

REPRESENTATIVE SHOTGUN HOUSES



Shotgun house en route to its new location



Shotgun houses at their new location behind the Old Little Rock AME Zion Church

[Click here for a 1986 article on the Shotgun Houses](#)

This report was written on May 8, 1985

1. Name and location of the property: Three houses constitute the property known as the Representative Shotgun Houses. The houses are located at 153 West Bland Street, 155 West Bland Street, and 810 East Ninth Street, in Charlotte, N.C.

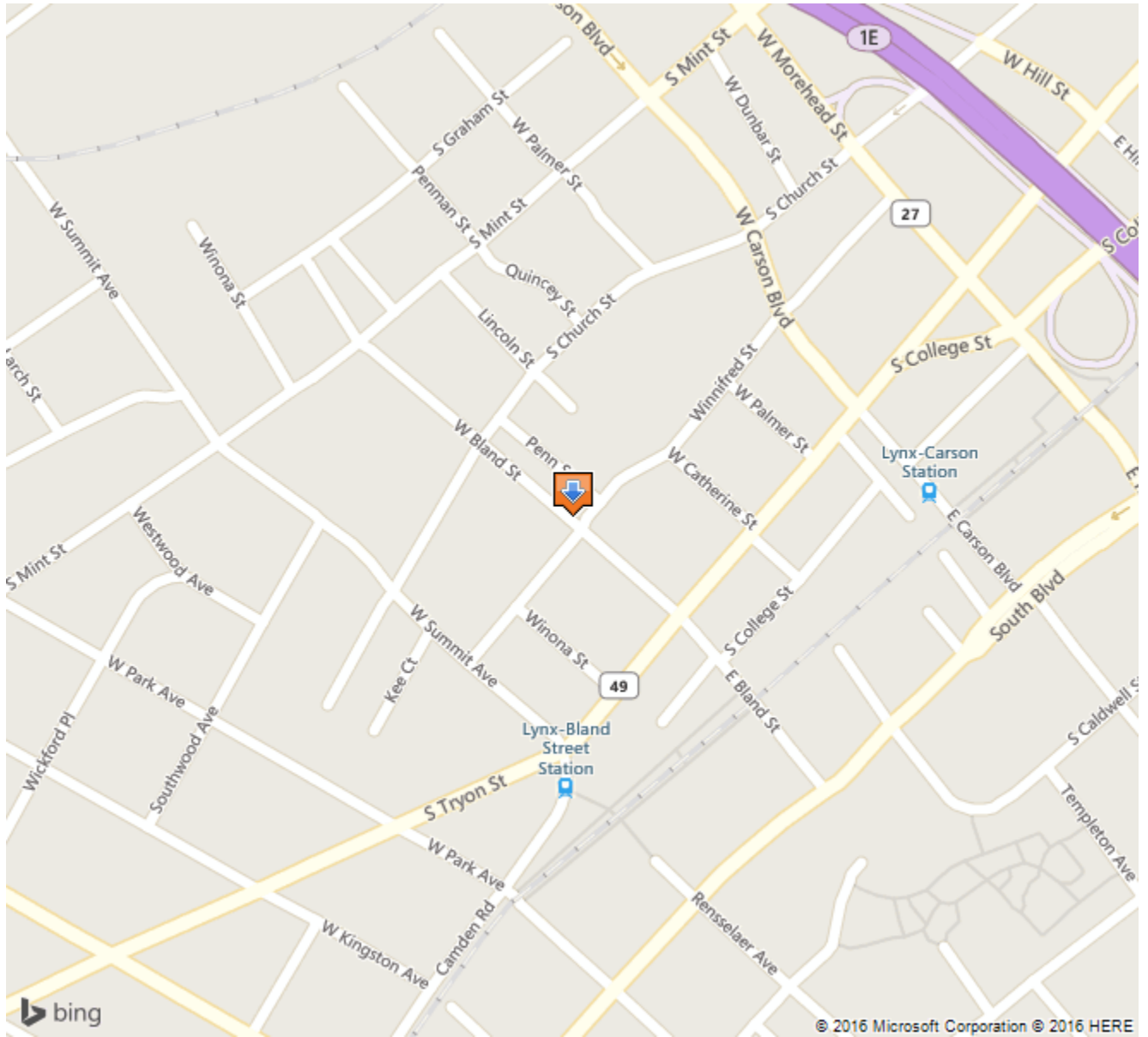
2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property: The owner of all three houses is:

