1. **Name and location of the Property:** The property known as the McAuley Road Farmland is located along McAuley Road in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

2. **Name of the current owners of the Property:**

   Phillips and Leslie Bragg  
   16040 McAuley Road  
   Huntersville, NC 28078

   J. Frank and Katharine Bragg  
   554 N. Church Street  
   Charlotte, NC 28202

   Price and Margaret Zimmermann  
   16101 McAuley Road  
   Huntersville, NC 28078

3. **Representative photographs of the Property:** This report contains representative photographs of the Property.

4. **A map depicting the location of the Property:** This report contains a map depicting the location of the property.
5. Current Deed Book Reference to the Property:

The tax parcel numbers are: 01113105, 01128108, 01113108, 01128108, and 01128105

6. A brief historical sketch of the Property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property

7. A brief architectural description of the Property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the Property meets the criteria for designation set forth in North Carolina General Statute 160A-400.5:

Special significance in terms of its history, architecture and/or cultural importance:
The Commission judges that the Property known as the McAuley Road Farmland does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1) The McAuley Road Farmland represents the best preserved and most intact rural/agricultural landscape in Mecklenburg County.

2) With the phenomenal growth of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County during the 20th Century, the McAuley Road Farmland is the last large area of the county that accurately depicts for the public, the once dominant late 19th century and early 20th agricultural character of Mecklenburg County.

Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:

The Commission contends that the architectural description included in this report demonstrates that the Property known as McAuley Road Farmland, meets this criterion.

9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal: The Commission is aware that designation allows the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the ad valorem taxes on all or any portion of the Property that becomes an "historic landmark." The current appraised value of the land containing.

10. Portion of property recommended for designation: all of tax parcels 01113108 and 01113105 that lie within 100’ of the property lines that lie along McAuley Road, all of the land in tax parcels and 01128105, and the land and buildings in tax parcel 01128108.

Date of Preparation of this Report: January, 2006

Prepared by: Stewart Gray

Historical Background Statement

The McAuley Road Farmland described in this report is historically significant because it represents the landscape that dominated Mecklenburg County for much of its 19th and 20th century history.

Mecklenburg County Agriculture

Mecklenburg County’s landscape changed drastically during the twentieth century. From its formation as a county in 1762 until 1900, Mecklenburg County exhibited a distinctly rural-agricultural character. But economic and industrial foundations built during the 19th century led to astounding development and population growth beginning around the turn of the century. Three interrelated factors are largely responsible for the radical alteration of the landscape: the development of the railroads, the growth of the City of Charlotte, and the expansion of the textile industry.
From colonial times, Charlotte has occupied an important position at a major crossroads. But the early town and the small city of the 19th century did not cover much of the area that made up Mecklenburg County. Until the Second World War, Charlotte was a compact city, very different from the sprawling metropolis that quickly developed after the war. In the late 19th century, the city was limited to its four wards surrounded by a ring of close-in villages, such as Biddleville, interspersed with farms. The city’s first suburb, Dilworth, was developed on farmland in 1891. In 1900, the area now known as Myers Park, was part of a large cotton farm. As late as 1938, industrial buildings that extended down South Boulevard to just past Tremont Ave. were surrounded by farm fields.

Despite the traditional compact nature of the city, its population growth was phenomenal. In 1870, only one out of five Mecklenburg County residents lived in Charlotte; by 1900, the ratio was one in three. In 1910 more people lived in the city than lived in the small towns and the unincorporated parts of the county combined. By 1930 Charlotte had become the largest city in the Carolinas with 82,675 residents. Good railroads combined with a strong tradition of boosterism encouraged industrial growth, the most important of which was textiles.

The industrial and population expansion of Charlotte was not an isolated event; instead it reflected a regional growth in the state’s southern Piedmont fueled by the textile
industry. In 1902, half of the textile production in the entire southern United States occurred within one hundred miles of the city. In the county outside of Charlotte, towns grew along the rail lines. Pineville, Cornelius, Huntersville, and Davidson all featured cotton mills, which brought workers and ever expanding housing. Despite the growth of Charlotte and the small towns, good transportation and a strong demand for cotton still encouraged farming in the county during the early decades of the 20th century.

