Annotated Reasons
to
Save Black Meadow Ridge

Compiled on behalf of Save Black Meadow Ridge,
the Eno River Association and the Durham Black Cemetery Coalition
Annotated Reasons to Save Black Meadow Ridge

“The quality of life of a community can slip away very subtly, little by little, day by day, the deterioration hardly noticed. As Terry Rolan, Director of Durham’s Water Resources, once remarked to me, ‘When changes are slow, people grow used to the degradation, and think it is standard.’ ... Our task today as Durham grows and prospers is to make sure that these lands are not despoiled and that this area continues to remain ‘The Flower of Carolina.’ The protection of our three main rivers and their surrounding lands is a form of fiscal responsibility.”

~ Margaret Nygard, from an address to the Durham Chamber of Commerce in 1989

The Eno River Association ~

“... be it resolved that the Association for the Preservation of the Eno River Valley wholeheartedly hereby goes on record to support the preservation of Black Meadow Ridge and its addition to West Point on the Eno Durham City Park and further hereby strongly advocates against the building of the current proposed ‘Eno Village’ development on Black Meadow Ridge and welcomes the opportunity to purchase the property at a fair and reasonable price.”

The full resolution is at enoriver.org

The Durham Black Cemetery Coalition ~

“Resolution to Urge the City of Durham to Acquire and Protect Black Meadow Ridge and the Holman Cemetery for Inclusion in West Point on the Eno City Cultural Heritage Park

Let it be known that the Durham Black Cemetery Coalition is firmly opposed to development on Black Meadow Ridge as development would pose harm to the historic African American Holman Cemetery and would destroy the historic wagon trail that runs between the Holman Cemetery and the ancient Buffalo Trail in West Point on the Eno City Cultural Heritage Park.

Furthermore let it be known that the Durham Black Cemetery Coalition supports and recommends that the City of Durham moves to acquire Black Meadow Ridge and the Holman Cemetery so as to protect and keep the Holman Cemetery accessible to family and the public, and then adjoin these parcels which embody the African American presence at the historic Eno River community there to West Point on the Eno City Cultural Heritage Park for the betterment of the people of the City of Durham in perpetuity.”

The Village of Horton Hills HOA ~

“The Village of Horton Hills Neighborhood, which comprises 198 homes, opposes any high-density development on Black Meadow Ridge. We are very concerned with the negative impact of the proposed site plans from the developer such as increased flooding to an already existing problem and increased traffic patterns within Horton Hills and surrounding areas. The site plan in question is out of date. They do not consider the current assessment of flooding, land, traffic, and environmental concerns and conditions of the Black Meadow Ridge and surrounding areas.”

More information:

blackmeadowridge.org
~ Please sign the petition if you have not yet.

enoriver.org

change.org
Save Preserve & Historically Designate Holman Cemetery Durham, NC
~ Please sign the petition by Joy Leak, descendant of Dilsey Holman
Annotated Reasons to Save Black Meadow Ridge

This is the one page list of reasons to preserve Black Meadow Ridge. An explanation of each reason follows.

I. ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS ~

1. Protection of the water quality in a critical watershed area which affects the Eno River, the source of drinking water for Falls Lake reservoir in Raleigh and the future Teer Quarry in Durham.

2. Preservation of the nationally significant Eno River Aquatic Habitat which contains endangered and threatened species, among them, the Neuse River waterdog, the yellow lamp mussel, the Roanoke bass aka the red-eye, the panhandle pebblesnail (Virginia pebblesnail), and the Atlantic pigtoe.

3. Preservation of the extensive wildlife corridor provided by the contiguous parklands of West Point on the Eno City Park and the Eno River State Park within our increasingly urbanized region. A conservation model for the state, this wildlife corridor gives animals passage into four counties and runs some 20 miles on the Eno, reaching beyond to the Falls of the Neuse Gamelands.

4. Protection from increased flooding at West Point, which will bring silt and pollution to natural habitat and will potentially damage the historic site, in particular the milldam and gristmill.

5. Preservation of a sizable unspoiled old forest, which mitigates climate change on a local level and provides the benefits of cleaning the water and air.

6. Renewed commitment by the City to the 50 year old conservation achievement of saving West Point on the Eno which has been of immeasurable benefit to Durham, the Triangle, and the State. By preserving Black Meadow Ridge as an intrinsic, historic part of West Point, the City will continue to protect the nationally significant cultural and natural heritage of West Point on the Eno City Park.

II. RECREATION BENEFITS ~

7. Providing equitable access to natural areas and nature trails by expanding the healthful quiet forest of West Point on the Eno City Park. As the city grows this park on the bus line provides access to an unspoiled, secluded natural place - an enhanced opportunity for all of Durham’s citizens to explore and enjoy.

8. Continuation of the water-related activities of swimming, fishing, wading and canoeing in the clean Eno River, which is dependent on keeping environmental protections in place. If the wildlife habitat is preserved, human use is enhanced, because the water is clean and safe for such recreation. Should the river’s water quality be degraded, these activities cannot continue to be safely enjoyed.

III. CULTURAL BENEFITS ~

9. Preservation of the historical identity of West Point on the Eno, keeping the rural character of 404 acres free of the intrusion of modern construction on the view-shed and preventing damage and alteration of the original topography, the historic mill, and its historic waterworks and the milldams. This living history museum is on the National Register of Historic Places and is one of Durham’s two Cultural Heritage Parks.

10. The preservation of an unspoiled place with Native American and African American history which predates the City and County of Durham. In 1878 Dilsey Holman, who had once been enslaved, bought 88 acres of this ridge, a notably large property for an African American woman in the time of Reconstruction.

11. Protection of the Holman Cemetery and preservation of the historic wagon trail which runs between the cemetery and the Buffalo Trail at West Point. Researchers are arriving at the conclusion that it was originally a slave cemetery, the final resting place for many from the enslaved families who once lived there in association with West Point Mill and the McCown homeplace.

12. Protection of the historic character of the home, darkroom and surroundings of the now internationally recognized photographer Hugh Mangum. His egalitarian photographs from the late Victorian period feature Black and White, young and old, rich and poor, side-by-side, for he welcomed all into his studio. He left us many scenic photographs of West Point, which include West Point Mill in the 1908 flood and the Sennett Hole, itself a millsite predating 1752.
1. ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS ~

Protection of the water quality in a critical watershed area which affects the Eno River, the source of drinking water for Falls Lake reservoir in Raleigh and the future Teer Quarry in Durham.

Pollution and sedimentation of the Eno will have detrimental consequences for the Triangle and the State, including degradation of the waters in Falls Lake and the future Teer Quarry. The ongoing plan to impose a 382 unit housing development on Black Meadow Ridge in the watershed of the Eno River next to West Point on the Eno City Park will ultimately result in environmental harm to the river and the irreversible loss of endangered and rare aquatic species as a consequence of habitat destruction.

