

Antiques Tourism and the Selling of Heritage in Eastern North Carolina

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Antiques tourism is a form of heritage tourism, wherein people travel in pursuit of antiques, or stop to shop for antiques during a trip for another purpose. It is an increasingly popular development strategy for cities and towns across North Carolina and throughout the United States. There have been few attempts to inventory or understand antiques tourism from an academic perspective, thus creating a need for site-specific empirical studies. This study describes the place of the antiques tourism trade in three eastern North Carolina communities —Selma, New Bern, and Wilson. Surveys, personal interviews, and general observation reveal significant differences in the ways in which entrepreneurs define what is “authentic” antiques-based development. There is variation in the scale and spatial form of antiques districts, the level of town involvement in promoting the antiques trade, the marketing strategies of owners and operators, the use of the Internet in promoting and selling antiques, and the types of antiques and customers.

Introduction

Heritage tourism is a growing market sector in North Carolina and the United States. Heritage tourism takes many forms, including museums, memory trails, war memorials, historic downtown districts, community festivals, and state and national parks. An increasingly important form of heritage-based development is antiques tourism. Although the collecting of antiques and historical artifacts is not a recent emergence, its popularity has been augmented as of late by the *Antiques Roadshow*, a television program where ordinary citizens bring family heirlooms and flea market buys to appraisers to learn the history and market value of their items. This show and others have encouraged people to travel to antique shops, malls, and auctions in search of treasures. Jim Tucker, director of the North Carolina-based Antiques and Collectibles Associations, has observed an increase in the number of antiques retailers in the country despite a recent lull in the economy and competition from e-commerce (Jares 2003).

A comprehensive count of the number of antiques establishments in the United States is difficult to obtain. Yet, a recent search of a national business directory revealed that there are at least 40,283 establishments in the United States with a Standard

Industrial Classification of “Antiques-Dealer” (SIC of 5932-02). According to this data, North Carolina has the tenth largest number of these establishments with 1,156 (Table 1). Even more impressive than the sheer number of malls and shops is the extent to which cities and towns have devoted entire districts to antiques tourism. An interesting example of such development is Havana, Florida, which markets itself as “North Florida’s Art and Antiques Capital.” Havana’s antiques district began in the mid 1980s, filling an economic void left behind when cigar production moved to Central America several decades earlier. With more than 30 shops, the city represents itself as a “haven for shoppers and art lovers who are tired of malls and big chain stores.” The relationship between large retailers and antique stores has taken on an interesting dimension in Colleyville, Texas, where entrepreneurs are converting a vacant Kmart building into an antiques mall with Tuscan-style décor (Jares 2003). Historic Depot Town in Ypsilanti, Michigan offers numerous antiques and collectible shops as well as a Farmers’ Market, and several museums. Antiques are an increasingly visible part of the tourist landscape in Kentucky, where approximately 40 of the 281 attractions listed on state-approved interstate signs are antiques shops or

Table 1. Antique Dealer Establishments By State, Sorted by Number (Source: *American Business Disc* 2003)

State	Antique Dealers	State	Antique Dealers	State	Antique Dealers	State	Antique Dealers
CA	4,014	MI	1,102	AL	620	MS	353
TX	3,569	NJ	1,037	CO	615	NH	341
NY	2,769	MO	994	OK	613	NM	278
FL	2,162	WA	939	LA	594	NE	264
PA	1,948	TN	882	SC	579	WV	213
IL	1,371	WI	874	IA	552	MT	205
OH	1,273	IN	743	KY	520	VT	202
GA	1,221	CT	729	AR	490	ID	194
VA	1,158	OR	725	KS	467	RI	183
NC	1,156	MD	714	AZ	435	UT	161
MA	1,134	MN	661	ME	427	Total	40,283

antiques districts. In 2002, antiques and souvenir shopping contributed \$220 million in direct spending to Kentucky's economy (Baxter 2003).

Despite the popularity and economic importance of the antiques industry, it is a grossly under-analyzed topic in the geographic and tourism literatures. Like heritage tourism in general, the selling and buying of antiques can take a variety of different, sometimes conflicting appearances and meanings within communities. Even what is considered an antique is open to multiple constructions and interpretations. Documenting this variation is an essential step in assessing the sustainability and importance of antiques as a platform for economic development.

This paper explores the place of antiques tourism in three eastern North Carolina communities— Selma, New Bern, and Wilson (Figure 1). We used information collected from surveys, personal interviews, and archival resources to document and analyze the diversity of the antiques trade in form, function, and scale; and differences

in entrepreneurial approaches to tourism and the business of antiques. The lack of uniformity in the antiques business in these communities illustrates the extent to which heritage and authenticity are inherently dissonant and contested concepts.

