in Tryon for Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Lightner’s daughter, Martha. This little “castle”, in the Godshaw Hill area, is occupied and in good shape today. One of Martha’s family friends was a cartoonist and author who wrote the “Prince Valiant” comic strip. I don’t know how many of you remember Prince Valiant, but his castle was modeled on Martha’s playhouse.

Another early practitioner was Erle Stilwell, a resident of Hendersonville until his death about 1980. He had practiced in Hendersonville and Asheville since the 20’s; one connection he undertook back in the nineteen twenties was with a man named Loew. Mr. Stilwell was responsible for hundreds of moving picture houses all over the world for Mr. Loew; Loew’s Grand, Lowe’s Palace, etc., as well as the Tryon Theater — the last one, of course, not for Mr. Loew. However, Mr. Stilwell also designed

“Lynncote” for Mr. and Mrs. Carroll Rogers after the earlier Lynncote was destroyed by fire. It, too, is a Tudor style house and is now occupied by the Rogers’ grandson, Anderson Haynes, and his family. The earlier Lynncote was designed by another architect who deserves more fame than he has received, Richard Sharp Smith. He, as well as the more famous Richard Morris Hunt, worked for George Vanderbilt. While Hunt was designing Biltmore House, Smith was designing Biltmore Village, and a building I can’t imagine undertaking — the Manure House at the Asheville Country Club. He was also assisting Hunt with All Souls Cathedral in Biltmore and providing drawings for the St. Lawrence Catholic Basilica in Asheville, a building famous for tile vaulting by the Gustavino family, as well as designing the first Lynncote.

Another name famous — or infamous — throughout the industrial world is Albert Kahn, an architect from Detroit, a friend of Henry Ford. It is reputed that Mr. Kahn had more to do with assembly line production than Mr. Ford. Mr. Kahn proposed the factories and helped design the assembly lines that made our present factories possible. So far as any architectural history book could tell you he probably never designed many houses — but he designed one in Tryon for Mr. J. N. Jackson, (Jim Jackson’s grandfather), recently Foxtrot Inn.

Tryon has certainly had its full share of resident architects in addition to visiting talent. The Erskine family and the Doubleday clan produced the earliest names. Andy Haynes, Chris Bartol, Carroll Rogers Jr., and numerous other local folks are part of the Erskine family. There were two Erskine brothers here in the last part of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th, one trained as an architect but both of them interested in architecture. One of them, Ralph Erskine, built Villa Barbara, a fascinating Italian villa



near Tryon, now owned by Mimi Bartol Pospisil, also an Erskine descendant. The other brother was Harold, who designed what was then called the Erskine Memorial Church, now the Congregational Church in Tryon. Harold studied architecture at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, in the atelier of Victor Laloux, in 1890, along with William Adams Delano, later of Delano and Aldrich, whose clients included John D. Rockefeller, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, The Union Club in New York, and several museums; William Lawrence Bottomley, the arbiter of elegant mansions along Monument Avenue in Richmond, and several others destined for fame in American architecture, a very select group. You can find a plaque in Mr. Erskine's memory in the Narthex of the building. Morgan, son of Andy and Linda Haynes, has recently studied architecture, so design may well continue to flourish in that family.

Two ladies from the Erskine family were not architects, but also have significant claims to fame in the design world. One, Emma Payne Erskine, retained Donald Ross, America's most famous golf course architect, to design the Tryon Country Club golf course. The other was Mrs. Violet Parrish-Watson; her initial bequest led to the construction of the Tryon Fine Arts Center; she occupied and preserved for posterity the Homer Ellertson house, "El Taarn," in Gillette Woods.

Two architects from the Doubleday clan produced very interesting work here. One practitioner was Lawrence Doubleday, part of the Shreve Lamb and Harmon office in New York, architects of the Empire State Building. Later, he became chief architect for IBM. Meanwhile, he had a long relationship with Polk County through his family, designing the Arthur Smith house and the landmark "Top O'Piney." Memories in the family suggest that he also participated in the design of El Taarn, the Ellertson studio.

Another fascinating member of that family was J. Foster Searles, uncle to Jack Blackwell and thereby related to the Doubleday family. He, the first real architect that I ever knew, was born in 1872 and was one of the first resident designers in this county, living here through the early 1900's to the 1930's. His local works include the small "English" cottage opposite the Congregational Church, Spanish Courts Apartments, the Tirre house, the former Godshaw house in which I grew up, and his own most interesting office on top of Hogback Mountain. He retired in the 1930's, traveled widely and eventually settled in the Seychelles Islands, where he died in 1949; it is said, in the arms of native girls.