Black Meadow Ridge is a watershed location of the highest sensitivity according to a 2018 study paid for by the City of Durham. The state-mandated study called CAPP for Critical Areas Protection Plan, was invested in to identify the “the highest priority private parcels … for protection in each watershed area.” The study identified four KEYSTONE PARCELS on Black Meadow Ridge as critical watershed land. (KEYSTONE PARCELS indicate land in proximity to sensitive protected water sources, which for public benefit should be protected, rather than compromised.) The parcels comprise 97% of the land on the ridge, almost all the property that is to be developed. In this time of climate change, which will bring increased flooding, it is important to protect the watershed by keeping absorbent buffers of natural area in place by major waterways. Imposing a dense hardscape development on two tributaries, Warren’s Mill Creek and Black Meadow Branch, and within the sloping river valley will exacerbate flooding at West Point. Floodwaters from the development will unleash pollution and sedimentation into Durham County’s remarkable wild river and will adversely affect Durham’s and Raleigh’s drinking water.
2. Preservation of the nationally significant Eno River Aquatic Habitat which contains endangered and threatened species, among them, the Neuse River waterdog, the Yellow lampmussel, the Roanoke Bass, aka the red-eye, the Panhandle pebblesnail (Virginia pebblesnail), and the Atlantic pigtoe.

Biologist Bill Adams, has written that the Eno, “still harbors a once common aquatic community that has virtually disappeared from the rest of the Piedmont, a community that contains some of North Carolina’s rarest and most unfamiliar residents.” A healthy Neuse River waterdog, now listed as a federally threatened species, was found on February 10 of this year at West Point by a graduate student who documented and reported his finding to US Fish and Wildlife Services and the Eno River Association. There has been a 50% decline in numbers of this species found only in the Eno/Neuse and Tar Rivers over the last 30 years, so NC State University is monitoring the waterdog’s range to better protect it through conservation measures. Some of the most important documentation about the ecology of the Eno is in the “Durham County Inventory of Important Natural Areas, Plants and Wildlife” written in 1999 by Robert Sutter and Stephen Hall of the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program. Durham County participated in the production of this inventory.

A partial list of the rare or threatened aquatic species identified at West Point includes the yellow lampmussel, the eastern elliptio, the variable spike, (freshwater mussels) the Virginia pebblesnail, the Neuse River waterdog, and the world’s rarest bass, the red-eye or Roanoke bass and the Carolina madtom, an endangered catfish. Important as bio-indicators of water quality, these aquatic creatures are our “canaries in the coal mine.” If a big development is allowed in their river valley, it is a certainty that these species, some only remaining in the Eno, will eventually be lost at West Point from habitat destruction. In the Durham County Inventory Sutter and Hall, both of whom are naturalists familiar with native flora and fauna across the state, rate the Eno River Corridor as well as West Point on Eno Park to be of “National Significance.” They make the following warning about environmental threats and conservation protection at West Point in particular. The proposed development would make these threats a horrible reality:

“The steep slopes and riverine habitats receive protection as city park lands, but encroaching development and heavy use by park visitors are significant and still growing sources of disturbance. Water quality within the Eno is particularly threatened by proliferating impervious surfaces, lawns, or other non-point sources of pollution. The eroding effects of stormwater runoff also threaten the natural communities particularly where tributary ravines cross through the park’s boundaries [Warren’s Mill Creek and Black Meadow Branch] and in areas where development approaches the steep bluffs above the Eno. Heavy use of the park’s trails also contributes to erosion and threatens several species that are particularly sensitive to human disturbance …”

“... Protection of the Eno River Aquatic Habitat (which includes the reaches of the Eno within both parks ...) should be a major priority for both parks and will additionally require the cooperative efforts by a number of different landowners, governmental agencies or conservation groups. … Due to the heavy visitation to West Point on the Eno, trails must be carefully routed to avoid disturbances to the most human-sensitive species and habitats that are vulnerable to trampling. … Trails should be routed through large blocks of intact forest. Wide buffer strips may need to be obtained, either through direct acquisition or by conservation easement, in order to avoid conflicts between the natural community the parks are intended to protect and the human uses that are also an integral function of these public lands.
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3. Preservation of the extensive wildlife corridor provided by the contiguous parklands of West Point on the Eno City Park and the Eno River State Park within our increasingly urbanized region. A conservation model for the state, this wildlife corridor gives animals passage into four counties and runs some 20 miles on the Eno, reaching beyond to the Falls of the Neuse Gamelands.

The extraordinary wildlife corridor of which West Point City Park is a vital part must be kept intact. The imposition of a massive development with urban lighting will be deleterious to the presence of many species, will affect migratory birds, and will deprive terrestrial species of the forest habitat they now occupy in our increasingly urbanized region. The particular animals of West Point on the Eno City Park depend on the existing forest habitat of Black Meadow Ridge remaining undisturbed, quiet, and without night-time artificial illumination which disrupts the presence of wildlife. “The Durham County Inventory of Important Natural Areas, Plants and Wildlife” written by Robert Sutter and Stephen Hall in 1999 states:

“The Eno River Valley also provides the backbone of an entire system of corridors that link the wildlife of Durham County to refuge areas far beyond the county’s boundaries. Upstream in Orange County the Eno itself forms links with the Hillsborough Division of Duke Forest, Occoneechee Mountain and the extensive woodlands of the Eno River Uplands - now partially protected as part of the State park. Further connections to the rural areas of northern Orange County are made via the Little River Corridor, which joins the Eno downstream from Penny’s Bend. Links to Person County are similarly formed by way of the Flat River Corridor, which joins the Eno to form the Neuse River just west of the Wake County line. Downstream the Neuse provides connections to several of the most important natural areas identified in Wake County (LeGrand, 1987) and still further links exist with the broad areas of bottomlands along the Neuse that reach all the way to New Bern in the Coastal Plain. …”

“The value of the Eno River Corridor to the region’s wildlife results not only from its connections to all these other corridors, but also in the fact that a large portion of the land along its length - from the Eno River State Park to the Falls of the Neuse Gamelands has been set aside as protected natural areas. Structurally, the string of core sanctuaries and protected links along the Eno exemplify the sort of preserve design advocated by modern, landscape level conservation theory.”

“The creation of the Eno River State Park and the West Point City Park, in fact, is probably the best example in the entire state of this approach to conservation and well illustrates the multiple conservation values that can be protected when efforts are directed toward the landscape level rather than towards more circumscribed sites:

1. Together, these two parks preserve one of the most scenic valleys in the eastern Piedmont … and provide a major recreation area and essential open space within the heart of one of the most urbanized regions in North Carolina. …

2. They also help protect the water quality of the Eno, which is vital for the human inhabitants of Orange, Durham, and Wake Counties as it is for the fauna of the nationally significant Eno River Aquatic Habitat. Not only is the Eno a major regional water supply, but canoeists, kayakers, and rafters coexist on the Eno with freshwater mussels that elsewhere have been devastated by the creation of impediments or from water quality degradation.

3. In addition to protecting four of the significant vegetation communities identified in Sutter’s inventory, the wooded slopes and ridges within the parks provide habitat for a large variety of terrestrial animal species, ranging from the regionally rare redback salamanders and broad-winged hawks to Louisiana waterthrushes, American redstarts, prothonotary warblers and the species typical of riparian habitats.

4. The Orange County section of the path contains a large expanses of upland habitat, which provides core refuge for many species requiring forest interior habitats. Smaller but still significant amounts of these habitats also exist at the Pump Station and West Point City Park in Durham County.
5. Equally important to the preservation of core wildlife areas is the protection of habitat continuity along a major portion of this corridor. Fish, otter, and redback salamanders, just as much as canoeists and hikers, can travel almost unimpeded for over eight miles from the dam at Pleasant Green in Orange County to the dam at West Point Mill.”