“Agriculture has advanced with the encouragement of ready markets. ....Good roads facilitate the work of the farmer in his resort to the market, and have advanced materially the value of rural property. This county (Mecklenburg) leads in the cause of "good roads" and really good Macadam roads radiate from Charlotte. The railroads also radiate from Charlotte in all directions."vii

In 1910 the number of farms in the county peaked at 4,339. Thus in 1910, Mecklenburg County featured a robust city, strong agricultural production, and small towns that served the rural population.

This exceptional balance of urban and rural did not last long. Mecklenburg County is composed of a total of 337,773 acres. At its peak in 1910, 318,282 of these acres were associated with farming. By 1920, acreage in farmland dropped 10%. This rate of decline held steady until 1940, and then dropped precipitously after the Second World War.ix Causes for the decline include the unprecedented growth of Charlotte, the development of the small towns, and a collapse of the cotton market around 1930.

In Mecklenburg County, like much of the South, cotton was the main cash crop, and crisis came to Southern agriculture years before the stock market crash with the onset of the boll weevil around 1920. The pest devastated the crop, and cultivation became more difficult and expensive. Increased cost coupled with declining prices, resulted in a 50% drop in cotton production in Mecklenburg County from 1930 to 1940.x

Another factor that contributed to the decline in agriculture was a change in agricultural practices. With good roads, refrigeration, and the development of modern grocery stores, proximity to the market became less important. Larger, more efficient farms in other parts of the state and in other regions of the country made the farms of Mecklenburg County less competitive. This, coupled with a strong demand for land for housing and industry, also led to the decline of farming in the county.

Despite these significant changes and challenges, the look and traditions of agriculture in Mecklenburg County were tenacious and persisted into the middle years of the 20th century. Though statistically declining during the 1930s, rural life in Mecklenburg County carried on in many ways as it had since the Civil War. In 1930, 3,773 farms still occupied 246,031 acres in the county.xi Mule power was still prominent. With a mule population of 4,907, Mecklenburg County had basically the same number of working farm animals in 1930 as it did in 1880.xii Many of the roads were unpaved, and
electricity had not yet reached all of the residents. So from the Civil War until the 1930’s, much of Mecklenburg County landscape looked the same and functioned in the same manner.

That is not to say that the rural life was idyllic. First-hand accounts tell of a very hard life for the Piedmont cotton farmers. Lexie Little Hill describes working as a child on her family’s farm in neighboring Union County. Chores included days of hoeing and thinning the cotton plants, and poisoning boll weevils with a toxic mixture of arsenic and black molasses applied to the plants with a homemade mop. When the plants were mature, the real work started. Heavy bags of cotton were drug by ropes tied around the worker’s waist, through the fields in the hot sun. As the farm families bent low to pick the cotton, they wore socks on their hands to protect them from sharp burrs. A federal survey of North Carolina farmers done in the mid-1920s tells us that white landowning farmers in the Piedmont were churchgoers, subscribed to a newspaper, and some kept a good collection of books in their homes. When asked about progressive government policies, around 80% favored “consolidated schools, road bonds, higher education, scientific farming, strict enforcement of the laws and cooperative buying and selling.” And yet the same survey shows that life was, by our standards, primitive. Statewide, less than 2% had running water in their homes, and practically none had electricity. A majority of all Piedmont farmers lacked screens to keep bugs out of their houses, and only a quarter of all farms had privies of any kind. Garbage and dishwater were dumped in the yards of many farm homes.