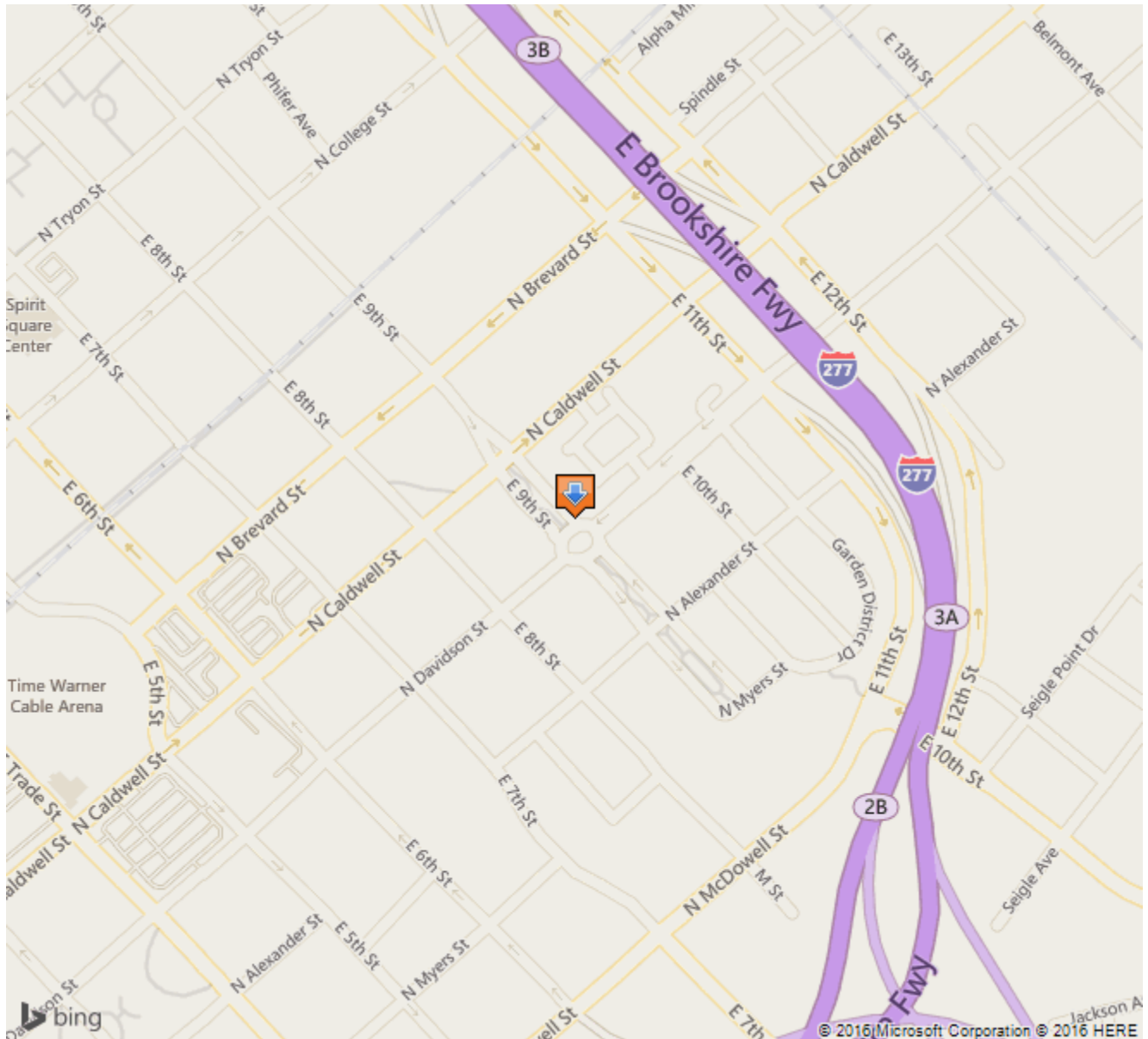
City of Charlotte
600 E. Trade St.
Charlotte, N.C., 28202

Telephone: 704/336-2241

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 two maps that depict the locations of the property.