~ Robert Sutter and Stephen Hall, authors of “Durham County Inventory of Important Natural Areas, Plants and Wildlife”

Today passage on the Eno is even less impeded, because the Pleasant Green Dam is gone.

4. Protection from increased flooding at West Point, which will bring silt and pollution to natural habitat and will potentially damage the historic site, in particular the milldam and gristmill.

With climate change, flooding on the Eno is expected to worsen. Flooding is already an issue at West Point. Here the river topographically widens and slows; the deeper gorges upstream pour forcefully into the site. The dense development proposed for the high ground almost the full length of the park’s south side will unleash increased floodwaters upon this historic location, floodwaters which in the past would have been ameliorated by the natural landscape of the ridge. See Item 9. under III. CULTURAL BENEFITS for more detail on the potential physical impact of increased flooding to the mill, the milldam across the Eno, and the extensive waterworks of the mill.

5. Preservation of a sizable unspoiled old forest, which mitigates climate change on a local level and provides the benefits of cleaning the water and air.

The United Nations International Climate Change Panel just issued their latest report with the urgent warning that the window of time for the world to mitigate the worst effects of climate change is rapidly closing. Action to circumvent the worst of climate change must take place in the next ten years and the next few years are critical. In a recent interview Jane Goodall advised that, instead of being overwhelmed by hopelessness and inertia at the scale of this threat, it is now important that individuals and communities act to do what they can to protect the environment on a local level. Acting locally, they can immediately be effective.

Black Meadow Ridge is a rare sizable piece of forest within massively developed north Durham. Planting new trees to replace those lost is one way to battle climate change. But it is most important not to eradicate the existing stands of mature trees Durham is fortunate to still have. The native forest on the ridge today is part of a beneficial ecosystem which has evolved over time, with only the interruption of low impact farming a century ago.

A “New York Times” March 2022 article about Diana Beresford-Kroeger, an expert on the necessity of trees for human survival, cites the known scientific fact that trees store
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carbon dioxide and oxygenate the air. Beresford-Kroeger, who has an honorary doctorate of biology and an honorary degree of law for climate-change work, describes the preservation and growing of trees to be:

"the best and only thing we have right now to fight climate change and do it fast ... When we cut down a forest, we only understand a small portion of what we're choosing to destroy. We've taken down too much forest. That's our big mistake... But if you build back the forests, you oxygenate the atmosphere more, and it buys us time."

The City and the County of Durham should deliberately preserve the precious old forest we still have to mitigate the drastic consequences of climate change, which include more flooding, more heat, more air and water degradation, and loss of biodiversity. It is especially important to keep the ecosystem of the wild Eno intact and unstressed by keeping the buffer of the woodland on Black Meadow Ridge in place. City and County government should understand that, as dramatic as it may sound, scientists have now warned us that the globe is at a tipping point. The local and regional decisions our government officials make today will be critical to the future health of Durham's environment and Durham's citizens. The proposed development would run almost a mile and would downgrade the beneficial environment of the park. The existing forest now there runs almost a mile and is irreplaceable considering the natural climate mitigation it will forever provide.

6.
Renewed commitment by the City to the 50 year old conservation achievement of saving West Point on the Eno which has been of immeasurable benefit to Durham, the Triangle and the State. By preserving Black Meadow Ridge as an intrinsic, historic part of West Point, the City will continue to protect the nationally significant cultural and natural heritage of West Point on the Eno City Park.

The city park, some 404 acres, lies eastward within the larger Eno River Corridor. The environmental damage this development would cause at West Point and downstream would contravene the inspired conservation effort which has gone on for over half a century. In 1965 the Eno River Association embarked on an ambitious plan to protect the entire river by preserving it as parkland and natural area in cooperation with Pearson Stewart, the chief planner of the Research Triangle Planning Commission, and later a founder of the Triangle Land Conservancy. Stewart and Margaret Nygard acted in preparation for the megalopolis they knew the Triangle would become, what they called “future shock.”

They set out to provide clean, unpolluted water for Orange, Durham and Wake Counties, to conserve a major wildlife corridor, and to provide natural parkland for outdoor recreation - all to meet the population explosion anticipated in 50 years. The Eno Association led the way to secure the green-space of the Eno River Corridor with its significant flora and fauna by helping to buy state parkland and continues to do so. City, county, state, and national governmental agencies were all involved in supporting this plan as were schoolchildren and citizens, old and young, from all walks of life. The preservation of the Eno drew national attention, including an article in the Christian Science Monitor and a 1989 visit by Al Roker to the Eno for an in-depth story, which Roker described to be his favorite piece that year. In 1988 Stewart Udall, Secretary of the Interior, presented the first national Alexander Calder Award for Conservation to Margaret Nygard in Washington, DC. As stated in the “Durham County Inventory of Important Natural Areas,” naturalists from the NC Natural Heritage Program describe the adjoining Eno River State Park and West Point City Park, which together comprise much of the Eno River Corridor, as being the best model in the state for landscape level conservation. Hundreds of thousands in Hillsborough, Raleigh and Durham have long benefited for five, going-on-six decades from the protection of the river as a clean water source and as beloved natural parkland.

Hand draft by Margaret Nygard, Southern Historical Collection at UNC
The huge endeavor to preserve the Eno was made to endure, not to unravel in effect and have but a short 60 year duration. The plan which was made with the Research Triangle’s preeminent planner was meant to provide clean water, respite and outdoor recreation in unspoiled wilderness for generations to come. It was meant, in Margaret Nygard’s words, to exist “in perpetuity.”

Despite having implemented this plan with the Eno River Association in the 1970’s and well into the 1990’s, the City seems to have lost touch with the core goals of this plan. In 2016 there was a failure to protect the pristine nature of the parkland at West Point which had remained undisturbed for 50 years, when the head planner of Durham City/County Planning, issued a letter allowing the developer to proceed with his development. It is not too late for Durham and North Carolina residents to voice their concern and prevent irreversible harm to our park and environment by advocating for the preservation of Black Meadow Ridge.

At the time the Eno River Association had started the campaign to create the state park on the Eno, they learned in 1967 of the City of Durham’s corresponding interest in buying land on the river in Durham County for city parkland. Margaret Nygard then wrote the following concerns to the city about their intentions:

“The Association for the Preservation of the Eno River Valley is wholeheartedly behind the establishment of a Roxboro-Guess Road Riverside Park. We hope that the City will give us legal assurances that this park will remain exclusively a park in perpetuity. The Eno is a historic and scenic river worth saving in its entirety east of Hillsborough and in its natural state as a free-flowing stream which presently forms a quiet green belt around Durham. The Association respectfully urges the City to acquire sufficient lands in this one mile stretch of the Eno between Guess and Roxboro Roads to secure a natural park which will be untroubled by highway noises and urban intrusion. We urge that the plans for these parklands should give special place to the historic sites in them - the Sennett Hole, the Old Mill Road, Westpoint Mill, the McCowan-Mangum House.”