Antiques as Heritage

Antiques tourism is a form of heritage tourism wherein people travel in pursuit of antiques, collectables, memorabilia, old wares, curios, or second-hand items; or stop to shop for these items during a trip for another purpose (Michael 2002). Heritage tourism, as defined in this paper, refers to travel for the purpose of experiencing places, activities, and objects that offer a way of connecting with the past—whether it is for the purpose of nostalgia, creating a distinctive place or self identity, researching family roots, spiritual or religious enlightenment, or the general understanding of historical events and people (Olsen and Timothy 2002). Antiques tourism falls within the realm of heritage tourism since many antiques are marketed

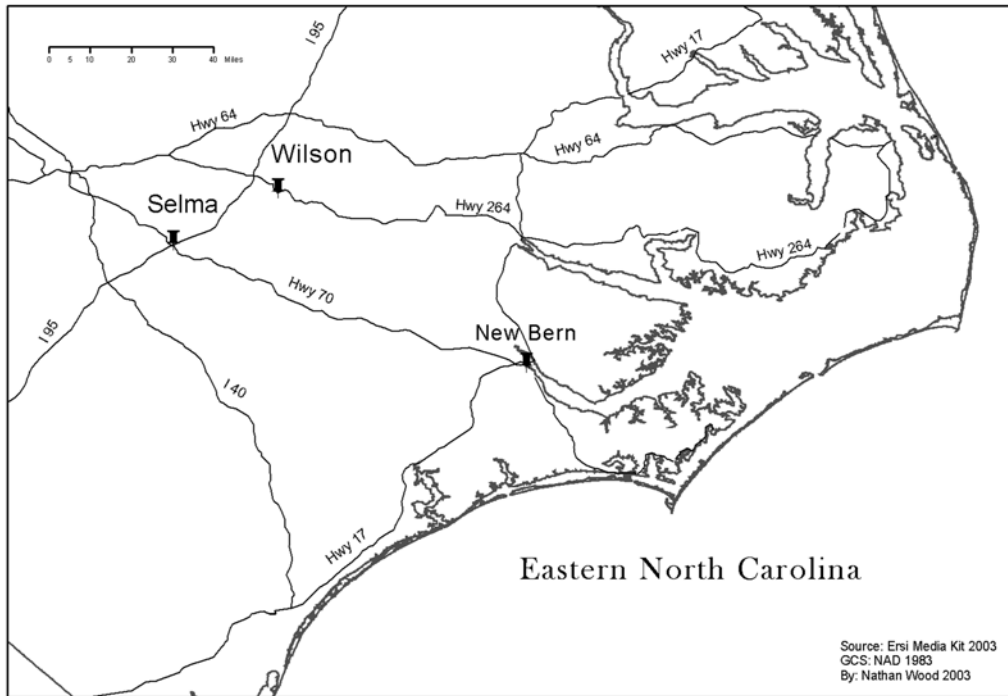


Figure 1. Location of Selma, New Bern, and Wilson.

as historically significant objects or artifacts, and the buying of these goods allows people to use ideas about the past to fulfill their present needs and desires (Graham et al 2000).

Despite the widely held belief that the United States suffers from “historical amnesia,” there appears to be growing public interest in heritage. Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998, 3) suggested that Americans frequently engage in “popular history making,” in which they “take an active in role in using and understanding the past.” They found that while studying history in school bored many individuals, these same people were eager to use the past on their own terms and in ways that contributed to the construction of their identities. Of the almost 1,500 people they interviewed, two-fifths had a hobby or collection related to the past. Some scholars have suggested that the growing popularity of heritage is related to the fact that the world is becoming more globally oriented. Distanced from

their historical and geographical roots, people increasingly reach out for things to link them to those who came before. Shortridge (1996, 10) used the term neo-localism to describe the “deliberate seeking out of regional lore and local attachment by residents (new and old) as a delayed reaction to the destruction in modern America of traditional bonds to community and family.” Implicit in this yearning for place in neo-localism is a desire to return to an earlier time. The concept of neo-localism runs the risk of overly romanticizing the division between local and global. At the very least, however, as Aplin (2002, 16) observed: “We need connections with both place and time to locate our present lives geographically and historically; heritage helps in both the temporal and spatial sense.”