5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to the houses at 153 and 155 W. Bland St. is recorded in Deed Book 4114, Page 111. The Tax Parcel Number for these houses is 073-091-01. The most recent deed to the house at 810 E. Ninth St. is recorded in Deed Book 3802, Page 649. The Tax Parcel Number for this house is 080-102-01.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. William H. Huffman.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Mr. Thomas W. Hanchett.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-399.4:

a. Special significance in terms of its history architecture and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Representative Shotgun Houses does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the three shotgun houses are the best-preserved examples in or near the center city of a type of house style which was once common in Charlotte; 2) the so-called "shotgun" house is an important component of Afro-American culture, both in Charlotte and throughout the Southern United States; and 3) the so-called "shotgun house" is a building form which occupies an important place in the architectural history of Charlotte.

b. 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 the Representative Shotgun Houses 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 "historic property." The current appraised value of the 3.90 acre tract, of which the house at 810 East Ninth St. is a small part, is \$219,570. The current appraised value of the house itself is \$4,610. The land is zoned B2. The current appraised value of the 3.89 acre tract, of which the houses at 153 and 155 W. Bland St., are a small part, is \$151,430. The current appraised value of the houses is \$2,302. The land is zoned I2.

Date of Preparation of this Report: May 8, 1985

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
1225 S. Caldwell St.
Charlotte, N.C., 28203

Telephone: 704/376-9115

Architectural Description

By Thomas W. Hanchett

Too often our view of architecture is focused solely on the unique monumental structures designed in large part to display the wealth and power of the elite ... while the greatest part of the built environment --the houses that most people live in -- goes unnoticed.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the "shotgun" house was the most common type found in the black neighborhoods of Charlotte, North Carolina. Rows and rows of these narrow dwellings could be found squeezed together along the sidestreets and alleys of such black areas as Brooklyn, Dulstown, [First Ward](#), and [Third Ward](#). Most were low and moderate income units rented by the week by absentee landlords. A handful were also found in white working-class neighborhoods, for instance along Belmont Avenue in [Belmont-Villa Heights](#), or on Thirty-fourth Street in the [North Charlotte](#) mill village.

In the Urban Renewal era of the 1960s and 1970s, destruction of Charlotte's shotgun housing was seen as a proud goal. Today fewer than three dozen are left scattered throughout the city. It is important to save examples of this once-common housetype for posterity. Not only will it demonstrate the environment in which many of today's black leaders were raised, but it will also serve as a reminder of an important part of this region's folk heritage. Much as the log cabin is a link to our European roots, the shotgun housetype represents a link to America's African roots.

For decades Americans have casually speculated on the reasons for the shotgun house's unusual form. It is a long, narrow one-story dwelling with a front porch, and the end of its [gable roof](#) faces the street. Its most important characteristic is its hall-less plan; rooms are lined up one-behind-the-other inside, so that the visitor must move through each room in turn to arrive at the last. It is said that the name "shotgun" comes from the fact that one could open the front door and shoot a gun through all the rooms and out the back door without hitting a wall, but in reality this is seldom true, for interior doorways usually do not line up. Most casual observers have guessed that the house was developed to fit narrow urban lots, but the same form is also commonly found on rural tenant farms.

In the 1970s, folklorist and social historian John Michael Vlach undertook the first serious study of the shotgun housetype. He found it was seldom found outside the South, and that the greatest concentration and earliest examples were in the vicinity of the port city of New Orleans. From there he traced the form back to Haiti, where he believes it had originated during the 1700s. The porch and gable-end door came from native Haitian Indian tradition, and the wood construction was borrowed from French colonists. But the basic hall-less plan, square rooms, and rectangular exterior came from western African slaves, specifically Yoruba tribesmen. In fact, the very name "shotgun" may well be a corruption of the Yoruba word "to-gun," meaning "place of assembly." Today Haitian blacks still build thatched-roofed "cailles," which, except for their primitive building materials, look exactly like urban American shotgun houses.