The proposed development would completely thwart these concerns, which were written to establish environmental and historic preservation objectives for the future of the river and the identity of the park at West Point. The Eno River Association was actively engaged in the creation of the new park for over 25 years after this was written. At their initiative the Friends of West Point was organized in 1977 to work with the City in furthering these goals and establishing the new city park. Should the development go in, new trails are likely to be configured to accommodate the 382 housing unit development, and the character of the historic wilderness parklands, long protected by Friends of West Point, will be changed to be compliant to the development’s presence. The Eno will not remain “in its natural state,” nor will it [remain] “a natural park which will be untroubled by highway noises and urban intrusion.”

And “this one mile stretch of the Eno between Guess and Roxboro Roads” Margaret Nygard wrote about, most of the full length of West Point on the Eno’s southern boundary, will be forever bordered and impacted by the biggest development ever made adjoining Eno parkland. This is against the wishes and intentions of the organization that fought for four years to implement the environmental impact statement that saved West Point in the first place, and they had huge public support in doing so. The conservation work is ongoing. Last year the Eno River Association made a major gift to the City by adding 8 acres to the natural parkland at West Point to further the protection of the river.

Today, if one is to take into account the hundreds of letters and emails sent to City officials over the last two years, the development is against the wishes of most Durham residents. The North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality is accustomed to receiving only a few objections to any given development during a Public Hearing, but this February they received over 2,000 written statements against issuing the developer’s water permit. Regardless of the unprecedented public outcry, the NCDEQ granted the water permit, so the struggle to protect the Eno at West Point goes on.
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II. RECREATION BENEFITS ~

7. Providing equitable access to natural areas and nature trails by expanding the healthful quiet forest of West Point on the Eno City Park. As the city grows this park on the bus line provides access to an unspoiled, secluded natural place - an enhanced opportunity for all of Durham’s citizens to explore and enjoy.

Because West Point is on the bus line it is already accessible to all people who live near bus routes in the City of Durham. Expanding the size of the natural part of the park would enhance outdoor recreation in the park and add yet more nature trails. More space within the woods affords more solitude for park visitors with the added benefit of healthy air and water and secluded quiet space. West Point on the Eno offers the rare opportunity to access wilderness parkland within the City of Durham. At West Point one can be deeply immersed in nature, can observe native flora and fauna, and enjoy a place with the quality of a national park. The health benefits of recreation in nature or simply being within a natural environment surrounded by trees are now well-documented.

The aforementioned March 8, 2022 “New York Times” article on the importance of forest restoration states “Studies led by the physician Dr. Qing Li [co-editor of the “International Handbook of Forest Therapy,”] …found visits to forests or forest-bathing lessened stress and activated cancer-fighting cells. A 2021 study from Italy suggested that lower rates of Covid-19 deaths in forested areas of the country were linked in part to immunity-boosting aerosols from the region’s trees and plants.” North Carolina medical doctor, Dr. Bill Rawls, lists ten health benefits from regular exposure outdoors to nature, each supported by scientific studies: “Reduced Stress, Enhanced Immune Function, Healthier Lungs, Lower Risk of Chronic Diseases, Healthier Aging, Improved Mood, Faster Healing and Less Pain, Better Focus and Cognitive Ability, Stronger Social Connections, [and] More Energy.

The expansion of West Point on the Eno Park by adding the ridge with its trees and exciting rock formations will enhance the existing natural area and be of equitable benefit to all Durham citizens. It is highly important that Durham’s youth have the opportunity to experience an accessible, truly natural place. Given Black Meadow Ridge’s deep African American history it would be of particular benefit to Durham’s African American youth.
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If the development is built, an extensive part of the woodland next to the secluded, quiet Buffalo Trail will instead be lost forever to urbanization. The trail itself will lose its remote character because it will be lined by a tall stretch of some 60 townhouses, each emitting noise (yet yet more noise will be induced by some 322 additional units). If the existing natural parkland is not protected from the proposed dense development, the quality of the air will be degraded and recreational activities on, in and near the water will ultimately be impeded. The activities of animals and birds will be curtailed by habitat interference and destruction and by the loss of night-sky to light pollution. Park visitors will be deprived of the spiritually meaningful and educational observation of nature. Durham citizens have unwittingly walked on the ridge for years not realizing they have strayed outside the park boundaries. It is important to incorporate Black Meadow Ridge into the existing natural parkland and to add more nature trails for all of Durham’s citizens to enjoy.

8. 
Continuation of the water-related activities of swimming, fishing, wading, and canoeing in the clean Eno River, which is dependent on keeping environmental protections in place. If the wildlife habitat is preserved, human use is enhanced, because the water is clean and safe for such recreation. Should the river’s water quality be degraded, these activities cannot continue to be safely enjoyed.

People have been swimming in the Eno for centuries confident in water quality. In the second decade of the 21st century we should commit to keeping recreational activities in and on the water possible and enjoyable. A polluted, degraded Eno will not be safe for fishing, swimming, wading, rafting, and canoeing. The simple enjoyment of observing aquatic life and wildlife dependent on the river will no longer be possible. Should the development be allowed at some point the Eno will be irreversibly degraded at West Point. It is a matter of when, not if.

Shoemaker’s Ford by the mill is a place many a toddler, holding the hand of a parent, is first introduced to the free-flowing wild river. This meaningful experience will not be possible for future generations at West Point if water quality protection is not responsibly enforced. The development will adversely alter the quality of the water by directly eroding Warren’s Mill Creek and Black Meadow Branch. These two tributaries of the Eno which run down the ridge will release destructive pollution and sediment into the river. The Eno at West Point Park will no longer be a place one can confidently enter the water to wade and swim, much less fish.
III. CULTURAL BENEFITS ~

9. Preservation of the historical identity of West Point on the Eno, keeping the rural character of 404 acres free of the intrusion of modern construction on the view-shed and preventing damage and alteration of the original topography, the historic mill, and its historic waterworks and milldams. This living history museum is on the National Register of Historic Places and is one of Durham’s two Cultural Heritage Parks.

(A) Destructive alteration of the historic site and potential damage:

The potential damage and alteration of the 20 acres comprising the National Register site which contains West Point Park’s core historic buildings will first be addressed. The reconstruction of West Point Mill demanded years of cooperative, costly, and specialized work. The original mill collapsed at the very time the Eno Association was trying to save the site. Volunteers dismantled an entire historic mill in Virginia, which had been donated to the cause, and recycled its machinery and wood into the rebuilt mill and blacksmith shop. A multitude of people donated $10.00 to “build a square foot of the mill.” Modern engineers had difficulty getting the runner stone, about a ton in weight, to run correctly. Derek Ogden, one of the world’s most skilled traditional millwrights, a recipient of Britain’s highest restoration award, constructed a massive oak hurst frame to support the millstones and made the mill operation truly traditional. A wave of civic involvement from the 1970’s into the 90’s in cooperation with City government made this happen. The Friends of West Point advisory board was created in 1975 to help develop and operate the park and to protect the park’s historic and natural character. (Around 2009 Friends of West Point disbanded.)

West Point Mill has ideal strategic placement for a water-powered gristmill, which in part explains its success as the longest running, most influential of some 30 mills on the Eno [1778-1942]. The stream Black Meadow Branch runs down the ridge, functioning as the natural course of the millrace. The mill is positioned to work with nature, set protectively off from the river in the path of the millrace in the original location. It is also powered by the milldam, which was rebuilt across the Eno on the bedrock of the original dam. A manmade stream diverted from the dam and controlled by sluice gates, joins Black Meadow Branch to power the waterwheel.