**Tenant Farming**

"They produce less of their home food supply, and in addition to this they have a lower cash income. They thus not only are practicing a system of agriculture which is ruinous for the future but are not making even personal gain while they are doing it." From *Economic and Social Conditions of North Carolina Farmers, 1922.*

It is unlikely that any true subsistence farmers existed in Mecklenburg County in the 20th century. Instead, farming was a “combination of producing for the market and for home consumption.” Unlike the early 20th-century farmers of the North Carolina Mountains who produced around 95% of what they consumed, Piedmont farmers appeared to be more involved with the larger economy. The afore mentioned 1922 statewide agricultural survey found that typical Piedmont farmers who lived on the land purchased between 25 to 40% of what they consumed. This may have been due to the prevalence of cotton as a cash crop. Mecklenburg County was among the leading cotton producers, having led the state in cotton production at the turn of the century.

While not subsistence farmers, the majority of early 20th-century farmers in Mecklenburg County were tenants, and most of these tenants were sharecroppers. Agricultural reformers of the day saw tenancy as a serious obstacle to improved farming. They argued that tenancy kept farmers trapped in poverty. The 1922 survey found that the
family equity of black Piedmont sharecroppers was only $36.00. Not only were they poor, but most were also in debt, using short-term loans to finance their crops.

The crop lien is the curse of North Carolina agriculture. The landlords and owner-operators are by no means universally free from the crop lien and chattel mortgage, but the landless farmers are farming under this handicap in three times as great numbers as are the landed. Furthermore, the tenants and croppers use a much greater per cent of their credit for living purposes than the landlords and owners do. Their credit is not so much for the sake of an investment as it is for the sake of a stake to tide them over from season to season. This is not a business use of credit but a makeshift one year after another.xx

Reformers also were concerned about the affect the institution of tenancy was having on the land.

Furthermore, it is clear…that tenant farming is conducive to exhaustive crop farming more than owner-operator farming. The tenants and croppers in two of the three counties surveyed had over 99 per cent of all their land planted to crops which were strictly fertility-exhausting rather than soil-improving. xxi

The countryside around McAuley Road bears evidence of this practice. The nearby Jesse Washam Farm, the Caldwell Bradford Farm, the Summer Farm, and the Fred Washam Farm each contains examples of ruined former tenant houses.xxii McAuley Road itself appears to have been constructed to serve tenants, or at least it must have functioned that way in the early years of the 20th century. The McAulay Tenant House is the only home to front on the one-and-one-half-mile gravel road. While no landowner homes appear to have existed along the road during the early years of the 20th centuryxxiii, the ruins of several other tenant houses have been identified.

The Road
A defining historical characteristic of the McAuley Road Farmland is the gravel road that runs through it.

The development of good paved roads proved central to the development of North Carolina during the 20th century. Mecklenburg County industrialist D.A. Tompkins began campaigning for improved roads late in the 19th century. But good road development was slow. In 1912 the state had 48,000 miles of roads, of which only 1,232 were macadam, an early form of paving where gravel is packed and then coated with tar. Even this number could be deceiving. Where funds were limited, Tompkins recommended that only one side of a road be macadamized to save money. If vehicles met, one could pull onto the unpaved side of the road and hopefully not get stuck. By 1921 only 135 miles of truly paved road had been constructed in the state.

Things began to change under the “Good Roads” governor, Cameron Morrison. Elected in 1920, Morrison helped establish a strong highway commission and fought for adequate funding. During the Depression, under Governor Max O. Gardner, North Carolina developed the nation's largest state-maintained highway system. Governor Bob Scott succeeded in his goal of paving 12,000 miles of secondary road; however, by the end of his term in 1953 two-third of the state's secondary road remained unpaved. By the end of the 20th century, the status of roads in
Mecklenburg County had changed completely, with the vast majority of state and locally maintained roads being paved.

Along with McAuley Road, some other unpaved roads have survived in Mecklenburg County, including Duke Power's Mountain Island Lake boat ramp access road, and the west westernmost section of Neck Road. However, no other identified unpaved road is part of a productive agricultural landscape. Some paved roads, such as the Ervin Cooke Road, Black Farm Road, Jim Kidd Road, all in Huntersville, may be significant for their rural character. But no other place in the county is as evocative of late 19th and early 20th century common-place rural history as McAuley Road.

