



Matthews, N.C. Reconnaissance Inventory

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Date: 2007

Purpose

The purpose of this endeavor is to complete a reconnaissance inventory of properties of special significance in Matthews, N.C. and its environs. This document explains the principal socio-economic forces that led to the founding and evolution of the town of Matthews, N.C. and its surrounding areas. The ultimate intent is to identify which properties in Matthews, N.C. and its environs contribute to the historical context of the area and should therefore be preserved to keep the historic character of the town and its surrounding areas intact.

Methodology

Bill Jeffers, the principal investigator, worked under the supervision of Dr. Dan L. Morrill to conduct a comprehensive inventory of the historic elements of the built environment of Matthews, N.C. and its environs. This inventory includes determinations of which properties prospectively have special historic significance and contains photographs and brief descriptive information for those properties judged to be potentially eligible for historic landmark designation as set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-400. The principal investigator conducted research, consulted archives, and perused relevant public documents which aided in the identification of properties with potential special historical significance. The principal investigator, when possible, consulted with individuals who had knowledge about specific properties in the area or who possessed knowledge of the history of Matthews, N.C. and its environs.

The principal investigator recognizes that some historically significant properties might have been inadvertently excluded from this inventory and welcomes public input into this process. Also, the principal investigator understands that in the future some individuals may come forward with information that will augment or detract from these findings. The surveying of historic properties is a process, not a product.

Historical Context of Matthews, NC

Like many small towns in the South, Matthews, N.C. can trace its early origins to farming and its associated agrarian enterprises. In the early 1800's, farmers began clearing land in the southeastern corner of Mecklenburg County. "As more land was cleared for planting, so many tree stumps were left standing that the early settlement became unofficially known as '*Stumptown*'"^[1] Cotton was the main crop of antebellum Mecklenburg County and was initially transported by wagon to markets located at the fall line of nearby major rivers, such as Fayetteville on the Cape Fear,

Cheraw on the Pee Dee, and Camden on the Wateree.

"Stumptown" became a congregating point for local farmers when a post office was established there in the 1820s. "Postal department records show that on July 12, 1825, John Miles Fullwood was appointed postmaster in the "Stumptown" area."^[2] The Fullwood home would ultimately serve not only as a store and post office for the area but would also be the focal point where locals came to get mail and to find out what was going on in their community. As a result the community of "Stumptown" would eventually become known as "Fullwood." The area would continue to go by that name until after Reconstruction.

After the Civil War, "Fullwood" began to resemble more of a town with the construction of a small number of houses and a general store. According to the *Charlotte News*, ". . . Soon after the Confederate guns quit looming, Wylie Knowles chose this spot for a saw mill and with Arthur and Watson Reid at the headblocks, and a slave negro, Dic McCain, driving the ox log cart, he sawed enough lumber to build a half dozen crude houses which formed the nucleus of the town."^[3] A general store was also erected. The store shelves ". . . were stocked with merchandise covering a variety of needs, with tin wares being a principle (sic.) line of goods. Whiskey and spirits were sold along with agricultural supplies necessary to support the farmers and family life."^[4]

While the origins of the "Fullwood" community can be traced to farming and its associated enterprises, the area also became an important stop for stagecoach transportation. The stagecoach further encouraged economic development in the area and ". . . by 1870, the town began to take shape." "Building lots," writes local historian Paula Lester, " were surveyed and streets were mapped out. Soon businesses and homes began to appear in increasing numbers. With cotton and timber fueling the

expansion, 'Fullwood' had evolved from a community and emerged as a town.”^[5] However, the area was still in transition. Not until the arrival of rail transportation would the community begin to resemble the Matthews of today.