But the mill sits squarely in the path of the increased flooding this development will introduce to the Eno floodplain. The claim has been made that building the 382 unit development at a density of 6.2 houses per acre will not have an impact on any historic place or structure. The Eno River Association and Save Black Meadow Ridge group strongly disagree. Now absorbent woodland, the developed ridge would be covered by an impermeable hardscape of housing units interlaced with roadways on the slope of the river valley above the millsite.

The natural woodland along the Eno’s two tributaries on the ridge is water absorbent and has been officially identified as “critical watershed.” But the development will divert floodwaters away from its site via large collection ponds, releasing extra waters into West Point Park at an injurious volume far beyond what runs in the creeks now. The
sedimentation caused by the development will come from direct erosion of the creek banks, a situation which has never occurred before, the direct result of waters being forcefully released from the development into the park. The streams within the park will be continuously eroded, their banks and beds deeply washed out, thus degrading the Eno River and the historic site with cumulative sedimentation. The natural topography of Warren’s Mill Creek and Black Meadow Branch, streams whose old names come to us from the 18th century, will be forever altered.

The National Register site contains West Point Mill’s extensive waterworks, which are a complex integration of the natural stream, the river itself, and traditional gristmill and waterpower technology. The potentially threatened waterworks consist of: the milldam across the Eno essential to mill operation, much of the stream Black Meadow Branch, which forms the natural course of the headrace, the manmade section of the headrace which runs from the milldam to join Black Meadow Branch and is controlled by sluice gates, the antique external machinery of the mill, including its big overshot waterwheel, a small dam in the race above the waterwheel, belts, shafts, and gears, and the tailrace part of the millrace which releases the waters into the river. The widespread configuration within the National Register grounds is positioned as it historically was and operates as it historically did for a stretch of time spanning four centuries from the 18th into the 21st.

What runs off the ridge, runs to the mill. Of all buildings, water-powered mills are the most vulnerable to flooding. Flooding on the Eno, especially at West Point, is expected to worsen and is already an issue. The dense development proposed for the high ground on the length of the park’s south side will unleash increased floodwaters on the historic site, floodwaters which once would have been ameliorated by the natural landscape of the ridge. The configuration of waterworks and mill represents traditional technology reliant on the natural forces of waterpower and gravity. Should the development go in above this historic configuration the entire site will undergo several adverse physical impacts: increased flooding, continual sedimentation build-up, and the topographical alteration of the channels of the headrace and tailrace. There is some question as to whether West Point Mill, the milldam, and related structures such as the bridge over the waterwheel can withstand the onslaught of yet more exacerbated flooding over time. Uncertainty as to the future of the historic site has been unthinkingly imposed on the park.

Black Meadow Branch, in particular, has always been a certain scale throughout West Point Mill’s history from the 18th into the 21st century. As described, the stream will change physically because of the adjoining development, becoming much deeper and wider from increased runoff. Its contours will be forever changed, thus altering the historic technological system of which it is a vital part. Black Meadow Branch does not have enough force to run the wheel alone. Instead the manmade stream diverted from the milldam provides most of the force necessary to run the waterwheel.

**Annotated Reasons to Save Black Meadow Ridge**

Floodwaters overtook the road around the park and the mill during the 1981 Festival for the Eno, Photo courtesy of Jim Wise from his book “Images of America ~ Durham County”
Annotated Reasons to Save Black Meadow Ridge

Should Black Meadow Branch become deepened, widened and heavily silted, the technological system which the millrace is part of will not work as it historically did and as it was expertly restored to operate. More waters and more silt than ever will reach the site via the stream. The stream’s essential interaction with the mill and its machinery will be forever changed. The mill’s machinery and waterworks may have to be altered and repaired when the two tributaries and the river bring an increased volume of water caused by the presence of an almost mile-long development.

It is a poor decision to permit a housing development to go in place to the detriment and potential destruction of Durham’s unique historic resource, which was saved by the selfless dedication of so many people. There is a legitimate question as to how or whether the city will be able to properly or adequately replace a destroyed gristmill or milldam should those events occur after the development is irrevocably in place. Around 2009 the City Recreation Department and the Friends of West Point discontinued interaction, ending Friends of West Point’s important advisory role in maintaining the historic and natural character of the park. Friends of West Point’s last act before the board disbanded was to repair the milldam, using the last $10,000 in their coffers to engage traditional gristmill specialists.

West Point Mill was recreated and the site saved to represent all the mills, some 30 in number, that once existed on a 20 mile stretch of the Eno, West Point having been the most prominent among them. Future alteration of the millrace and the use of the milldam could interfere with the continued operation of the mill as a safe, public, educational facility. Alteration of the configuration of this old technology reliant on existing topography and the harnessing and control of water power would interfere permanently with the functionality of the park as a living history museum.

Should the development go in, other detrimental consequences are likely to be increased costs to the City to maintain and repair the mill (work which should be done by skilled traditional millwrights) and costs to maintain the integrity of the physical mill and related structures such as the bridges over the waterwheel and millrace. The city should take ongoing maintenance and repair of this historic site into serious consideration, realizing it must do so within the confines and requirements of a National Register site. It would be wise and most fitting not to introduce increased floodwaters to the location in the first place. Everyone should be mindful that a flood ended West Point Mill’s 164 years of operation in 1942 when the original milldam across the Eno was washed away.

Boating Party by the old saw mill at West Point Mill. They are on the waters of Black Meadow Branch, a stream called so since the 1700’s. Headrace of West Point Mill, it runs from the high ground of Black Meadow Ridge directly to the mill, turning the water wheel which turns the stones which grind the corn.
~ photograph by Hugh Mangum, Rubenstein Collections Library at Duke, a color scan of Mangum’s original glass negative by Alex Harris
Annotated Reasons to Save Black Meadow Ridge

A further important aspect of the representation of the rural community at West Point is the preservation of the site’s original topography and the prevention of disturbance to the natural topography. The historic site represents the gentle agricultural use of the land that took place for centuries, America’s early start subsiding on Native American corn, and an early economy based on the growing and milling of corn before urbanization. The site’s known history begins with cultivation of corn by Native Americans long before the European and African American presence. Historian Jean Anderson cites the 18th century name Black Meadow Branch and that of its companion stream White Meadow Branch (now in a culvert under Old Farm) to signify meadowland which had been cleared and cultivated by Indians long before European arrival and displacement. Another intriguing possibility is that woodland buffalo, thought to have made the Buffalo Trail at West Point, may have had a role in clearing the meadowland that is documented in the 18th century. Bison actively eat the bark off saplings bringing about the formation of meadows in wilderness.

The North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources has published a series of books “The Way We Lived,” which includes Thomas H. Clayton’s book “Close to the Land – The Way We Lived in North Carolina, 1820-1870.” Clayton devotes a 6-page chapter to West Point Mill in the time of the ownership of Herbert Sims followed by that of John Cabe McCown. He presents West Point as a significant living history museum authentically representative of community life in that time.