While neo-localism is a useful concept for understanding why people value old things and consume history, it does not capture all the reasons behind why people yearn for the past and desire to

bring it into the space and time of the present. Almost thirty years ago, noted geographer David Lowenthal (1975) discussed the growing popularity of nostalgia among all levels of society, noting the expansion of antique buying to the middle class. In an attempt to explain the social importance of antiques and other tangible forms of heritage, Lowenthal (1985) suggested that there are several benefits to engaging the past. First, the past is used to make the present familiar, providing a framework for comprehending contemporary features and patterns. Second, the past allows us justify or validate current practices and attitudes by referring to tradition. Third, the past is integral to our sense of identity, whether on the basis of family, region, race/ethnicity, or nation. Fourth, the past is a means of escaping the present, creating a distinction between now and then. The past becomes "a foreign and exotic place where people did things differently" (Lowenthal 1996, x). Conceivably, antiques tourism fills these needs and many others. Indeed, Goulding (2000) found that people consumed heritage for a variety of existential, aesthetic, and social reasons.

Antiques as Economic Development

At the same time that heritage has important socio-cultural functions, it is also a resource that is increasingly being used to promote economic development in both urban and rural areas, particularly tourism development (Graham 2002). According to the Travel Industry Association of America, tourists who engage in historical activities "spend more, do more, and stay longer than other types of U.S. travelers" (Hargrove 2002, 10). Antique shops and stores are important sites in the production and consumption of heritage because of their role in transforming historical objects into saleable commodities. Yet, geographers have virtually ignored the antiques tourism sector. Site-specific empirical studies such as the one reported here are needed to inventory and understand this growing industry. This is particularly the case in North Carolina, where the Department of Heritage does not officially recognize antiques tourism and state officials have not attempted to document or evaluate its importance statistically or otherwise. This is odd given that shopping is the

number one activity of tourists visiting the state (North Carolina Department of Commerce 2003). There are early indications that the economic pay off from antiques tourism could be significant. In one of the only economic impact studies of antiquing as a tourism recreation activity, Grado and his colleagues (1997) found that the industry brought southwestern Pennsylvania \$3.36 million annually.

The antiques industry not only promotes local economic growth with the presence of shops, but also supports artisans who prepare the antiques for market. Michael (2002, 121) suggested that the antiques industry is not simply the recycling of used goods but represents a "complex mixture of retailing, wholesaling, and physical production...It generates employment across a diverse range of skilled occupations and . . . preserves skills that are often not required for contemporary manufactures." This point is particularly relevant to antiques in North Carolina, since the state is known for its skilled furniture artisans.

Michael (2002, 123) suggested that the antiques industry generates tourism arrivals in at least two ways. First, it serves as a primary trip generator, drawing people whose predominant reason for traveling is to search for antiques, thus making antiques shops or districts "a destination like any other tourism product." Second, antiques tourism is a secondary trip generator, providing "an ancillary activity at a location that induces the visitor to extend the length of their stay." Although Michael's work took place in Australia, his general findings appear to be consistent with antiques development in the United States. For example, among the three North Carolina communities examined, we observed that antiques had a largely secondary influence on the attraction of travelers to Selma while Wilson would be considered a primary generator of tourism arrivals. New Bern had an even mix of primary and secondary antiques tourists.

Antiques tourism is not single, monolithic industry but a diverse collection of establishments and entrepreneurs. Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) have suggested that heritage is inherently "dissonant," meaning that it is characterized by a lack of consistency or agreement in the way people produce and consume the past in the present. Similarly, Graham (2002) noted "heritage has multiple uses and interpretations

which immensely complicate any assessment of its role." Heritage tourism does not simply exist in some universal, objective way. It is a "selective re-creation and re-interpretation of the past based upon contemporary values and ideas" (Olsen and Timothy 2002). This is not to suggest that heritage is somehow "bogus history." The past is always remembered and represented in reference to the present. The production of all heritage—including antiques tourism—can take any number of different forms and meanings since the needs and demands of the present vary socially and geographically from place to place. In analyzing antiques development, we felt that a comparative approach would yield the greatest insight and allow us to document the dissonance and diversity intrinsic to this emerging form of tourist development.

The Nature of Selling Antiques

According to Barthel (1996, 345), historical sites and artifacts are heavily sought because the paying public desires an "unmediated" encounter with the past, "to get in touch with history in a very real, literal sense." While the antiques industry puts us in close, physical contact with historical objects, it is not an unmediated experience but one shaped by selection, contextualization, and interpretation (Barthel 1996). As Barthel (1996) also pointed out, representation of the past is mediated by the attitudes, motivations, and actions of powerful individuals who manipulate the exchange of cultural meanings. In the case of the antiques industry, dealers and storeowners frame how the public values and interacts with historical items. Like museums, antiques shops are not simply repositories of artifacts but "carefully managed realms of classification" that play a critical role in determining what counts as an historical treasure and who has the power to assign value to one object over another (Handler and Gable 1997, 3). Although there are many actors involved in the production and consumption of antiques, we feel that any critical analysis of antiques-based tourism must examine the role of antiques entrepreneurs.