According to Richard Mattson in his survey of the small towns of Mecklenburg County, “it was along the railroads that several of the small county towns were established.”^[6] This was true for Matthews. Indeed, the arrival of the railroad was a transforming event in the history of Matthews and its environs, giving greater impetus to what farming and the stagecoach had begun. “The stagecoach era ended in 1874 with the completion of the railroad which the Carolina Central Railway Company built from the Pee Dee to Charlotte as part of the line from Wilmington to Tennessee.” “The railway officials,” states the *Charlotte Observer*, “gave the station the name of Matthews, probably in honor of two directors of the company, Watson Matthews and J. Bronder Matthews, both of New York.”^[7] Local legend, however, credits the name to a resident with the last name of “Matthews” who donated the lands for the town's commercial building sites and for the station and the station master's house. “Beginning in 1875,” writes Lester, “incoming mail arriving by train was addressed ‘Matthews Station’, and the name ‘Fullwood’ became less popular.”^[8]

The railroad had a sustaining impact upon economic development in southeastern Mecklenburg County, including Matthews. “By the 1870’s the merchants and other businessmen who had established enterprises in the immediate vicinity of the Matthews Depot constituted a settlement which contained approximately two hundred people,” states the *Southeast News*, a local newspaper. “In 1879 they secured a charter of incorporation from the legislature of North Carolina, creating the town of Matthews and empowering the citizens thereof to exercise their authority as residents of an incorporated municipality.”^[9]

The town, as noted earlier, had always occupied an important place in the economic development of eastern Mecklenburg County. Prior to the 1870's, farmers had used the settlement as their most accessible source for supplies. With the arrival of rail transportation, Matthews's importance began to escalate. "The railroad became the lifeline of Matthews" proclaims a Matthews website. "Five passenger trains and eight freight trains came through the town each day and the depot did thousands of dollars in business. By 1901 Matthews' (sic.) downtown boasted two cotton gins, three general stores, a bank, two doctors, a pharmacy, a grist mill, a blacksmith shop, a livery stable and a hotel."^[10]

In the twentieth century Matthews's place in Mecklenburg County began to change once again. "Matthews passed a milestone in 1926 when electric power came to town," states an article in the *Charlotte Observer*.^[11] Following World War II the town started to lose much of its rural setting due to rapid suburbanization and the expansion of Charlotte. By the 1980's Matthews, while still serving as a supply location for farmers in the area, had essentially become a suburb of Charlotte, which by then had expanded into most of unincorporated Mecklenburg County between it and Matthews. Rail and farming would eventually give way to corporate interests. Today Matthews is home to the corporate headquarters of various companies such as Conbraco Industries, Family Dollar, and Harris Teeter.

The Built Environment

The built environment of Matthews is a testament to its history. While modernization and suburbanization have destroyed or significantly altered substantial portions of the townscape of Matthews and its formerly rural environs, many of the structures and places that document Matthews's historical rural and small town setting remain. Buildings in the commercial core of Matthews, such as the Heath and Reid

General Store and the Funderburk Brothers Building, serve as reminders of the importance of farming and transportation in the economy of Matthews in the late 1800's and well into the twentieth century.



Heath and Reid General Store



Funderburk Brothers Building

Founded by Everard Jefferson Heath and Edward Soloman Reid, the Heath and Reid General Store, built in 1888, was a supplier of dry goods and farming supplies. Heath was regarded as a very adroit businessman and known throughout the county. With the arrival of rail transportation, his store took on an even greater presence in the town. Situated beside the railroad tracks, the store attracted even more business thanks to the arrival of new commerce that the railroad brought. Thereafter farmers could come to Matthews to get a good price for their crops, as opposed to traveling "all day" to Charlotte or Monroe. As the town's economy expanded, more merchants began to take advantage of the new and increasing economic opportunities.

Near the turn of the last century B. D. Funderburk acquired a building which was constructed by his father, Ellison James Funderburk. The elder Funderburk had acquired the land and erected the structure around 1878-1879. With this building, the younger Funderburk opened another general store and with it brought economic

competition to Matthews. With competition came eventual expansion as Funderburk purchased the lot next to his and erected an extension of his store. Funderburk also expanded his buildings to include not only a general store but also a two story structure that would house a bank as well as apartments on the second floor.