The presence of the McAulay tenant farmhouse and barn, the adjoining woodland, and the landscape of the open, productive fields along the unpaved McAuley Road, in a setting where new development has been severely restricted, afford the public a singular experience in Mecklenburg County. Visitors to McAuley Road experience what was once the most common landscape in the county, but today is the rarest.

McAuley Road Farmland

Deed records indicate that most, if not all, of the subject farm property was once part of a single 532-acre parcel, conveyed in 1889 from M. Black to her sister Mary McAulay. Later, most of the farmland in the subject area was part of the W. C. McAulay Estate identified in a 1954 map used in the division of the property. The subject house and barn, and much of the land, were part of a tenant farm on that property. It appears that during the first half of the 20th century the farmland, like most of the rest of the county, was used to grow cotton.
The substantial tenant house would have housed a family that worked some portion of the land for either a fee or for a portion of the crop. The proximity of the barn to the house indicates that the farmhouse may have been the center of a relatively autonomous farming unit. No other identified extant tenant houses in Mecklenburg County appear to have been associated with such a substantial outbuilding. In contrast, nearby tenant houses like the Jesse Washam tenant house and the Morehead tenant house appear to be simply worker housing with no substantial outbuildings. The proximity of the large barn to the subject house might indicate that the tenant maintained his own work animals, which could have included mules for plowing and draft horses, with feed in the form of hay stored loose in the second-story loft. Stalls that line the center passage would have also housed a milk cow for the use of the family. Tenants in the subject house during the 20th century included the Cliff Shinn Family, the Will Cannon Family, a family named Tevepaw, and the Jack Neil Family.xxxii

In 1938, Soil Conservation Service maps indicate that neighboring farmland was owned or operated by Jesse Washam to the east, and Hurd Grier Bradford to the west. Other nearby landowners included African American farmer Frank Lytle, John Caldwell, Robert Bradford, and Tom McAuley. None of these property owners lived on McAuley Road. The land adjacent to the road was farmed by these landowners and by tenants. The ruins of numerous additional tenant houses dot the landscape along McAuley Road.

In 1955 the original W.C. McAulay Estate was divided into six tracts. According to deed records, the subject farmland was part of tracts belonging to Marty Brown, James Frailey, and Martha Osborne. In 1956 Martha Osbourne put her property under contract with the Lower Catawba Soil Conservation District. Early District records for her land do not exist, but records for neighboring property indicates that farmers were moving away
from cotton, by putting land into pasture and concentrating on beef production, growing hay and grain. xxxiii

The Significance of McAuley Road Farmland

Once ubiquitous in Mecklenburg County, the common, every-day agricultural landscape found intact along McAuley Road is now the rarest of all landscapes found in the county. The below photos demonstrate that the rural landscape along McAuley Road has stayed relatively intact, while rural landscapes elsewhere in the county have been drastically altered.
Other significant rural landscapes in Mecklenburg County have been preserved. White Oak in eastern Mecklenburg County is designated as a local historic landmark and contains an ante-bellum plantation house and sections of open fields and woodlands. Rural Hill Plantation in Northern Mecklenburg County preserves active farmland on the site of the plantation of the Davidson Family, a family active in the county’s history since colonial times. Latta Place Plantation demonstrates for the public the agricultural life in the county in the early years of the Republic. None of these properties effectively portray the life of the county’s smaller farmers and tenants, nor do they demonstrate the post-Civil War latter days of Mecklenburg's agricultural history.

The McAuley Road Farmland is a snapshot of late 19th and early 20th century rural landscape. No other place in Mecklenburg County is as evocative of the area’s late 19th and early 20th century common-place rural history. The presence of the McAulay tenant farmhouse and barn, the adjoining woodland, and the landscape of the open, productive fields along the unpaved McAuley Road, in a setting where new development has been severely restricted, affords the public a singular experience in Mecklenburg County. Visitors to McAuley Road experience what was once the most common landscape in the county, but today is the rarest.