Another early architect here, who lived off Warrior Drive from about 1926 to 1931 and designed several houses in the area, was named Ferguson. His son, Wilton, attended, if I remember correctly, Clemson and studied architecture too. He later worked in Spartanburg and was an uninhibited character. He is said to have ridden to work daily in downtown Spartanburg on his bicycle wearing a fringed Mexican Sombrero. He later moved to Atlanta and became one of the world's real experts in stadium design.

I approach at last the recent past. A few of you may remember meeting some of these men. The first and greatest must have been Russell S. Walcott, born in Evanston, Illinois in 1889 and educated in architecture at Princeton University. He practiced in the Chicago area until 1936. His firm was well known for residential work of real quality, including early development of the Barrington area northwest of Chicago. He moved to Tryon in 1936 intending to retire but his abilities and interest in residential architecture were too great, so he resumed his practice here. He was assisted from about 1938 by Shannon Meriwether. His local works include Auberge Apartments, originally a really classy

building with a four-star restaurant, and numerous residences, including the former Hope Washburn house (now the Dan Trumble house), Holt-Webster (now the home of Dave and Isabel Rice), and the former Turck house, now occupied by Mrs. Frank Basler. Many of his houses were featured in "House Beautiful" and "House and Garden" magazines; one house on Overlook Circle, the Dave Rice house, was selected by House Beautiful as House of the Year in 1941. Mr. Walcott died in Tryon in 1959.

Another one of that generation was Arthur Laidler Jones, another fascinating and totally professional man. He worked in Florida and was associated with Addison Mizner, who developed Palm Beach and the "Cloisters" at Sea Island, Georgia. On Mr. Mizner's departure from Florida, Arthur Jones completed work at the "Cloister," and continued to work at Sea Island. He practiced in Tryon from about the 1930's and was a superb designer of good traditional houses. Many of the magnificent houses built in the 40's and 50's and early 60's in Spartanburg were designed by Arthur Jones.

Ernst Benkert, another Tryon practitioner, was a very interesting person, born in Dusseldorf, Germany, in 1899, a grandson of the "Lord Architect of Dusseldorf," whatever that was! He studied at technical schools in Germany, but World War I interrupted his education and he became a Luftwaffe pilot. He moved to Chicago in 1922, worked for various Chicago architects between 1923 to 1929, and was a good friend of Russell Walcott. He opened his own office about 1929 in Winnetka and developed a substantial practice, designing single family houses for the North Shore area of Chicago. He claimed two interesting firsts in his practice: he designed the first split level house ever, and he invented the first aluminum awning window because he got tired of rain



blowing through open windows. I'm not sure what you think of either of those inventions, but there they are. By a strange quirk of fate, this former German citizen designed camps in Nebraska for internment of Germans during World War II. He first visited Polk County in 1946, later bought land here in Cooper's Gap and moved to Tryon in 1961. He designed quite a few residences here, St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, and the Fine Arts Center. And at one point over a period of 12 months, Mr. Benkert and I jointly designed a house in Charlotte for the Chairman of the Department of Art at Queens College. His son, Kyle Benkert, also practiced in Polk County briefly but after a few years returned to Chicago and worked in the city planning field, as related below.

Shannon Meriwether, with whom I worked, figures largely in my past. He was a very conscientious man not always very well liked except by people who knew him well. Nobody could have been kinder than he was to me, such as putting up with drawings I did for him in our early years together that looked like they were drawn with the end of my thumb rather than a pencil. He grew up in Kentucky, studied at the University of Illinois, and worked in Cincinnati and Kansas City, where he was chief architect for Burns and McDonnell Engineers. His works before he moved to Tryon included buildings for Cincinnati Water Works, a whole series of SAE Fraternity houses all over the country, and many substantial residences in Kansas City. He first came to Tryon in 1936 to design "Brookhill" for Dudley Smith, his brother-in-law. From about 1938 until WWII, he was associated with Russell Walcott. After WWII he practiced independently, until he asked me to join him in 1951. I became his partner in 1953 and continued working with him until his death. His local works include restoration of the "Four Columns Farm" outside Landrum,

numerous residences and the First Baptist Church in Tryon. He may have been known to me as “Mr. Meriwether” but to all of the carpenters he was known as “Stormyweather.”