In 1900 the Renfrow General Store also opened its doors. Owned and operated by Thomas Jefferson (T. J.) Renfrow, the store represents continued economic expansion in Matthews. Today, while the buildings that housed both the Heath and Reid and Funderburk General Stores are still standing, they are no longer general stores. However, the Renfrow building continues to serve the needs of the town as a hardware/general store. One of the primary reasons that is a significant example of the evolution of Matthews is not that it is an old structure, but rather that it has served the same function since its construction of being a farming supply and general store for the farmers of the area. Also, the building is important because it serves as a physical link to the past of rural east Mecklenburg County and because it has remained essentially intact. Even today, as farmland in Mecklenburg County becomes ever more scarce, the store continues to do a brisk business.



Renfrow Hardware & General Merchandise Store

With commercial expansion came newfound wealth to many in Matthews. Most notably were those who ran the commercial enterprises in the town or those farmers who stood to make a bigger profit thanks to the convenience of rail transit. The McLaughlin-Bost House on West John St. is an example of how merchants prospered in the town. Joseph McLaughlin, son of Charlotte businessman Charles McLaughlin, partnered with J.T. Barnett to open the first general store in Matthews. His home holds an important position in the history of the built environment of Matthews. The reasons being that: 1) It was larger than many of the homes in the area at the time it was built; and 2) While being a larger home and thus an important one, the house is not ostentatious in design or in decoration. This ensured that the house would not detract from the rural setting of the town. An example of new wealth in farming can be seen in the Grier-Furr House which is

located on West John St. The two story farm house at what was considered the edge of town when it was built is an example of the wealth that cash crops brought to the area. It also highlights the fact that as the economy expanded, so did the size of the town.



McLaughlin - Bost House



Grier - Furr House

With this increase in size came an increase in population. While farmers and merchants were the first to set up residence in Matthews, economic prosperity also brought the professional or middle class to Matthews as well. The Nancy Reid House on West John St. was built by Edward Soloman Reid of the Heath and Reid General Store in 1890. The style of the house is called Queen Anne Style Cottage which was an offshoot of the Queen Victorian Style. This style of architecture is representative of the turn of the century but it was a rarity considering its location. In a time in the south where function would usually trump form, the house is a beautiful aberration. With a growing population there came a need for a town doctor. Eventually the house was owned by Dr. Thomas Neely Reid who was a doctor, counselor, and friend to not only Matthews but much of the surrounding area. After the Second World War, the middle class population boom would be more evident as Matthews became a commuting suburb of Charlotte. These professionals

would drive to the city to work and drive back to Matthews to escape the "urban jungle" in favor of the rural tableau.



Nancy Reid House



Renfrow - Lemmond House

In the twentieth century, the Renfrow-Lemmond House shows this shift towards automobiles. Built in 1924 by John Renfrow, he would ultimately lose the house during the Great Depression. The property was subsequently purchased by S.R. "Rea" Lemmond in 1942. This house sits along West John Street, where most of the well to do residents of Matthews settled. What is important to note here is that the house is oriented towards the driveway and the street. This reflects the influence that automobiles would have and have had on home construction.

Crestdale: The Forgotten Matthews

Until the latter half of the twentieth century, there was a forgotten community just outside the original town boundaries. This area today is known as Crestdale but in the 1870's had the moniker of "Tanktown". Founded by free blacks and freed slaves the name of "Tanktown", ". . . referred to the railroad water tank that originally stood at the heart of the district, near the train tracks. The men who operated the tank

and lived nearby made up the settlement's earliest residents."^[12] They would come to settle along Tank Town Road, which is known today as E. Charles St. This was one of the first all African American communities in the area. "Tanktown" would become "Crestdale" in 1963 but the obvious disparities between it and Matthews were readily visible to anyone who bothered to look. A Charlotte Observer article from May 13, 1968 only highlights the inequality: "Most of Crestdale's 250 people use wooden privies. Only about 10 houses have septic tanks. Everybody uses well water, three or four families often draw from a common well, and you can see women trudging wearily with buckets . . . one hundred yards away is a housing subdivision. It's inside the Matthews city limits, with water and sewer lines for all homes. The residents are white."^[13]