**Brief Architectural Description**

![House](image_url)
The McAuley Tenant Farmhouse is a one-story hall-and-parlor house. Hall-and-parlor houses are single-pile, meaning that the principal section of the house is just one room deep. As implied by their name, the principal section is composed of two rooms. The “hall” is the larger of the rooms. It usually features the house’s front entrance and is the most public space in the house. The “parlor” is the smaller of the rooms and usually functioned as a bedroom. Rear ells are common, although early houses may instead have had a detached or semi-detached kitchen.

Hall-and-parlor houses hold a special place in North Carolina architectural history. A single-pile design, the hall-parlor form was common in the North Carolina from the 17th century. In fact, the oldest surviving building in North Carolina, the Newbold-White House ca. 1680-1730, is a hall-parlor type.xxxv With the exception of the log Smith Housexxxvi located in the Long Creek Community however, no antebellum examples of hall-parlor farmhouse have been found in the county. After the Civil War, some of Mecklenburg County’s white farmers, African-American farmers and tenants lived in hall-and-parlor houses. But surviving examples are still greatly outnumbered by I-houses.

Today, hall-and-parlor houses are most commonly found in the small towns of Mecklenburg County and in the African-American neighborhoods and mill villages of the city of Charlotte. Mills and former mill sites in Huntersville and Davidson are surrounded by small hall-parlor houses. The simplicity of the hall-parlor design must have appealed to both the mill owners and the mill workers. The following passage written by cotton mill builder and New South promoter D.A. Tompkins may give us a clue why the traditional hall-parlor design was utilized in mill villages.

The whole matter of providing attractive and comfortable habitations for cotton mill operatives in the South may be summarized in the statement that they are essentially a rural people. They have been accustomed to farm life, where there is plenty of room. While their condition is in most cases decidedly bettered by going to the factory, the old instincts cling to them. The ideal arrangement is to preserve the general conditions of rural life and add some of the comforts of city life.xxxvii

With the approach of the 20th century, both I-houses and hall-and-parlor houses faced growing competition from massed-plan houses.
The McAulay Tenant House appears to have been built around the 1900. The house follows the hall-and-parlor form. The principal section is one room deep and three bays wide, with a rear ell. The house rests on brick piers that have been in-filled with brick curtain walls. A shed-porch protects the front of the house. Masonite siding has been applied over the original weatherboard. Fenestration has been changed on the front of the house, but remains generally unaltered on the rest of the building. It appears that original single windows on the façade have been replaced with ganged double windows. The front panel door is not original. Early-20ᵗʰ-century 3-v metal roofing covers the entire house.
The rear ell was built flush with the north elevation of the principal section. The ell consist of one room. The north elevation is pierced with original six-over-six double hungs and paired replacement double-hung in the middle bay. An interior chimney between the ell and the principal section would have served a fireplace in the parlor and a kitchen stove in the ell.
The rear of the house features a simple gable and is pierced with a pair of short replacement six-over-six windows. The south elevation features an L-shaped porch that has been enclosed to form a rear hall and a bathroom. An original chimney on the south elevation of the principal section was in poor condition and was removed recently while repairs were being made to the house.

Barn
Approximately 150’ south of the farm house is a front-gabled frame barn. Typical for most early 20th-century barns in Mecklenburg County, the building was constructed using light framing. This type of building replaced the log barns that were typical in the county during the 19th century. Balloon framing, an abundance of dimensioned lumber, and the availability of wire nails appear to have contributed to the popularity of this barn type. Similar existing examples include the nearby Summer’s barn, which was built on a poured concrete foundation, and the Jesse Washam barn. In comparison to the neighboring barns that appear to have been abandoned, the subject barn is in good condition and is currently being maintained.
The subject building is notable for its strictly utilitarian design. It is a stark icon of the county’s rural past. The building has no fenestration except for the gable-end doors. A minimal roof over-hang lacks a rake fascia. The angled opening of the doors is no whimsical design, but instead reflects the brace-framing of the opening. Framing is uniformly covered with plain weather-board siding. As was typical, siding was nailed directly to the framing and covered with corner boards. Siding comes nearly to the grade without interruption. One of the biggest obstacles to the preservation of early 20th-century barns was the practice of using extremely low timber sills, usually white oak, that rested on stone piers. This allowed the siding to run close to the ground, protecting the animals in the stalls from the elements. However, the build-up of debris, as well as the natural sagging of the sill beams can led to contact with the ground, termite infestation, rot, and failure. The subject barn is typical in that the sill beams rest on low stone piers, however, because of its constant use and suitable upkeep, the deterioration found on most of the neighboring barns is not found on the McAulay Barn.