Another practitioner here from that period was Daniel D. Merrill, educated at Cornell. He worked at one time in New York City for the famous Cass Gilbert. He practiced in New York from 1919 until he moved here in the early 1960's. He was responsible for all sorts of ecclesiastical, educational, and public buildings including the Parish House at Franklin D. Roosevelt's Church, St. James in Hyde Park, N.Y. During WWII Mr. Merrill was chief of the Architectural Section of the US Corps of Engineers. In Tryon, he designed the McFarland Funeral Chapel, the Parish House of the Church of the Holy Cross, and several residences.

Back in the 30's a famous radio commentator, H. V. Kaltenborn, said “Tryon has charm and culture. It is a place of enchantment.” I'll list together a few architects who came here but really didn't practice much, coming only because it was a “place of enchantment.” One was Clyde S. Merriell who retired here in the 1950's and designed a few houses around Lynn. He was affectionately known to many people as “Squeaky.” About the same time, moving to Polk County in 1947, were George Repp and Joseph Wells. Joe taught architecture at Clemson part-time during his retirement here and was, I believe, a member of the Tryon Rotary Club. I also remember Kenneth McGrew, born in Kankakee, Illinois in 1896, educated at the University of Pennsylvania and a director of Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, who lived in Gillette Woods for several years.

Would the firm name “Harrison and Abramovitz” ring a bell? They were probably one of the two or three most important American architectural offices. Wallace Harrison and his partners

designed Rockefeller Center, the UN Building, and skyscrapers all over the country – indeed all over the world. In the later years of that office, it was known as Harrison, Abramovitz, and Abbe, Abbe being Mr. Charles Abbe who later lived in Gillette Woods. He did not practice locally but he should be mentioned.

Now I will diverge a little to a section I call “Famous Figures on the Fringe.” They weren’t really architects but you couldn’t talk about architecture in Polk County and not discuss them. The first one obviously was Carter P. Brown. He, I believe, still has twelve houses existing in Polk County. As you probably know, he operated Pine Crest Inn here and The Castle at Castle Park, Michigan for many years. He was fascinated with old logs and reusable building materials and the local people he found here. He built some 12 or 15 houses that had great character, but you never were quite sure whether they were going to stand up or not. He sort of built by trial and error. On Peniel Road, he had this log cabin sort of house erected with a steep roof and flat ceiling. He came back one afternoon to where the carpenters were working and decided it was pity to waste all that beautiful space up there. He said “Let’s take out those ceiling beams and get a cathedral ceiling.” The carpenters, who were all men from the Kuykendall family, were skeptical because they knew that the ceiling beams were holding the building together but Mr. Brown insisted and said take out the beams! They took them out, and the famous quotation I’ll never forget is “There was a loud crack and the whole damn air was full of Kuykendalls.” Another man who was not an architect but probably designed one of the great pieces of architecture in Polk County was Homer Ellertson, the painter responsible for his own studio in Gillette Woods, “El Taarn,” very Italian and very beautiful. Mrs. Parrish-Watson later added a wing

to it. Another person on the fringe of architecture was George Aid, who did beautiful architectural sketches and etchings.

But now I do want to ask you a question and I want you to think about it, does anybody know who Catherine Tobin was? What if I said Catherine Tobin Wright? She was the first Mrs. Frank Lloyd Wright! She lived off Melrose Avenue; I knew her when I worked at Lanier Library in the late 1940's. When I was a high school boy I think the influence of Russell Walcott and V. D. Van Akin and the fact that I knew Mrs. Frank Lloyd Wright is what made me become an architect.

One of the country's great architects and city planners was Edward Bennett. He was the co-author, along with Daniel Burnham, of the Chicago City Plan, a great figure in architecture and planning, and the author of Chicago's Grant Park. He retired to Tryon in 1949 to live in the Hunting Country. I was working for an architect in Chicago at the time, Paul Schweikher, and prepared the drawings for Mr. Bennett's house here in Tryon: all the way to Chicago to work and end up drawing a house in Tryon. The house, which now belongs to Mr. and Mrs. Loren Smith, is a striking example of contemporary design and, with its beautifully maintained grounds, is a likely candidate for future inclusion on the National Register.

I now approach the present generation to describe several other architects who have lived and worked here in recent decades.