Authenticity is a popular theme within heritage tourism studies since attractions are often marketed with emphasis on the genuineness or legitimacy of

the historical experience or product they offer to the public (Chambers 2000, 97-99). Authenticity takes on even greater importance with the selling of antiques since the dollar value of an object is often directly related to its age, documented history, and rareness. However, authenticity is not an inherent quality or condition but rather a socially constructed concept that "varies with different people, at different times, and in different places" (Dylser 1999, 604). Handler and Gable (1997, 223) pointed out that notions of authenticity are based on "an ever-changing historical sensibility that is a product of the present, not the past." Objects, such as antiques and artifacts, become historically significant when identified by authorities, who are not only guided by knowledge of the past but also the desire to project a marketable, believable image to the public (Bruner 1994; Handler and Gable 1997).

Although the 100-year rule appears to be a strict and reliable yardstick for deciding what is an "authentic" antique, our conversations with dealers reveal that authenticity is frequently based upon other criteria and that the term "antique" is open to multiple, and sometimes competing interpretations. While some shop owners include a broad range of goods under the label of antiques, including collectible and vintage items, other dealers pride themselves on the "purity" of their shops. Clearly, because of the dissonant and potentially contested nature of the antiques industry, entrepreneurs target different markets and use different strategies to sell heritage. In the sections that follow, we document the varied ways in which entrepreneurs in eastern North Carolina have envisioned and carried out the selling of antiques.

Methods

This study sought to find out why antique shops are flourishing, where this development is taking place, and what relationship antiques has with tourism in general and heritage tourism in particular. Three North Carolina towns—Selma, New Bern, and Wilson—were chosen for this study because it was believed that they each represented a different style of antiques tourism. The research began with a search for literature on antiques, both regionally

and specifically in the towns chosen for the survey. It was quickly discovered that there were only a few academic studies about antiques tourism. What little that has been written is for a general magazine audience. The research then led to visits to each town to observe the layout of the antiques districts and the style of the businesses.

Because of the influential role that entrepreneurs play in constructing the heritage experience of antiques tourists, we focused on the perceptions, motivations, and business approaches of antiques proprietors. This was done through a preliminary paper survey of five to seven entrepreneurs in each of the three towns. These respondents represent approximately 45 percent of all antiques establishments in each town. This survey collected general information about each business and the entrepreneur's observations of the antiques industry in their local area. The survey was followed by in-depth personal interviews with two different proprietors in each town. Our results are drawn from these interviews as well as our own observations. It is important to note that this is a preliminary study better suited for creating hypotheses for future, more rigorous studies rather than drawing firm conclusions. At this point, given the lack of any

substantive geographic research on antiques—quantitative or qualitative in nature—our goal was to conduct a largely exploratory survey of three antiques tourism clusters. In the next several pages, we provide historical background on these communities and compare/contrast the spatial form of their antiques districts, the level of town involvement in promoting antiques, the style of marketing, use of Internet technology, and the type of tourists served (Table 2).

Historical Background

The small (3.23 square mile) town of Selma is in Johnston County, which is easily accessible from Interstate 95. Smithfield, famous for being the home of Hollywood legend Ava Gardner, is nearby. Selma was chartered in 1873 and was a booming railroad town. Even early on, Selma was a town with an interest in culture and the arts. The downtown area was home to two opera houses, remarkable for a place so small. Selma was also the birthplace of the medicine Vicks Vapo-Rub, which was created in a small downtown pharmacy. The town was noted for having two different rail lines cross in the middle of downtown. These rail lines sent cotton and tobacco from rural North Carolina to the mills where they were

Table 2. Overall Comparison of Three Antiques Towns

	Selma	New Bern	Wilson
Size	3.25 sq. miles	26.98 sq. miles	23.44 sq. miles
District	Revitalized historic uptown	Historic downtown	Hwy. 301
Type of Visit	Passing Through	Overnight Tourist	Business
Type of Visitor	Casual Shopper	Casual Shopper	Dealer
Town Involvement	Heavy	Moderate	Light
Marketing	Dealer's Association Billboards	Visitor's Guide Pamphlets	Billboards Newspaper
Internet	Town and Dealer Advertising and Sales	Town Advertising	Town and Dealer Advertising and Sales
Trip Generator	Secondary	Primary/Secondary	Primary

processed. With the advent of the automobile and the declining importance of the railroad for shipping, Selma began to decline. The once thriving downtown was falling apart, and citizens were searching for a way to bring Selma back to life. In 1997, the town manager, Bruce Radford, came up with the idea of making Selma an antiques center (Hajian 1999).

