

**SURVEY AND RESEARCH REPORT  
ON THE  
RENFROW-LEMMOND HOUSE**



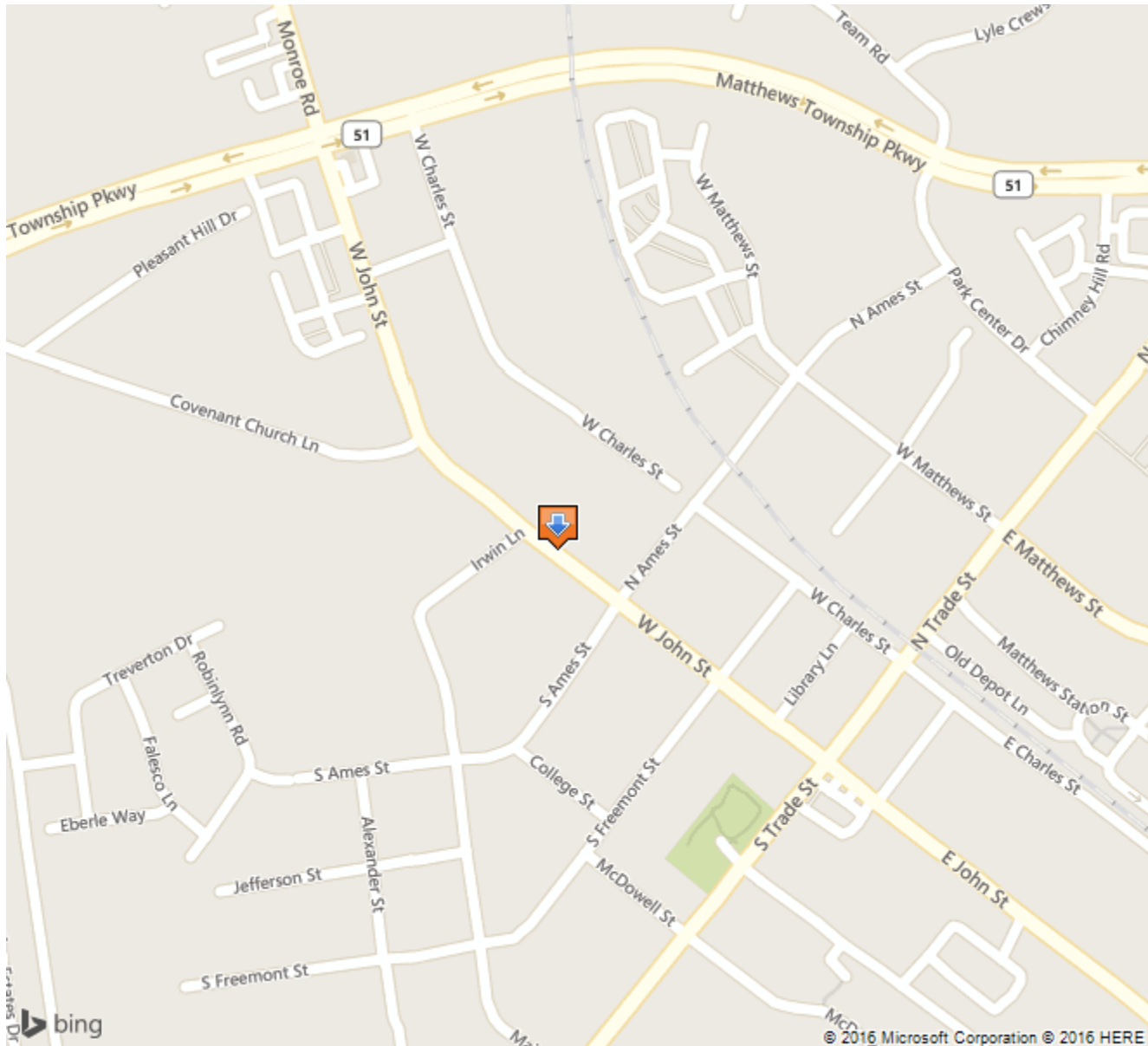
**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Renfrow-Lemmond House is located at 344 West John Street, in Matthews, North Carolina.

**2. Name and address of the present owner of the property:**

**Jimaana Properties  
344 West John Street  
Matthews, N.C., 28105**

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

**4. Maps depicting the location of the property:** This report contains a map depicting the location of the property.



**5. Current deed book and tax parcel information for the property:**

The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 19325138. The most recent deed reference to this property is [17331-726](#), recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book

**6. A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property by Paula Stathakis.

**7. A brief architectural and physical description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural description of the property by Stewart Gray.

