

GUTHEIM *the* GREAT

To look east across the Potomac River from Mount Vernon is to be indebted to Frederick Gutheim for what one sees: a vista of largely unspoiled landscape that appears almost precisely as it did in George Washington's day. What one does not see, however, is equally important: No tract housing, no high rises, none of the industrial clutter that despoils many other historic viewsapes.

Like the view from Mount Vernon, Gutheim's career as historian and planner is significant for what one does not see. Some people save buildings, some people save neighborhoods, and some people—like Gutheim—generate the intangible ideas that mold the tangible landscapes in which we live. Known to friends and colleagues as "Fritz," Gutheim is a soft-spoken, serious man who, as a preservation activist, has often played a behind-the-scenes role.

It was during the early fifties, when the Maryland side of the Potomac was being threatened with development, that Gutheim and his longtime friend, management consultant Robert Ware Straus, were discussing possible ways to preserve and protect the view from Mount Vernon. As Straus describes it, Gutheim quickly conceived a solution: Create a new type of national park—partially government-owned, partially controlled by the new concept of scenic easements—and establish an agricultural historical museum, something then unheard of. But with Straus as the driving force, Gutheim's idea eventually bore fruit as Piscataway Park, the Accokeek Foundation, and its offspring, the National Colonial Farm—successful ventures that preserve the scenic landscape and demonstrate its historic use. Says Straus, "Every major new federal park since that time has been based on the same concepts."

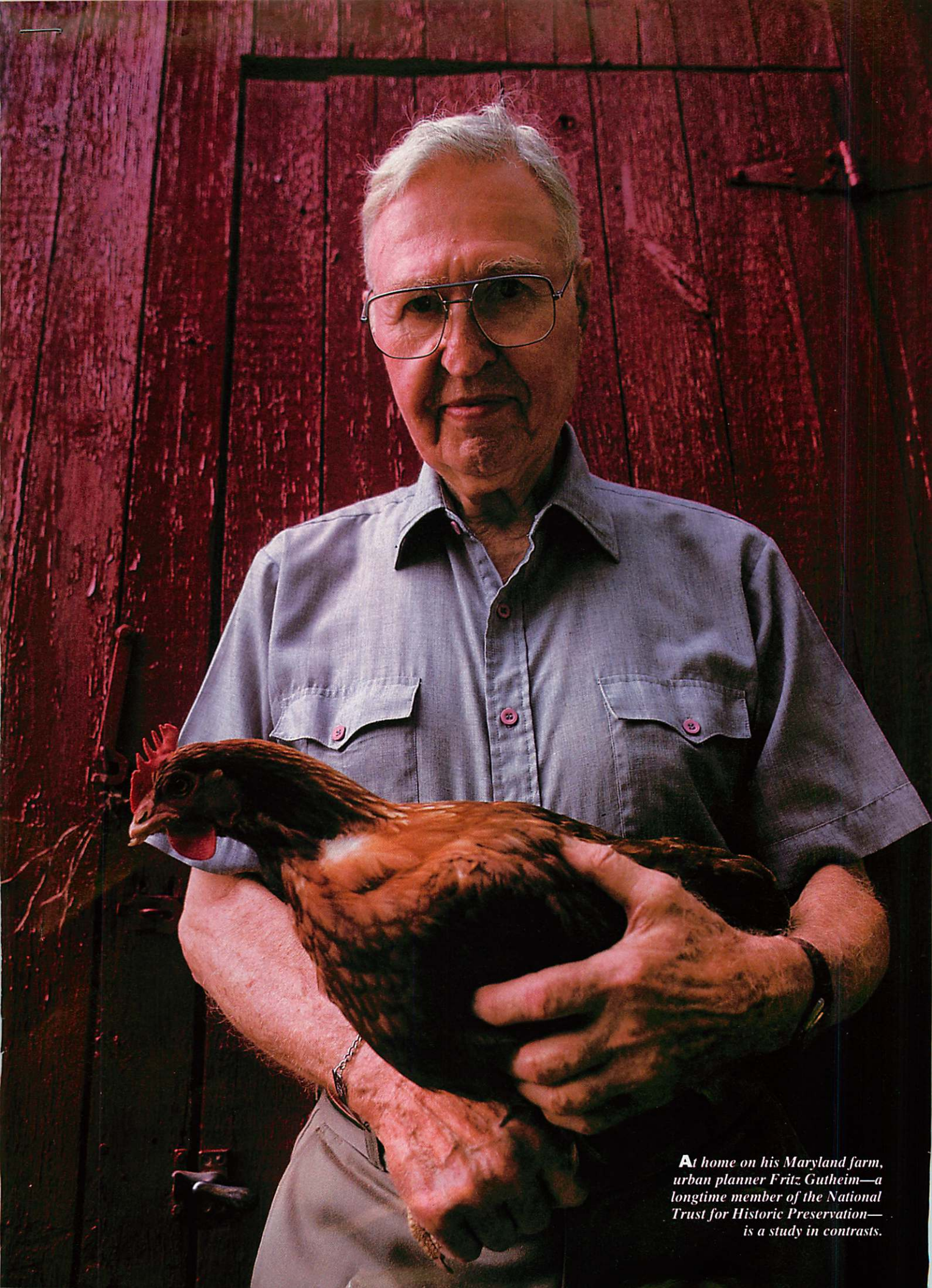
The Mount Vernon example is but one of many that portray Gutheim as a man with a vision—more precisely, as a man with a great many visions that have prompted efforts ranging from the award-winning preservation program for the rural landscape in Maryland to the foundation of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Gutheim was a veritable font of ideas when he served as a member of the President's Task Force on Natural Beauty in 1964) to the successful redevelopment of Washington, D.C.'s *(continued on page 72)*