All of the original lumber in the barn was circular saw, and framing was joined using wire nails, indicating an early-20th century construction date. The sills are 6x8 oak timbers joined with simple lap joints. Tall studs run past the floor of the loft, supporting the top plates. The interior walls of the stall and ledgers attached to the studs below the top plate to bear the joists of the loft. Four tall 4x6 pine post define the center hall and with large angled braces, support light roof beam formed from doubled 2x4s. These beams in turn bear the barns 2x4 rafters. The roof is covered with metal, each side with three rows of 5-v metal roofing.
Outbuilding

To the rear of the tenant house is an outbuilding that may have served as a corn crib in the past. The building has been altered with recent siding, and it is difficult to perceive the original fenestration. The floor framing of the building is composed of square hewn sills. Massive log joist flattened on only one side run under the floor, planked with circular sawn lumber. The existence of this altered building is significant because it may indicate that this farm site predates the house and barn.


iv 1938 countywide photos in possession of the Mecklenburg County GIS Department.


vi Sherry J. Joines and Dr. Dan L. Morrill “Historic Rural Resources in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina” (Charlotte - Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission: 1999)
http://www.cmhp.org/educhargrowth.htm

vii North Carolina and its Resources, State Board of Agriculture
(Winston: M. I. & J. C. Stewart, Public Printers and Binders, 1896) p. 159
Text encoded by Apex Data Services, Inc. Academic Affairs Library, UNC-CH University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001. p. 366

viii NC Forest Service website http://www.dfr.state.nc.us/contacts/mecklenburg.htm

ix Mattson.

x Mattson, chart 1.

xi Mattson.

xii Mattson.

xiii See the collection of Duke Power work orders held in the Carolina Room of the PLCMC.


xvi Taylor, p. 43-46.


xviii North Carolina and its Resources, State Board of Agriculture
(Winston: M. I. & J. C. Stewart, Public Printers and Binders, 1896) p. 159
Text encoded by Apex Data Services, Inc. Academic Affairs Library, UNC-CH University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001.

xix Mattson

xxii Tenant houses were identified by the author during 2001 Survey of African American Historic Sites in Mecklenburg County. Field notes from the survey are in the possession of the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office in Raleigh.

xxiii 1938 aerial maps do not show any other large house sites. Interview with Joe Washam confirms that other tenants live along McAulay Road in houses that have been lost.

xxiv Turner p.1

xxv Tompkins

xxvi Turner p. 12

xxvii Turner p. 32

xxviii Turner p.53

xxix All of the land being recommended for designation is currently protected by easements that strictly limit development and protect the viewshed from the road. The Catawba Lands Trust holds these easements.

xxx See Deed Books 1739 pages 477&473, and 1815 page 375, in Mecklenburg County, NC Register of Deeds.

xxxi Interview With Joe Washam indicates that cotton was grown on the property. Notes from the interview dated on file with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

xxxii From a list of tenants supplied by Joe Washam on file at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

xxxiii See conservation agreement 992 in the record of the US Department of Agriculture, Concord North Carolina.

xxxiv All of the land being recommended for designation is currently protected by easements that strictly limit development and protect the viewshed from the road. The Catawba Lands Trust holds these easements.

xxxv NC Arch Ch 1

xxxvi The early 19th century log Smith House is located along ---- road. It appears that the house was originally a hall-and-parlor design, and then converted to a central hall, and then returned to its original configuration. The house is not locally designated.