Differences such as these continued to highlight the inequity between predominately white Matthews and predominately black Crestdale. As late as 1982, nearly two thirds of Crestdale's residents still had no running water or sewer service. A former member of the Matthews Board of Commissioners, Vicky Baucom remarked that, "nobody knew anything about it. And I think that's the problem with Crestdale in general . . . it's sort of like, 'out of sight, out of mind.'^[14] Baucom was ultimately responsible for spearheading the effort to get Crestdale annexed to Matthews so the residents could get needed sewer and water lines. In her own words, "I don't think anyone should live in conditions like that today, not in southeast Charlotte."^[15] Her efforts would bear fruit and with infrastructure improvements made to the area, Crestdale officially became part of Matthews in 1988.

As with most southern communities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, regardless of color or ethnicity, religion played an important role in Crestdale. There are two churches in the area constructed in the early 1950's with

origins that in once case go back to the community's founding. Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church was organized in 1879 and the United House of Prayer for all People can trace its origins back to 1928. Also, there is another structure off Matthews Chapel Rd., which may have been a church at one point. Today the building is vacant and boarded up but a sign above the door reads: "Crestdale Community Center."



Crestdale Community Center

Crestdale does not have many historic buildings still standing. Most of the buildings or structures built before 1900 have been destroyed. The one exception is the Alice Thompson House. "Not much is known about the home's history except that it was built and occupied by the Thompson family."^[16]

Conclusion

Matthews, NC is a town that has done much to embrace its history. In the central business district of the town many late nineteenth or early twentieth century buildings that had not been lost to fire, or demolition, have already been afforded protection. However, there are still some houses in the town proper that could be eligible for preservation. In the extra territorial jurisdiction there are also several structures that could merit designation, for they tell the story of Matthews agrarian roots.

It is also important to recognize what few remaining structures of historical significance remain in Crestdale. This is because there are only a few buildings remaining that could merit historical significance, and if they do have significance, then they tell the story of Matthews from the African-American perspective. Regardless of when the area was annexed, Crestdale played an important role in the development of Matthews and therefore its contributions to the town's evolution should be recognized and preserved for future generations.

For List Of Identified Properties Click [Here](#).

^[1] Paula H. Lester, *Discover Matthews: From Cotton to Corporate* (Matthews, North Carolina: the Town of Matthews Tourism Council, 2000), p. 5.

^[2] Ibid.

^[3] Reverend S.J. Hood, "Many Had Part in the Founding and Growth of Matthews," *Charlotte News*, December 18, 1937. p. 1.

^[4] Lester, p. 6.

^[5] Lester, p. 6-7.

^[6] Richard L. Mattson, *Historic Landscapes of Mecklenburg County: The Small Towns* (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission), p. 14.

^[7] Mrs. Watson Morris, " Matthews' Life Includes Days Of The Stagecoach," *Charlotte Observer*, Feb 28, 1950. p. 4-I.

^[8] Lester, pg 7.

^[9] *The Southeast News*, November 10,1975, p. 1-24

^[10] History, *The Town Of Matthews*, (http://www.matthewsnc.com/html/history__maps.html) , (accessed March 12, 2007).

^[11] Morris, 4-I..

^[12] Mattson, p. 59-61.

^[13] Bob Rosenblatt, "Proud, Poor, They're Cleaning: Tiny Negro Community Wants Water Lines, Playgrounds,"*Charlotte Observer*, May 13, 1968. p. 1C.

^[14] Charles E. Shepard, "Matthews Seeking Federal Grant For Crestdale," *Charlotte Observer*, July 31, 1982. p. 2B.

^[15] Ibid.

^[16] Lester, p. 60.