Frederick Gutheim has inspired the preservation movement for more than sixty years, serving as the catalyst for multifaceted projects ranging from Maryland's preservation program for the rural landscape to the redevelopment of Washington's Pennsylvania Avenue.

By JANE C. LOEFFLER



Photograph By Ron Colbroth



At home on his Maryland farm, urban planner Fritz Gutheim—a longtime member of the National Trust for Historic Preservation—is a study in contrasts.

GUTHEIM

(continued from page 36) main street, Pennsylvania Avenue. Indeed, Gutheim attended the initial meeting on Pennsylvania Avenue with Secretary of Labor Arthur Goldberg, Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and architect Paul Thiry. "It was an extraordinary meeting—inspiring," Thiry recalls. "It gave me admiration for Goldberg's concern but principally for how Fritz, in his quiet way, steered the meeting into [the creation of] the Advisory Council on Pennsylvania Avenue." Gutheim and Moynihan wrote the council's final report and presented it to President Lyndon Johnson in 1964. (Moynihan, who led Congressional efforts to implement the plan, now keeps a copy of *Worthy of the Nation*, Gutheim's acclaimed history of Washington, D.C., planning, beside his Senate desk.)

As part of that planning effort, Gutheim outlined the Pennsylvania Avenue Historic District and, later, as coauthor of the master plan for the United States Capitol, prepared the boundaries of the Capitol Hill Historic District, a project that won him honors from the American Institute of Architects—all endeavors, fruitions of Gutheim's broadcast ideas.

In March 1988, colleagues, former students, and admirers gathered at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., to honor Gutheim's eightieth birthday and to celebrate his remarkable career of nearly sixty years. From their combined tributes emerges the portrait of a multifaceted man whose professional life has been distinguished by a wide range of accomplishments. Some had learned of Gutheim's ideas through his best-known book, *The Potomac*, now considered a classic in regional environmental history. Others, through his pioneering planning work for the Tennessee Valley Authority and the United States Housing Authority. Still others had first come into contact with the Gutheim influence during his public relations campaign for Reston, Virginia, while an entire cadre of professional preservationists regard him as the catalyst who made their careers both possible and purposeful. Robert Kapsch, for example, now chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), met Gutheim as a graduate student in the historic preserva-

tion program at The George Washington University, a program established there by Gutheim in 1976 with support from the National Trust and the National Endowment for the Arts. Kapsch's studies with Gutheim led him to realize that little valuable data existed on the nation's structures. "What began more or less as a recreational degree led directly to my career in historic preservation," says Kapsch.

Joseph Getty, executive director of the Historic Society of Carroll County, Maryland, also studied under Gutheim and credits him with instilling in his students "the what, why, how, and who of preservation." Through Gutheim's lectures, Getty learned to understand the significance of vernacular architecture—of such buildings as farmhouses, fire stations, and rural railroad depots—and to determine for these structures the best answer to the crucial question: "What

"Beyond a strictly architectural approach, I looked at the larger goals of a more attractive public environment."

should be preserved?" It is Gutheim's preservation philosophy, one based on a need for thoughtful planning and a thorough knowledge of planning tools, that guides Getty and numerous other former students as they wrestle with the day-to-day decisions of preservation work.

Gutheim's involvement in preservation began following his graduation from Wisconsin's Experimental College where he encountered two men who shaped his professional path: the architect Frank Lloyd Wright and the urban historian Lewis Mumford. Gutheim worked with Wright at his famous Wisconsin studio, Taliesin, and gained an appreciation of architectural practice there. Mumford, then a young professor, encouraged Gutheim's interest in urban planning. In 1931, Gutheim began writing on architecture, planning, and landscape in the *Magazine of Art*. "I wrote about the historical aspects of planning, about medieval and renaissance towns, and about historic preservation in places like Charleston and Annapolis," he recalls. "I followed what was going on in Alexandria, Savannah,

Georgetown, New Orleans, and on Beacon Hill. In those days, preservation was an extremely local concern. What interested me, of course, with my political orientation, was the use of zoning powers and other legal devices to preserve not just individual buildings, but the whole range of values inherent in old towns, whole districts like Greenwich Village, and landscape features like Central Park or the Bronx River Parkway."