Selma's antiques development was facilitated by the fact that it was located close to a major interstate and had an historic downtown. Radford pointed to the importance of downtown when he said: "People don't expect to shop for antiques in buildings that are made of brass and glass. They want an older feeling. Our buildings were tailor-made for antiques" (Quoted in Westbrook 2000, 18). Radford offered one year's free rent to anyone who would move into one of the downtown buildings and open an antiques store. The town council approved the idea and started courting proprietors. "I chose Selma because of the concentration of antiques shops and because of town support for this concept," said Tonia Harris, the owner of Visual Pleasures Antiques. However, many of the new investors wanted to buy their buildings instead of just leasing them, because of the amount of the expense of repairing damage inside buildings. One shop owner described the purchase of her building in a state magazine: "At closing, you know how they give you keys? I couldn't get keys. The building didn't have any doors!" (Quoted in Westbrook 2000, 19). Massive renovations were eventually completed, and today Selma has a thriving uptown antiques district.

New Bern, the second oldest town in North Carolina (after Bath), was settled by German and Swiss immigrants in 1710 and named after the town of Bern in Switzerland. Situated between the Neuse and Trent Rivers, New Bern became the site of Tryon Palace, North Carolina's colonial capital, in 1766. The palace was named for Governor William Tryon, and famous for having hosted George Washington for a night's stay during his tour of the new United States. This long history is still very visible in the downtown area. New Bern has the oldest working clock tower in the state. It is also the place where Pepsi was created in a downtown corner pharmacy. New Bern's already active heritage

industry has provided a strong infrastructure for the development of its antiques district. The district is in the downtown blocks, one street over from the waterfront and within walking distance of historic homes and the bed and breakfast area.

Wilson is famous for being the home of North Carolina's heralded Brightleaf tobacco. However, with the decline of the tobacco industry, Wilson has had to explore alternative income sources, including antiques development. Wilson was settled in the mid-18th century by small farmers, and has enjoyed fairly healthy growth. The town was already home to the noted Boone's Antiques, which was started in 1951. A dealer-oriented antiques district has grown around the area of the original Boone's establishment along Highway 301. Today, Wilson markets itself as the "City of Antiques" and is host to several large antiques stores and auction houses. Boone's is still in operation, now housed in a multi-building complex.

Antique Districts

The Uptown Selma antiques district is a revitalized historic downtown area with a cluster of shops. Most of the antiques stores are centered on a four-block area (Figure 2). There are over 10 antiques stores in the town as well as boutiques that specialize in items like handmade soaps and quilts. There is a parking area at the immediate edge of the antiques district, and parking is also available along the street within the Uptown blocks. Visitors are encouraged to park their cars for the day and explore the town on foot. Selma is a day-trip oriented antiques town, with several supporting restaurants and cafes, but no in-town bed and breakfasts or hotels. There are many places to stay overnight in neighboring Smithfield, and many visitors choose to visit Selma after shopping at Smithfield's outlet mall. There are other heritage attractions in Selma. One is the newly restored Union Depot Train Station, which was restored to working order in 2002. Another is the Atkinson's Grist Mill, which is just outside of town. The historic Rudy Theatre offers two shows daily, reminiscent of Selma's opera-house legacy. Selma also hosts a Railroad Days festival each fall to celebrate the town's railroad history and attract additional customers for the antiques shops. The opening of new antiques stores appears to

be progressing steadily as more of the historic buildings are refurbished.

New Bern's antique district, which consists of approximately 12 shops, is also located in the core area of the downtown historic district (Figure 3). Also located in the heart of the historic district is the Chelsea, the pharmacy where Pepsi was created. Today visitors can sit at the counter in a re-creation of Caleb Bradham's store and taste "Brad's Drink" which was created as a hometown version of Coca-Cola. The antiques district is within walking distance of the historic homes district, where many of New Bern's famous bed and breakfasts are located. A common weekend trip is to stay in a bed and breakfast, visit Tryon Palace one day, and then explore the antiques district the next day. Scattered among New Bern's antiques stores are specialty shops, boutiques, and eateries. Because the antiques district is close to the

new waterfront convention center, many people who visit the antiques district are business tourists. As one entrepreneur observed: "When people come to downtown New Bern and stay at the Sheraton or go to the convention, they gravitate down here on Middle Street [the antiques district]."