**8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets criteria for designation set forth in N. C. G. S. 160A-400.5:**

**a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Renfrow-Lemmond House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:**

**1) The Renfrow-Lemmond House is a prominent reminder of the original residential nature of West John Street, and is important in understanding the historical character of the Town of Matthews.**

**2) The Renfrow-Lemmond House is a well preserved example of a two-story Craftsman Style house, with a high degree of interior and exterior historical integrity.**

**3) The Renfrow-Lemmond House is associated with two prominent families. Both the Renfrows and the Lemmonds played a major role in the economic development of Matthews during the 20th Century.**

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the physical and architectural description which is included in this report demonstrates that the Renfrow-Lemmond House in Matthews, N.C. meets this criterion.**

**9. Ad Valorem tax appraisal: The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes designated as "historic landmark."**

**Date of preparation of this report: September 2005**

**Prepared by: Stewart Gray**

### **Historical Context Statement for the Renfrow-Lemmond House**

**The Renfrow-Lemmond House was built c. 1924 by John Renfrow, a son of prominent Matthews businessman and farmer T.J. "Captain" Renfrow. Captain Renfrow, as he was**

popularly known, was the proprietor of Renfrow's Hardware and General Store [188 N. Trade St.] and over the course of his career also owned four cotton gins and an automobile dealership. Captain Renfrow moved to Matthews in the late nineteenth century, just at the time that the small town was transformed from an isolated farming village to a railroad hamlet.

The economic fortunes of Matthews rested on the construction of a segment of the Central Carolina Railroad. The town was originally and informally known as Stumptown, because of the number of tree stumps left from its earliest construction projects. Stumptown acquired a Post Office in 1825 and the town named changed its name to Fullwood after the first postmaster John M. Fullwood. The area was settled by small farmers who raised cotton, corn and subsistence crops. Fullwood was a stagecoach stop between Monroe and Charlotte.<sup>[1]</sup>

The tenor of the town changed irrevocably in 1874 with the construction of a rail line and a stop for the Central Carolina Railroad, placing Fullwood on the line between Wilmington and Tennessee. Matthews grew to the extent that it received its town charter in March 1879. The 1880 census shows the town had grown to 91 residents.<sup>[2]</sup> Railroad officials decided to rename the stop in honor of Watson Matthews, director of the Central Carolina Railroad. The first train blasted through Matthews on December 15, 1874. By the 1920s, thirteen trains passed through Matthews every day. The water tank for the locomotives was located in an area that came to be known as Tank Town. Now known as Crestdale, the area is historically home to the Matthews's African American population.<sup>[3]</sup>

The railroad connected Matthews with the outside world and brought new employment opportunities to local citizens, both black and white. The railroad offered unique prospects to the local African American population who were traditionally relegated to field labor and domestic service. The railroad offered steady employment, cash wages, housing, and later, insurance benefits.<sup>[4]</sup>

Railroads breathe new life into sleepy crossroads communities, and subsequent to the arrival of the Central Carolina, the commercial development of the town began apace. The railroad provided farmers with the means to send commodities to market and local entrepreneurs the means to bring in merchandise and produce from other areas. A small commercial district developed near the railroad tracks by 1880. In that year, the town's first general store, McLaughlin and Barrnette, was built on Trade Street. Within four years, six other stores and a druggist joined them on commercial row. The 1889 Charlotte City Directory ran an advertisement inviting investors to consider Matthews where land was cheap and prospects just beginning. By 1900, T.J. "Captain" Renfrow started his general merchandise business and in 1906, he built the town's cotton gin behind his store.

Captain Renfrow moved to Matthews from Davidson County, North Carolina and was employed at the Rea Gold Mine as Captain of Operations and after the mine closed this honorary title became part of his name. He acquired the mine property and became a farmer, later branching into the general merchandise and cotton ginning businesses. He also served in the North Carolina State Legislature for six years and received an

appointment as the Chairman of the North Carolina Prison Board and served for forty years on the Matthews School Board. His prominence in the town is further illustrated by streets named for two of his sons. Dow Street was named for his son McDowell and John Street for his son John.<sup>[5]</sup>

In 1919, Captain Renfrow and his sons John and Dow purchased the Williams Hotel Building, which was located on Trade Street next door to the Livery Stable, where they opened a Ford Dealership. In 1921 they sold the business to Oscar Benton, whose faded painted sign, Benton Motor Company, is still faintly visible on the building.<sup>[6]</sup> The Renfrows kept the General Store and John Renfrow entered into public service as the Register of Deeds for Mecklenburg County. He was elected to this position thirteen times between 1922 and 1960.<sup>[7]</sup>

It was shortly after the sale of the Ford dealership that John Renfrow built his two story bungalow style house on John Street. According to the town map of 1923, John Renfrow owned several parcels and houses on John Street.<sup>[8]</sup> This bungalow style house was unusual for the styles prevalent on John Street, which were mostly late nineteenth century Victorian and vernacular designs, but the bungalow was already prevalent as the preferred style of the middle class in Mecklenburg County. Many examples of this style currently exist in the county.