Gutheim's love for the landscape and his appreciation of its historic and cultural values come as no surprise to those who have visited his home, Mount Ephraim, a six-acre farm located approximately thirty-five miles outside of Washington, D.C., where he and his wife, Polly, have lived since 1941. Seated in his living room, a pleasant airy room with a view of the distinctive notched profile of Sugarloaf Mountain in the distance, Gutheim indeed seems the farmer or rural gentleman—which he is. He takes pride in his small flock of sheep and in his hens that lay the only brown eggs in the neighborhood. This aspect of Gutheim's life presents quite a contrast to his identity as an urban planner, an expert on cities. And yet preservation issues cross all boundaries, and it is planning, Gutheim says, that provides the underpinning for sensitive and sensible preservation policy in country and city alike.

"I should say that I was early into the preservation game, but from the start I was interested in the context of buildings," says Gutheim. "Beyond a strictly architectural approach, I looked at the larger goals of a more attractive, improved public environment. This approach has taken longer to arrive in the preservation movement than I thought it would," he notes, "but it is indeed arriving."

For early evidence of his preservation philosophy, Gutheim removes from his library bookcase enormous bound volumes of newspapers that include his articles. He began writing for the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1947 and was the first to write a regular column of architectural criticism for a major American daily newspaper. "Ada Louise Huxtable says that I invented her, which is very kind of her," he says with a smile.

In daily columns and in editorials Gutheim condemned efforts to rob New York of its "fast-vanishing past" and called for legal protection for buildings of exceptional historical or architectural

value. He battled New York University over the destruction of Greek Revival houses threatened by what he called the university's "piecemeal and opportunistic creeping around Washington Square" and called repeatedly for comprehensive city planning. He decried the "dangerous measure of discretionary power" concentrated in the hands of his frequent foe, New York's parks czar Robert Moses.

Reflecting on those days, Gutheim is pleased by what he accomplished. "Just the idea that Washington Square was an important historic site was novel at that time," he points out.

Throughout a career combining consulting, teaching, writing, and public service, Gutheim has demonstrated a flair for bringing together new constituencies. For example, the Frederick Law Olmsted Sesquicentennial, which he orchestrated in 1972, fostered the development of vocal new supporters for the idea of urban parks, and two groups that he founded in the sixties have had lasting influence in the capital city: the Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies and Washington's Preservation Roundtable. The Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies was one of the first urban think tanks to address the critical issues confronting the rapidly growing metropolitan area and its deteriorating core. Through that project he came to know Robert E. Simon, Jr., the man who developed the planned community of Reston, Virginia. Simon describes Gutheim's knowledge of planning as "encyclopedic." "Fritz became a sort of guru to all of us," Simon recalls, relating how Gutheim masterminded the strategy for convincing a reluctant Fairfax County to build Reston as a planned "new town" as opposed to just another sprawling subdivision.

The Preservation Roundtable met for the first time in 1968 when Gutheim and several friends gathered to discuss the landmark status that some historic districts had achieved. Twenty years later, it remains a monthly forum for those most closely allied with all aspects of preservation policy. Although most Roundtable members are local, their influence is felt throughout the United States because so many of them are associated with federal programs and private groups headquartered in Washington.

In 1974 Gutheim, a longtime leader of the Sugarloaf Citizens Association, established Sugarloaf Regional Trails

(SRT), a nonprofit center dedicated to the preservation of the cultural and scenic landscape of an area boasting more than 1,000 historic buildings, farms, and districts.

SRT prepared valuable studies detailing ways to preserve scenic roads and protect farmland threatened by subdivisions that reach out from Washington in ever-widening arcs. Additionally, SRT produced three television films and developed a system of trails that were aimed at broadening the educational and recreational value of the region and thereby expanding public support for its preservation.

Reflecting on his local activity Gutheim says, "We've managed to hook the area into the C&O Canal National Historic Park, which runs along the Potomac just west of us, and managed to get the State of Maryland to create a two-thousand-acre, multiple-use resource area nearby around the lower part of the Monocacy River. And, of course, we've created tax incentives and prompted large landowners to donate conservation easements."

Under Gutheim's leadership, SRT received an Honor Award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1984. In 1974 Maryland awarded Gutheim the Calvert Prize, the state's honor for preservation, and just last year, the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission awarded him the Montgomery Prize for his role in establishing the county historic preservation plan, which has since served as a model for numerous others nationwide.

"Frederick Gutheim," says HABS chief Kapsch, "never envisioned the academy as something apart from the larger society." Kapsch cites Gutheim's advice to his students: Don't simply join historic preservation organizations, assume leadership positions in them; don't just study society, change it for the better.

In projects worldwide, and in his own backyard as well, that is exactly what Gutheim has been doing—and doing well. No wonder so many colleagues hold him in awe. Despite the twinkling of lights in the distance at night, he is able to say with satisfaction, "From where I live, I can't see anything that wasn't there forty years ago." To those who treasure the past, that's quite an accomplishment. ▼

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