Wilson's antique district consists of approximately 11 antiques stores with several other establishments specializing in reproduction and refinishing. The district in Wilson is quite different from the ones in Selma and New Bern in that it is not located in the town's historic downtown area. The stores are very large and dealer-oriented. In other words, while the stores are open to the public, they tend to sell to other antique establishments. In fact, some antique dealers in Selma and New Bern buy their stock in Wilson. In addition to antiques stores, Wilson is home to several large auction



Figure 2. The revitalized historic downtown antiques district in Selma surrounds the intersection of Anderson and North Raiford Streets. (Photograph by authors)

houses, including Langston Antiques. The antique district in Wilson is along Highway 301, near Interstate 95 (Figure 4). Stores have their own parking lots, and are too far apart to walk from one store to the next. Wilson has the largest square footage of antiques space of any of the three towns and entrepreneurs have the reputation for carrying expensive, high-end items. There are several hotels and restaurants near the antiques district, including the well-known Parker's Barbeque, but visiting these establishments requires driving as well.

Town Involvement

Selma, New Bern, and Wilson demonstrate significant differences in the level of town involvement. In Selma, the antiques district is being used by local leaders to revitalize a crumbling historic downtown. The town pays for all of the

outside advertising, including billboards and directional signs. Selma has invested a significant amount of money in its antiques district and has been successful in creating a themed historic downtown area with the antique stores. Most of the antiques dealers in Selma belong to the Uptown Selma Antiques Dealers Association, which exists primarily for advertising and promotional purposes. This organization pays for group advertising for the dealers in over 30 publications along the eastern seaboard. The president of the Antiques Dealers Association observed that: "Without town support, the dealers could not be prosperous." Selma is growing at such a rapid rate that downtown business merchants are organizing a second association. This association will include the restaurant and boutique owners as well as the antique dealers.



Figure 3. The antiques district in New Bern is located in the historic downtown area, one block from the waterfront. (Photograph by authors)

In New Bern, there is no association established specifically for the antiques dealers, but the downtown businesses all belong to the New Bern Preservation Foundation and Downtown Merchants Association. The Preservation Foundation and the Merchants Association do not advertise outside the town, but they do host events such as *Alive after Five* and the Antiques Show and Sale. *Alive after Five* is an event where all the downtown businesses, most of which close at five o'clock p.m., stay open until nine o'clock. There are musicians, food vendors, and other outside activities in the downtown area, and people are invited to bring their families and come down to the waterfront and historic downtown area for the evening. The Antiques Show and Sale is held at the Riverfront Convention Center for the purpose of raising money for the Preservation Foundation. Many of the antiques dealers participate in this event by either selling at a booth or volunteering for appraisals or talks on specific types of antiques, such as pottery. The city does not pay for billboard advertising, but the New Bern Visitor's Bureau maintains a website that provides tourist information.

Wilson advertises itself as the "City of Antiques" on billboards along all the major highways that run into or near the town. The Chamber of Commerce and the Visitor's Bureau pay for this advertising. A Wilson antiques store manager stated: "The town is supportive emotionally but not financially . . . people like to go out of town to buy things . . . people from

Raleigh come here." Most of the buyers who shop in Wilson are from out of town, so advertising through billboards and pamphlets does bring in business. At the same time, however, most of the antiques stores in Wilson advertise individually in antiques magazines of their own choosing since dealers are their primary customers.

Marketing

The Uptown Selma Antiques Dealers Association does most of the marketing for the antique district in Selma. They have adopted two slogans—"Antiques Mecca" and "Selma: A Charming Place to be"—for billboards and flyers used by the city. Billboards, the main advertising medium, are placed along Interstate 95 near the Selma exits. One of these exists is connected with the large Carolina Outlet Shopping Center in Smithfield, which is popular among travelers headed north and south on the interstate. Selma's billboard marketing strategy aims to catch people who are stopping in Smithfield and bring them over to Selma. The newest addition to Selma's interstate marketing plan is directional signage. These signs direct people to the Uptown Selma Antiques District after they exit Interstate 95.

Billboards are important for marketing Selma and its antiques district, but they are not the only strategy. Selma has an easy-to-navigate website that showcases the town and provides a printable map of the antiques district. The Antique Dealer's



Figure 4. The Wilson antiques district lines the sides of Highway 301, anchored by Boone's Antiques and other large-scale establishments.

Association also purchases advertising space in 30 newspapers. This form of advertisement invites people to include Selma in their travel plans before they leave home. The Uptown Selma Antiques Dealers Association claims to advertise in magazines that go from New England to Florida, and also in the central part of the United States. Some of the shops also do independent marketing in newspapers or magazines. One shop owner holds clinics and classes on antiques in her shop to attract tourists. "I hold appraisal clinics that are free to the public, like little mini antiques roadshows....I usually [advertise] when I have an appraisal clinic coming up."