- Don Jay Kelly, born in Michigan in 1926, studied at the University of Michigan (with Holland Brady). Don is now retired but works for architects in Spartanburg part-time. He earlier practiced in Saginaw and Frankenmuth, Michigan.
- Kyle Benkert, son of Ernst Benkert, was born in Chicago in 1931, attended Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania.

He worked in Chicago as Director of the Loop Planning directly under and appointed by Mayor Daley. He moved to Tryon in 1974 and developed Morgan Chapel Village but returned to his practice in Chicago after several years here.

- Another architect in the community is Ralph Sherer. He was born in Waukegan, Illinois, in 1941. He studied at Illinois Institute of Technology, receiving a Bachelor's in 1964 and a Master's in 1965. He worked in Ann Arbor, Michigan and Tuscon, Arizona before coming here. He now conducts an active practice from Columbus.
- Anton Cedarvall, practiced here for several years. He moved to Tryon in 1972 after working in the Palm Beach area. He was born in Peking, China and studied at the University of Michigan. Anton designed several homes here and the Western North Carolina Diocesan Office Building for the Episcopal Church in Black Mountain.
- Rosemary Pleune is yet another Tryon resident who studied architecture at the University of Michigan. She designed many houses in the Detroit area and, although she did not practice regularly after moving to Tryon, she was responsible for two or three houses near Tryon and at Lake Adger.
- Michael Brannon practiced here for some twenty years and later relocated to Aiken, SC, where he died several years ago. He attended Clemson University and was a partner in my office for several years.
- Ligon Flynn was born in Tryon in 1931 and is my wife's brother. He was educated at N.C. State University, he practiced in Tryon and Raleigh and now from his office in Wilmington. Some of his major works are the Visitors Center at Brookgreen Gardens,



S.C., as well as condominiums and houses at Litchfield Plantation. He has rehabilitated an old group of church buildings as the St. John's Art Gallery in Wilmington, N.C., and Chandler's Wharf on the Wilmington waterfront as a shopping center. He and I together designed several houses in Tryon and Student Housing at the Brevard Music Center.

- John Walters recently retired from the office of A. G. Odell Architects in Charlotte and has moved to Tryon to practice. His office is located on Pacolet Street.
- J. Kelly Murphy lives near the Block House. He is well-known in the equestrian field, having served as a judge in the Atlanta Olympics, and retired recently from an active architectural practice here.
- Julia McIntyre was an architect in Atlanta but moved to Tryon a about six years ago. She was born in Pennsylvania, received an undergraduate degree from Penn State and completed coursework towards a Master's degree at Georgia Tech. She now works with Brady/Trakas Architects.
- Michael Derrick practiced here and is responsible for several substantial houses in Polk County but moved on to Atlanta after a few years to continue his work there.
- Robin Laidlaw, an architectural designer interested in historic restoration and repair updated the South Trade Building and participated in developing the Oak Hall Condominiums. After several busy years here, he and his wife moved to Cooperstown, N.Y.
- Also working in Tryon now is Paul Johanson. He moved to Tryon a few years ago after many years in Spartanburg, not a licensed architect but well known as a skilled residential designer.

- The firm Harcourt Architects of Dublin, Ireland, has a significant presence here. Patrick Kinsella, a registered architect, and his brothers are developing the White Oak project, located off Pea Ridge Road. Justin Kinsella, a younger architect in the same family, is also designing at White Oak but from the Dublin office except for occasional visits here.
- The penultimate name on this list is Dean Trakas, a native of Spartanburg. He received his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Clemson University and previously worked in Charleston and Spartanburg. He closed his practice in Marion, N.C., to join me in practice here and is now a partner in Brady/Trakas Architects.

There have been two or three other architects who have recently retired to this area that I have not met and about whom I cannot usefully comment. Therefore, I will conclude by stating my own resume. I was born in Tryon in 1925, graduated from Tryon High School, attended Clemson but eventually received my degree after four years at the University of Michigan in 1950. I served in the U.S. Army in Europe in World War II, receiving along the way three battle stars, the Purple Heart, the Combat Medical Badge, Presidential Unit Citation, and the inevitable Good Conduct Medal. I worked for architect Paul Schweikker in Chicago, Roger Bailey in Ann Arbor, and Anthony Lord in Asheville and returned to Tryon in 1951 to assist Shannon Meriwether, becoming his partner in 1953. The rest is, for better or worse, local history.

What other small town has ever had as many architects as Tryon? It seems to me that the results have been beneficial; I hope you agree.

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ARCHITECTS  
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31 MAY 2007