The original topography, the land underfoot, and the streams running to the river, all affecting mill operation should not be altered by the intrusive effect of an adjoining unrelated modern venture. The lay of the land is a functional part of the historic park. “Close to the Land” is exactly what is represented at West Point. Reconfiguration of landscape and streams, including revision of the workings of the mill because of the development, would not be true to the history the park is meant to represent.

It should be further said that when West Point was saved the Eno River Association and the Research Triangle Planning Commission in cooperation with City, State, and National government aspired to create a “gateway park” with restored structures representative of the entire Eno history, which included some 30 colonial and Victorian mills. West Point Mill, having been prominent, was once owned by two of Durham’s mayors. It is hoped that officials in Durham City/County Planning and North Carolina Archives and History come to realize that “Eno Village” would be the biggest, most intrusive development ever placed on the length of the Eno since most of the river became protected parkland. The rural history which West Point on the Eno signifies as a living history museum also requires continued preservation of the distinctive natural environment within the 20 acres of National Register property. Furthermore, it was formally understood that the entire 404 acre West point on the Eno City Park would be kept a preserved natural area “in perpetuity … free of noise and urban intrusion.”

West Point historically was a place where people could work, play, and interact with a clean river. Such historic interaction with nature is still possible at the park in 2022. On this National Register site people can still go fishing and catch the world’s rarest bass, the red-eye or Roanoke bass. (It is hoped they throw it back.) The development would adversely affect the visitor experience by altering the historic site itself, said alteration causing the destruction of native flora and fauna that was present in the times of the McCowans and the Mangums. The natural world people in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries knew remains remarkably preserved in this new century thanks to the interdependent conservation and historic preservation work which began in the 1970’s. 2022 is not the time to undo and abandon the historic site’s natural
Annotated Reasons to Save Black Meadow Ridge

identity. The native, natural features of West Point, dependent on the protection of the Eno and its tributaries, are distinguishing qualities authentic to this historic site, which will be irreparably damaged and lost should a development dominate the park's border for almost a mile.

9. Preservation of the historical identity of West Point on the Eno – continued
B) Adverse alteration of the view-shed and a quiet, natural location by huge modern structures

Visitors to West Point use the old trails that physically evoke the place's history, tracing the foot-steps of Native American farmers, hunters and traders and those of some 300 people who used the Eno's longest running mill. Hugh Mangum, the young Victorian photographer who first documented the river by camera, wandered these paths, unaware his portraits would be world-acclaimed a century on. Views we see today were in his gaze and his camera's eye. West Point's compelling, complex history is best brought to life amid the unspoiled rural surroundings of its past. Friends of West Point considered the absence of modern construction and preservation of nature to be fundamental to the visitor experience of this living history museum. In 1979 their president, Ken Coulter, emphasized “If the public is to enjoy the true meaning and value of West Point, the historic focus of the park must be maintained in the years to come.” His brother Rufus Coulter, of Durham's Planning Department, firmly advocated against “an overpowering influence upon the Park of a manmade object upon the view” in a 1970 Public Works meeting about the park's future design.

Saved by the first environmental impact statement ever enacted in North Carolina and placed on the National Register, the McCown-Mangum House and West Point Mill are surrounded by quiet natural area and hiking trails. The Buffalo Trail shown in the map runs to the Sennett Hole, site of the Eno’s oldest colonial gristmill pre-dating 1752. A legendary place named for its eccentric owner Captain Michael Synnot, it is the broadest, second-deepest swimming hole on the river. This trail, first worn by woodland buffalo which vanished from our state by 1715, became an Indian trade path, part of a large Indian settlement, then a wagon road giving passage to three historic millsites which lie within the city park boundaries. The centuries-old remote trail would be dominated for most of its length on the way to the Sennett Hole by the garish sight of a bank of modern townhouses, or, as Rufus Coulter put it, the “overpowering influence upon the Park of a manmade object upon the view.”

The drastic alteration of the view from within the park will definitely impact the Buffalo Trail. There is some concern that, depending on the time of year, the development may be visible from the McCown-Mangum House, the Hugh Mangum Photography Museum, and the park entrance, a
matter which should be investigated. Unconstrained noise introduced from the 382 housing units will cause further degradation of the historic site.

The 60 acre modern housing development would occupy almost a mile on the high ground, bordering most of the length of the park’s south side. Joe Liles’ map on page 3 of this document illustrates the potential impact clearly. The incompatible visual elements, noise intrusion and physical alteration described, would irreversibly deprive the public of the living history experience West Point Park, one of Durham’s two Cultural Heritage Parks, was meant to provide.

10. The preservation of an unspoiled place which was an important part of African American and Native American history at West Point. In 1886 Dilsey Holman, who had once been enslaved, owned 88 acres of this ridge, more land than most of the 242 Black landowners in Durham County at the time.

The name Black Meadow Ridge is a derived from the historic stream name, Black Meadow Branch. Black Meadow Branch and a companion stream named White Meadow Branch, now in a culvert across Roxboro Road, are names indicative of of a big Indian site that existed here long pre-dating West Point. These names from early 18th century documents are so old that, according to historian Jean Anderson, they describe meadows which had first been cleared and cultivated by Native Americans before the Europeans arrived.

Open meadowland was easier to take over for the early settlers than clearing the land themselves, another explanation for the early millsites in the city park, including Synnott’s Mill which predates 1752. Jean Anderson has said the 1752 document alludes to the presence of an even earlier millsite at the Sennett Hole. The West Point area including Black Meadow Ridge or “the Black Meadows,” as Margaret Nygard called them, was first actively used Native American land that had been cleared for cultivation. While one cannot cite which particular tribes were on this site, the Eno Indians, once the dominant tribe in the region, had the primary avocation of growing corn. Their legendary village, Adshusheer, is thought to have been near the area. In the historical section of the Environmental Impact Statement to save West Point Anderson states:

“By Roxboro Road a pair of companion streams enter the river on the south bank which are known as Black Meadow Branch and White Meadow Branch. These streams and others in the vicinity are fed by 15 springs. One deed dated 1794 gives directions ‘to cross the meadows to a stake above the meadow spring.’ From early deeds like this one, there is evidence that the meadows which gave the Meadows Branches their name were in existence in an extensive way before the white man came to
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settle. And there is further evidence from local people that these meadows were once occupied by a big Indian settlement. Here, as a youngster, Mr. Wm. Pratt, Consulting Engineer for the City of Durham, would pick up ‘bushel baskets’ of arrowheads and axeheads after a fresh plowing.”

The land which would be developed on Black Meadow Ridge was historically part of the West Point community and affirms the fact that West Point was a multi-racial community. As shown in the map the ridge has an old wagon road which joins the Buffalo Trail at West Point. In 1878 a Black woman named Dilsey Holman purchased 88 acres of the ridge from James Pool. It is thought she had formerly been enslaved. Charles Emerson’s “Tobacco Belt Directory,” records the landowners of Durham County in 1886. As best can be calculated from this document, among 34 sole female Black landowners listed in Durham County, Holman owned over twice as much land as her fellows; among all 242 Black landowners listed, she ranked 13th from the top in acreage holdings. Her life coincided with those of her neighbors:

William Lipscomb, Mayor of Durham, who owned the mill from 1875-1888, and W. J. Christian, another Mayor of Durham, who owned the mill from 1888-1909. Dilsey Holman’s neighbors also included the Presley J. Mangum family of six. The Mangums started to spend summers at West Point in the 1880’s, then permanently moved into the McCown-Mangum House in 1893.