Renfrow built the house for his wife and six children. His daughter Katherine Renfrow Erwin recalls moving into the house when she was five years old. The large family had a live in maid, Flossie Pierce, who helped with the day to day chores and the cooking, and once a week, a laundress came to take care of the washing. Mrs. Erwin's childhood memories of growing up pre-World War II Matthews recall an idyllic place and time. "You knew everybody," she recalls, "and you weren't afraid to go out at night. We never locked our doors. You could sit around the drug store all afternoon and talk to people. All your family lived nearby and there were always children to play with." An exciting event for the town's children was to watch the delivery of horses to the livery stable. The horses were brought by train and it was very entertaining to watch as they were unloaded from the train. If Matthews wasn't interesting enough, a quarter would buy train fare to Charlotte, and if you didn't want to ride the train, you could catch the bus at the drugstore.<sup>[9]</sup>

In spite of Katherine Renfrow Erwin's happy memories, the Depression took its toll on the Renfrow family. John Renfrow lost the house because he could not pay the taxes on it. It was purchased in 1940 by C.B. Howard from the Home Owners Loan Corporation, subject to the payment of 1940 taxes, for \$5500.<sup>[10]</sup> The house was sold again in 1942 to S.R. "Rea" Lemmond and his wife Kathryn for \$6250.<sup>[11]</sup>

The fortunes of Rea Lemmond and John Renfrow intersected twice; through Lemmond's acquisition of the Renfrow residence on John Street and in 1933 with Lemmond's purchase of Oscar Benton's automobile dealership, a business that formerly belonged to John Renfrow. Oscar Benton, on the verge of foreclosure, sold his dealership and building to Rea Lemmond and his brother Pars. The Lemmond brothers renamed the building the Lemmond Building and in addition to the Ford dealership also had a filling



station and garage in the building. The Lemmond Garage was a popular gathering place in the 1940s, where a man could enjoy a beer and discuss the problems of the world.<sup>[12]</sup>

In 1954, Rea Lemmond built a “modern service station” on the corner of John and Trade Streets, the present location of the Exxon Service Station. Thanks to Lemmond’s tenure in the auto trade, he was able to help the fledgling Matthews-Morningstar Volunteer Fire Department [chartered 1953] acquire its first serious firefighting vehicle. Lemmond gave the Fire Department an oil tanker that had been converted to carry water. The fire department added a front mount pump to complete the conversion. This vehicle replaced the two wheel hose cart that was the Fire Department’s original piece of fire fighting equipment.<sup>[13]</sup>

The Renfrow-Lemmond House remained in the possession of the heirs of Rea and Kathryn Lemmond until 2004 when it was purchased by Jimaana Properties.

### **Architectural Description of the Renfrow-Lemmond House**



Built in 1924, the Renfrow-Lemmond House holds a prominent position in the town of Matthew as one of the best preserved, substantial homes along West John Street. West John Street was historically a residential street, containing the homes of many of the town’s most prominent families. Currently the road carries a great deal of traffic and has experienced some change in character, becoming more commercial in nature. Thus, the preservation of the residential character of West John Street is important to the integrity of historical nature of Matthews.

The two-story, side-gabled house faces south, and is situated on a half-acre lot. The house features a veneer of wire-cut brick over frame construction. A partial wrap-

around porch shelters the first story of the façade and much of the east elevation. Five tapered wooden posts, resting on tall wire-cut brick piers, support the hipped/shed porch roof. Brick curtain walls connect the piers and support the wooden porch floor. Brick steps with stepped and capped cheek walls are centered on the two-story-block of the house, with the cheek walls built against the brick piers that frame the front entrance. A gable in the porch roof above the steps features timber brackets, and exposed tongue-and-groove roof decking. The original porch floor has been replaced with a new tongue-and-groove floor. The original beaded-board ceiling and the tapered posts are trimmed with original moulding. The original front door features a typical Craftsman light (glass pane) pattern, with one large central light bordered with eight lights on the perimeter. The façade is also pierced by four window openings. On the second story the openings are filled by paired Craftsman-Style eight-over-one double-hung windows. The front door is bordered by paired windows to the east, and narrow triple-ganged windows of the same design to the west. While the four-square form of the house dictates a rough symmetry in the fenestration, the Craftsman Style allows for asymmetrical elements such as the partial wrap-around porch and a variety in window sizes.