New Bern's advertising strategy is quite different from Selma's. Instead of emphasizing billboards, it relies mostly on print advertising aimed at people attracted to Tryon Palace and other historic sites in the area. The visitor's guide and the Visitor's Bureau website both feature the New Bern antiques district. The *New Bern Magazine* is a small, complimentary publication found in the town's stores, restaurants, and hotels. It presents articles about the current events and activities in town as well as advertisements for individual establishments, including many of the antique stores. Most of the stores here do their own advertising. Many stores advertise in the *New Bern Magazine*, regional newspapers, and on the local radio station. However, the most common advertising seen in New Bern is in the form of posters and handouts that are found throughout downtown. For example, when the New Bern Preservation Foundation held its annual antique show and sale, many downtown businesses advertised the event with posters in their windows and flyers distributed to customers.

The Visitor's Bureau in Wilson handles group advertising via billboards along the area. The bright yellow billboards proclaim that Wilson is the "City of Antiques, Barbeque, and So Much More," thus illustrating the commitment of town authorities to the antique district. The antique district is currently the biggest marketable area in Wilson. The Visitor's Bureau also produces the Visitor's Guide, which features several pages listing the antique dealers found in town. This pamphlet is available upon request from the Visitor's Bureau. However, most of the direct marketing of the

antiques stores is done individually. Each store handles this a bit differently, but most advertise in regional newspapers and many advertise in national or international antiques publications. Trade paper advertising is the medium of choice for large auctions. Advertising in antiques publications such as the *Maine Antiques Digest* allows the stores to reach the antiques consumer directly. Many of the stores, and especially the auction houses, have established customers. These dealers repeatedly travel to Wilson to buy antiques in Wilson. Many of the stores use a mailing list to inform loyal customers about upcoming events.

Use of the Internet

Although the evoking of heritage can be conceptualized as a reaction to globalization, it is worth noting that trade in antiques is a global business has been enhanced rather than threatened by new Internet technology (Michael 2002). Selma, New Bern, and Wilson all use the Internet to promote their antiques districts. Selma's site, www.visitselmanc.com, taps into a niche market and is used for promoting the town, its antiques district, and heritage festivals. The site features photos of the historic area, a calendar of events, a map of the antiques district, and links to the individual shop websites. Most of the stores have individual websites. Some are used only for advertisement, but many are used to sell antiques as well. In general, surveyed shop owners said they are pleased with their use of the Internet.

New Bern's website, www.visitnewbern.com, taps into a general heritage tourism market by providing information and links to the historic sites in the area, including Tryon Palace. This site is solely for tourism promotion in New Bern, and while it includes the antique district, it does not focus on it. Also, many of the shop owners in New Bern are retirees who operate their stores as a hobby, and they generally do not use the Internet. Therefore, the town website provides no links to specific shop sites.

In Wilson, the antiques district is just one part of a broad tourism strategy that includes a variety of attractions. Wilson's town website, www.wilson-nc.com, promotes all forms of tourism in the town. A significant section of this website is devoted to the antiques district, and includes the address,

telephone number, and website (if available) of every antique store in town. Many of the stores in Wilson have individual websites. All the stores with websites use them for promotion and advertising, and many sell through their sites as well. Wilson proprietors also commonly use larger websites such as Ebay for selling their antiques. Storeowners stressed the importance of the Internet in today's antique market, and stated that they had nothing but positive experiences and increased sales by using the Internet. One storeowner pointed out that the Internet has had a huge impact on the antiques industry. She said: "in your shop you may not have someone who will walk in your door and pay you \$2,500 for a platter. It may sit in your shop for two years, but on the Internet, you can find that buyer tomorrow . . . That's the real difference."

Types of Antiques and Customers

The antique shoppers who visit Selma are usually only there for the day and most are just passing through Selma on their way to another destination. Shoppers commonly spend some time shopping at the outlet centers in Smithfield. However, many people do spend an entire day in Selma. Many of them are on their way to or from Florida. They stop in Selma because it is on their way and many are loyal customers who visit every year, according to one antique entrepreneur we interviewed. While young people do enjoy shopping in Selma, most shoppers are over forty, and many are retirees.