The historic Holman Cemetery lies at the crest of the ridge. The deep wagon road runs across the ridge from the graveyard to the Buffalo Trail, once an active route in the rural West Point complex. This historic trail could provide the public a pathway to visit and reflect upon the cemetery. Set in secluded, wooded surroundings, it holds the graves of at least 50 African Americans. Researchers have recently concluded that many of the people buried here had been enslaved. Black Meadow Ridge should be preserved as the meaningful part of West Point it always was.
11. Preservation of the Holman Cemetery, the historic Black cemetery, and access via the historic wagon road running from the cemetery down the ridge to join the Buffalo Trail. It was part of West Point on the Eno.

The Holman Cemetery contains at least 14 members of Dilsey Holman’s family who have been identified by burial records. Such public records were first recorded in Durham in 1907. Those in the cemetery who died prior to 1907 do not have an existing death record in Durham or in Orange County, which the land was part of until 1881 when Durham County came about. It is the consensus of researchers that given burial practices, the number of graves (at least 50), and the names of those known to be in the cemetery, that this was initially a slave cemetery associated with the historic mill community. Only two graves are marked with inscribed stones, that of Seal Hall [1800-1891] and that of Dilsey Holman’s grandson, Lonnie Holman [1897-1925], whose grandmother owned 88 acres of the ridge during reconstruction. The rest of the graves are simply marked with head and foot stones of field stone.

Researcher Jessica Bandel has written that at one time John Cabe McCown owned 17 slaves at West Point. These enslaved people lived in three houses somewhere nearby within the mill complex. Current research of burial records led by Debra Taylor Gonzalez-Garcia indicates that several African American individuals with the last name Sims, McCown, and Lipscomb are buried in the Holman Cemetery. These are the last names of the sequence of mill-owners at West Point from

The history and significance of the Holman Cemetery is a now a subject of great interest and ongoing exploration. Historians, genealogists, archeologists and descendants, made aware of the African American cemetery’s importance in 2021, have just begun to investigate this site to better determine its history. The cemetery is associated by proximity and by an old wagon road to the community for a time known as West Point on Eno. Relevant information is presented above in item 10. This mill-oriented rural community of some 300 existed prior to the existence of the city of Durham. As shown in the map the historic wagon road, a deeply worn trail, runs from the cemetery at the crest of the ridge down to meet an ancient prominent trail at West Point called the Buffalo Trail. The Buffalo Trail was made by eastern woodland buffalo, a species which vanished from our state around 1715. The Buffalo Trail has been sequentially used by Native Americans, European traders and settlers, the community using West Point Mill, and in present day by visitors to the City Park. The wagon road should remain a part of the network.
Annotated Reasons to Save Black Meadow Ridge

1820-1888. At the time of reconstruction people who had been enslaved often adopted the last names of the families that had held them as slaves.

For many African Americans old graveyards and related features such as the wagon road on the ridge are among the sole places that remain as physical testament on the landscape to the existence of their antebellum ancestors. Such places should be treated as sacrosanct. The Durham Black Cemetery Coalition, among its many projects, has organized a group dedicated to the preservation of the Holman Cemetery. Joy Leak, a descendant of Dilsey Holman, has written a petition to protect the cemetery. (See opening page.) In keeping with the aspiration to identify and preserve historic Black cemeteries so African American history is better documented and honored, it is fitting that Black Meadow Ridge be preserved. And access should be provided for the public and for descendants by means of the original historic path up the ridge.

Above: Joy Leak, second from right, visiting the Holman Cemetery with her children. A descendant of Dilsey Holman, she is an engaged participant in the effort to protect the cemetery by preserving the original access trail across the ridge. Orange flags placed by the Durham Historical Society mark over fifty graves.

Right: Rock formations on the ridge which would be blasted away for the proposed development.
- photos by Kerstin Nygard
12. Protection of the historic character of the home, darkroom and surroundings of the internationally known photographer Hugh Mangum. Subjects he documented on the Eno include the Sennett Hole.

Not only did Black Meadow Branch function as the natural course of the millrace to run the mill, that use spanning into four centuries; for a time it had its most unusual use as a water source to develop artistic, now famous Victorian photographs. And as experts emphasize, these were not mundane photographs. A number of the images that were first washed in the creek or in waters collected from the creek are regarded by some scholars to be the work of a photographer of genius. Documentarian Margaret Sartor has described his portraiture to rank alongside that of “the modern greats.” Mangum gave subjects of all colors, classes, and genders the gift of passage to the future by perceiving and affirming each person as an individual. Doing so, he revealed a little contradictory corner of the southern past generally thought not to exist.

In 1893 P. J. Mangum, Hugh Mangum’s father and Durham’s postmaster, permanently moved his family of six to West Point into the Greek revival farmhouse, which had first been the home of mill-owner John Cabe McCown. As a teenager Mangum began developing his glass negatives in the darkroom he set up in an old pack house by the family house and used the waters of Black Meadow Branch, the creek running past the Pack House, to wash his prints and glass negatives.

In the 1970s hundreds of Mangum’s glass negatives were rescued from the Pack House by his nephew Jack Vaughan when the site was threatened and almost destroyed by a development. With the help of the Eno River Association the negatives were donated by his descendants to the Rubenstein Collection at Duke for archival care and study. The Smithsonian Institution and the George Eastman House/International Museum of Photography supported the Friends of West Point in the restoration of the Pack House to be a photography museum in Mangum’s honor. Though he worked in the time of the Jim Crow south, Mangum ran an egalitarian studio photographing Black and White clients in turn. The revelatory and honest beauty of his portraits has inspired recent two art books: “Where We Find Ourselves ~ The Photographs of Hugh Mangum 1887-1922” by Margaret Sartor and Alex Harris and “Photos Day or Night ~ The Archive of Hugh Mangum” by Sarah Stacke. His images have captivated many in the world and Mangum is known in New York and as far away as Britain and Spain. In January a choral performance celebrating Mangum’s subjects took place in Carnegie Hall and there was another such event in March in Washington, DC.
Michael Lesy, writer of the introduction to “Where We Find Ourselves,” tells how Mangum launched his modest career as an itinerant photographer in the racially visceral year of the Wilmington Massacre, 1897, and how the his life’s work today challenges some broadly made assumptions about the denizens of the southern past.