The wrap-around porch extends partially across the east elevation. The house's side entrance is treated much in the same way as the front entrance, with a small gable over the short flight of brick steps. A nine-light door, like that found on the façade, pierces the side elevation and is bordered by a single window to the north, and paired sash to the south. To the north of the porch a wire-cut brick, exterior, shouldered chimney protrudes only slightly from the wall. Paired double-hungs and a single double-hung window pierce the east elevation on the second story, and are protected by a deep eave supported by brackets that have been covered with vinyl. Three small, ganged, double-hungs are set high in the gable, illuminating the attic.

The architectural features found on the east elevation demonstrate that the Renfroe-Lemmond house is oriented both to the street and to the driveway located to the east of the house. This dual orientation reflects the growing importance of the automobile in 20<sup>th</sup>-century domestic architecture.

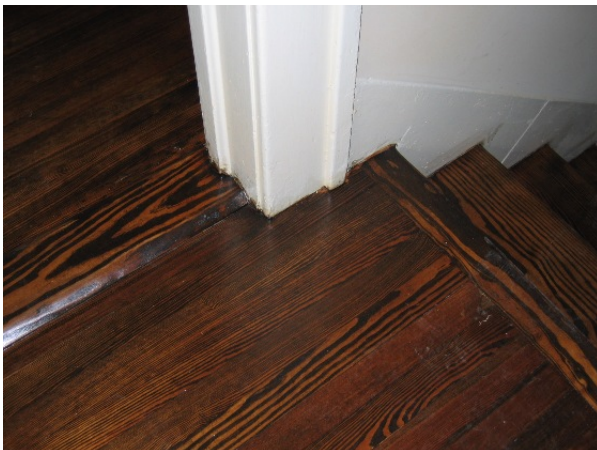


In contrast to the east elevation, the west elevation exhibits a more private nature. Short eight-over-one windows border the shallow exterior chimney located near the façade. Near the center of the elevation are ganged double-hungs that illuminate the interior rooms. Short double hungs near the rear elevation and in the small one-story rear wing indicate the location of bathrooms and the kitchen.





The rear addition features a full width hipped roof that shelters both the shallow one-story kitchen and a rear porch. Until recently, the porch had been enclosed, but is now supported by simple square posts. A doorway leads from the porch into the principal block of the house. A second doorway lead into the kitchen but was bricked in, and now contains a window. A short double-hung pierces the rear wall of the kitchen. The second story features two single eight-over-one windows as well as triple double-hungs located adjacent to the east elevation.





The good condition and high level of integrity found on the exterior of the Renfrow-Lemmond House is also found in the home's interior. Narrow-strip wood floors are found throughout the house, with oak in the formal front rooms, and pine narrow-strip flooring in most of the other rooms. This use of pine in narrow-strip flooring is rare. Pine was commonly used as flooring during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but was typically milled into wider planks. The fireplace in the front room is surrounded by a corbelled brick mantle that supports a thick shelf. With the exception of a narrow four-light panel door that leads into the attic, the interior features two-panel doors, typical of the Craftsman Style. The original moulded stairway handrail is supported by simple square pickets and square newels. Tall baseboards topped with a moulded cap are found throughout the house. Significant changes to the interior are limited to the bathrooms which feature new tile floors and the kitchen which has been repeatedly remodeled.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Paula Hartill Lester, *Discover Matthews: From Cotton to Corporate*, Charlotte: Herff Jones Publishing Co., 2000, pp. 5-7.

<sup>[2]</sup> Ibid, pp. 7, 9-13.

<sup>[3]</sup> Ibid, pp. 7, 55-56.

<sup>[4]</sup> Survey of African American Billings and Sites in Mecklenburg County, Contextual Essay, Paula Stathakis and Stewart Gray, 2002.

<sup>[5]</sup> Lester, *Discover Matthews*, p. 13; Interview with Paula Hartill Lester.

<sup>[6]</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>[7]</sup> Interview with Katherine Renfrow Erwin.

<sup>[8]</sup> Map in Lester's *Discover Matthews*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>[9]</sup> Interview, Katherine Renfrow Erwin.

<sup>[10]</sup> Deed 1018-58, July 1, 1940.

<sup>[11]</sup> Deed 1070-263, May 16, 1942.

<sup>[12]</sup> Lester, *Discover Matthews*, p. 26.

<sup>[13]</sup> *Ibid*, p. 53.