The shops in Selma carry a variety of antiques, but some proprietors specialize in something specific, such as country primitives or a certain type of furniture. Most stores have the ability to ship purchases worldwide, and many will hold purchases for customers who are traveling and wish to pick up their purchases on their way home. According to one storeowner in Selma, an antique's authenticity or historical marketability is not simply a product of its sheer age but the extent to which it can be connected to a prominent family or an interesting story. This same entrepreneur places story cards on pieces for sale in her shop. Many of the stores in Selma offer Wish Lists, a form that customers fill out if they are looking for something specific. The proprietor will then make an

effort to find the piece for customers and notify them to arrange a sale. If the customer has changed his or her mind, the proprietor will put the piece in the shop and sell it to someone else. Most proprietors in Selma buy antiques nationally and internationally, so they are usually able to find what the customer is looking for. According to one shop owner in Selma, she interacts with dealers in France, England, and Chicago.

The visitors to New Bern's antique district are usually tourists who are in New Bern for reasons other than antiques shopping. Many come for the historic sites, an event at the convention center, or a getaway weekend at the bed and breakfasts. Some even arrive by boat and stay in New Bern's marina for a while, and visit the antique stores while they are docked in town. Since most of the shoppers are travelers, and shipping is available (though not encouraged), most of the shops in New Bern sell "smalls." "Smalls" are antiques that are small enough to be put into a bag or a suitcase. Therefore, although furniture is available for purchase in New Bern, it is not as common. Most shops are eclectic, and only a few owners specialize. Most of the antiques for sale in New Bern are bought by proprietors at regional auctions or sales.

Many of the stores in New Bern are very small-scale enterprises. Quite a few entrepreneurs moved to the New Bern area after retirement and opened a store because they love antiques. As one shop owner explained: "We retired here, and I always wanted to have a folk art antique shop . . . we've done it for a hobby." This is usually the reason for the shops being small and the advertising being limited.

Like the dealers, the shoppers in Wilson are serious about antiques. Many shoppers are actually dealers from somewhere in the southeastern United States, and they come to Wilson specifically to buy antiques. According to one major antiques dealer in Wilson, visitors usually spend the night and visit multiple antiques houses during their stay. The proprietors of a few of the stores in New Bern and Selma occasionally buy the antiques they sell in Wilson. Some visitors to Wilson are even international buyers, traveling from Asia and Europe to buy antiques.

There are some small stores in Wilson, but they are the exception rather than the rule. Most of the stores and auction houses in Wilson are large-scale business

operations. Stancil's Antiques focuses on high-end "small" like silver and English porcelain. The specialty at large auction houses like Langston Antiques is usually furniture. Wilson has been an antiques area for a long time, and this has allowed some of the antiques stores to move into their second or third generation of ownership. Almost all are family-owned and operated, but many have multiple full- or part-time employees. The proprietors in Wilson buy antiques all over the world and ship internationally as well. This also encourages business on a large scale.

Conclusion

Antiques tourism is an increasingly important yet under-analyzed component in the booming heritage industry. This neglect is due, in part, to the varied nature of antiques-based development. No doubt there is a growing national fascination with collecting antiques, collectibles, and other historical artifacts. At the same time, however, antiques tourism is not carried out in an uniform or consistent way across the landscape. It plays out locally in shops, malls, and auctions run by individual entrepreneurs who target different markets and use different strategies. As our anecdotal evidence from Selma, New Bern, and Wilson suggests, antiques districts are diverse collections of establishments and entrepreneurs that defy broad generalizations. Future studies should focus on documenting and explaining this variation in more comprehensive and rigorous terms. It will be particularly fruitful to produce a national map of major antiques tourism clusters, places where antiques-based heritage development takes on great cultural and economic importance.

Variation in the geography of antiques districts results not only from the place-specific development needs of communities but also the dissonant and contested nature of heritage and authenticity. Rather than communicating a universal vision of how the past should be produced and consumed, the antiques industry in Eastern North Carolina—from the large corporate-like auction houses in Wilson to the small, retiree-owned shops in New Bern—demonstrates that heritage is multi-sold and multi-interpreted (Graham et al. 2000). While the inherently loose nature of authenticity has allowed for the rapid establishment of

antiques establishments of varying sizes and styles, there is some concern that a lack of standardization may eventually hurt the sustainability of the industry. Dissonance or discord over what represents an authentic or legitimate antique occurs not only among entrepreneurs but also among customers, who may feel cheated if an item is later independently appraised for less than the purchase price. Future studies will need to provide a more complete unpacking of how authenticity is conceptualized, commodified, and consumed in the antiques trade. This will require conducting in-depth interviews and participant observation with antique dealers and shoppers. History is made in antique stores—like museums—when objects are put in the context of the past, given meaning through stories and narratives, and framed in relation to the needs of the present (Handler and Gable 1997). In this respect, antiques tourism involves not only the trading commodities but also the selling of ideas about heritage and how the past is a resource for the present.

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End Notes

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