“For the next ten years, he lugged a trunk of camera equipment from railroad town to railroad town, back and forth, from Durham … up into the coal and tobacco country of southwestern Virginia. … The faces of the people he photographed in those first years, and in the years that followed, fill this book. No one’s sure - for now - where many of his clients came from, but one thing is obvious: they were a racially diverse group. In an era of violent Jim Crow segregation, such diversity was unusual, perhaps even unprecedented. That Mangum’s portraits were as insightful, as unbiased - as existentially revealing as they were - is extraordinary. In an era of racial terror, the evidence of these feelings in Mangum’s photographs appears remarkable. So remarkable that the very existence of his work challenges the ‘common knowledge’ of progressive, modern viewers - viewers who have assumed that all white southerners living then were as racist as their spokesmen and politicians. …”

“Hugh Mangum didn’t see African American people the way Jim Crow saw them. … Seen, understood, and experienced now, in the present, Mangum’s images prove how fantastical, how imaginary - how delusional - was the world conjured into existence by the homicidal racism of white supremacy. … Even if Mangum’s portraits had been no more than competently made - made in such numbers across a wide enough span of time and space, that they supply revisionist historians with new information - they are more than just data. They are also works of art. They display and evoke emotion. They are authentic human remains. If you doubt it look in the eyes of these people in these photographs. … The very best of his portraits open up and out into the souls of the people who looked back at him. His studio was a safe zone, the equivalent of a watering hole in the desert, a place where races and classes and genders gathered to be photographed by a man they trusted - a smiling fox of a man who radiated empathy and ease. A man who welcomed them, and by welcoming them gave them permission to be themselves.”

Margaret Sartor, author with Alex Harris of “Where We Find Ourselves ~ The photographs of Hugh Mangum, 1897-1922” describes Mangum’s start at West Point as a photographer:

“At the farm, in the second story of a packhouse barn once used to store tobacco as it cured, Mangum built his first darkroom, using tar to seal the gaps between boards and drawing water from a nearby tributary of the Eno River. On a pine board, just inside the narrow doorway, he wrote, in a heavily and elaborately penciled script suggestive of a proud teenager staking his territory: ‘Hugh Mangum’s Dark Room.’ Other penciled, dated notations by Mangum on the...
pine walls indicate that he continued to use the darkroom for many years. In another part of the packhouse, reachable only by ladder, he found a place to store his glass plate negatives. ... Mangum’s nephew, Jack Vaughan ... recalled that his uncle liked to ‘roam’ and, as a rule, would ‘ride the rails until his money gave out then come back [home].’ ”

The location where the creek runs past the Pack House, Mangum’s first darkroom, is on formally protected National Register ground. It functioned as an essential part of his photographic activity at West Point at times when he was in Durham between the dates 1897-1922. A 1978 Friends of West Point brochure states: “Hugh Mangum’s daughter tells us that her father printed many of his negatives in the Pack House. ... Mangum used Black Meadow Branch, a small tributary of the Eno, as a water source for chemical mixing and for washing his prints.” Another 1978-1979 brochure states: “The Pack House Museum where Hugh Mangum had his darkroom in Durham still stands back of the McCown-Mangum House. The stream still runs by where he washed his photographs.”

Firsthand information about Hugh Mangum and his family came from living descendants who had been close to him, namely his daughter Julia Mangum Rowe, his nephew Jack Vaughan, and his three nieces Polly Vaughan, Vivian Vaughan and Louise Garrard. In addition to the accounts of his relatives that he did some work creek-side, one Mangum photograph reveals his darkroom arrangement behind an open curtain. Possibly a picture taken in the Pack House, it shows a barrel with a spigot for dispensing waters that may have been drawn up from the creek.

Should there be a development, undesirable change to the physical contours and behavior of the stream, historically called Black Meadow Branch, will not only affect the mill and its waterworks. The stream would also undergo unwarranted change at its location near the Pack House. It is the place Mangum paced back and forth to from his darkroom, providing the water integral to his photographic work. Any prospective alteration of the historic site’s topography and of the creek’s dimensions and appearance is a significant issue, because, given Mangum’s singular talent, the body of work emergent from this location is recognized to be of national and international importance. This part of the creek, ever since the property was saved from the threat of a 1970s development, was meant to be under National Register protection. In tandem with the Pack House it was long a part of Mangum’s photographic process and exemplifies a simple resourceful approach to early technology in a rural setting, as does the mill with its workings.

Lower photo: Mangum photograph of clients or friends taken in the front yard of the McCown-Mangum House. These images and Mangum's self portrait on the previous page are from the Rubenstein Collection at Duke
West Point on the Eno is the place in which this exceptional man was rooted, the place he set out from to ride the rails on his photographic ventures, a home-place to which he repeatedly returned, and the place that became the repository of his life’s work for half a century after his death. Mangum left us his engaged documentation of his surroundings at West Point including: the mill covered in huge circus lithographs topped by a fish weathervane in the 1908 flood, a Sennett Hole photograph which he inscribed “Eno River Near Home 1900,” the Eno milldam fortified by wooden timbers over bedrock, a boating party bobbing in the Black Meadow Branch millpond by the sawmill, and many “plein-air” photographs in the lush Mangum House yard of the creative family he sprung from.

One such photograph is of his siblings Lula and Leo posing in the yard with their musical instruments. The two lived out their days in the house, Leo its last occupant having died in 1968. Lula was known for the expansive, beautiful garden she tended by the Mangum House. Truly it is an extraordinary rarity to have a historic site that was occupied and recorded by an early photographer of the highest merit who self-identified as an artist. To be true to West Point’s living history, the stream Mangum used to develop his images should be kept protected and unchanged, because it is intrinsic to the authentic historic site, as it has always been.
This tinted postcard of the milldam likely was made by Hugh Mangum. He offered postcards as one of his products. In his time the mill was called Christian's Mill after the owner, a former mayor of Durham. In September of 1906 this card was mailed to Mangum, then in Wythville, Virginia by his sister.
- from Margaret C. Nygard’s papers, Southern Historical Collection at UNC

Above: Mangum photograph of the McCown Mangum House taken in 1897
Left: Mangum original from Margaret C. Nygard's papers, Southern Historical Collection at UNC.
Annotated Reasons to Save black Meadow Ridge

Margaret Nygard ~ 1989 Address to the Durham Chamber of Commerce

“... If there is to be quality of life in a community, everybody would agree that there must be clean water, clean air, effective ways for waste disposal and sufficient open space. The key words, of course, are the adjectives. These are all environmental indicators. For quality of life most people would also agree that there should be enterprising industry, plenty of jobs, affordable housing, racial harmony, good schools, good restaurants, good entertainment, noise control, traffic control, public transportation, good roads, plentiful parks, humane animal shelters, no homeless people, no drugs and no dioxins. There must also be fiscal responsibility and a good tax base, but, of course, few taxes. Again the key words are the adjectives.

As the coming leaders of the Durham community you have been studying many aspects of the good life that every community strives for. It is a complex inter-related process with complicated parts. Because of the compromises that have to be made, there are losses as well as gains. The quality of life of a community can slip away very subtly, little by little, day by day, the deterioration hardly noticed. As Terry Rolan, Director of Durham’s Water Resources, once remarked to me, ‘When changes are slow, people grow used to the degradation, and think it is standard.’

My focus on the good life of the Durham community has been on the environmental essentials, on the ground and the water, particularly Durham’s rivers. Rivers are the essential infrastructure around which communities build themselves. When John Lawson walked the Eno in February 1701, he called the region, “the Flower of Carolina.” Around the same time William Byrd described the Great Indian Trading Path and the rivers it traversed, remarking particularly on the Flat, the Little and the Eno. These men were not interested in the scenery. They were entrepreneurs keenly aware of the economic opportunity of this region, and time has proved them right.

Our task today as Durham grows and prospers is to make sure that these lands are not despoiled and that this area continues to remain ‘The Flower of Carolina.’ The protection of our three main rivers and their surrounding lands is a form of fiscal responsibility.”

~ finis
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