810 EAST NINTH STREET:

Due to demolition of most Charlotte examples, it is hard to estimate when the first shotgun houses appeared in Charlotte. Today's earliest surviving specimens are thought to date from the last years of the nineteenth century, some three-quarters of a century after Vlach believes the type was introduced in New Orleans and began to work its way northward.

The house at 810 East Ninth Street dates from the 1890s. This block between North Myers and North McDowell streets was then at the very edge of Charlotte's built-up area, the traditional place for low-income residents in those days. The block is part of First Ward, which for many years had white residents near its East Trade Street and North Tryon Street borders, and a cluster of black residents in its interior blocks. In the late 1800s, a [streetcar](#) began running along Myers Street, and some of the city's wealthiest blacks built handsome two-story residences facing the tracks, as well as the imposing [Little Rock A.M.E. Zion Church](#). By the 1980s virtually all of the upper-class black dwellings had been demolished or moved, and the brick church and this humble shotgun were all that remained in place from the black neighborhood's early days.

The house is a basic two-room shotgun with a gable roof that extends at the front to form a front porch. At the rear a small wing, either original or an addition, contains a kitchen, bath and tiny corner porch. The dwelling rests on separate red-brick foundation piers, as almost all Charlotte houses did before building-codes required completely enclosed foundations. According to a survey made for the City of Charlotte Community Development office, the dwelling is 14.0 feet wide and 38.5 feet deep.

The exterior is sheathed in weatherboards with chamfered cornerboards and extremely simple boxed eaves. There are two brick chimneys, a large one on the ridgeline between the two main rooms, and a smaller and older-looking exterior stack at the rear of the kitchen wing. The tall, narrow window and door openings have wide, plain surrounds. There is a hip roof over the front porch, which is supported by simple square columns. The front door has a six-pane window above three horizontal panels, and may date from the early decades of the twentieth century when such motifs were common in Charlotte.

Inside, the house is carefully finished: this was no shack. The front room is roughly square. It is lit by four windows -- two unusually narrow units on either side of the front door, and one in each side wall. The windows are four-over-four-pane double-hung sash units with wide surrounds that feature an extra band of sill molding at the bottoms. A baseboard with a molded top runs around the room, and is matched by a shallow molded cornice, both of wood. Carefully fitted to the room and covered with decades of paint, these trim pieces appear to have been part of the house for most, if not all, of its existence. Changes have been made to the room over the years, however. An electric light fixture may be seen in the center of the ceiling. The original plaster of the walls and ceiling has been replaced in recent times by wall-board. And the large mantel which dominated the rear wall has been removed by vandals since the house has been vacant.

To the right of the fireplace is the door to the second room. Moving through it, one passes the large chimney stack on the left. This fireplace still has its handsome original mantel. It consists of molded base blocks, beaded and chamfered uprights and a matching cross-piece at the top, with a wide shelf built up of molding. The niche to the right of the chimney stack -- as one faces the mantel -- is enclosed to form a small closet. Its two-panel door is a narrower version of that which connects the first and second rooms. Like the front room, this second room also has a window in each side wall, and a molded baseboard. Plaster has been replaced by wall-board, and there is an electric light fixture in the center of the ceiling.

The rear of the second room is pierced by two doorways into the rear wing. The narrow right-hand doorway opens onto the compact bath: sink and commode only, with no bath tub. The larger central door leads to the kitchen. This square space originally had a sink next to the window along its left wall, and a free-standing stove vented by a stovepipe in its rear wall. All fixtures are now gone. At the right rear corner of the room is the door to the small rear corner porch.

153 AND 155 WEST BLAND STREET:

The earliest map of the outlying areas of Charlotte, Butler and Spratt's *Map of Charlotte Township ... 1892*, shows a cluster of small houses labeled "Blandville" just off South Tryon Street outside the city limits. This area was one of several black villages that grew up in the nineteenth century around the edges of the city. Like First Ward, it became an Urban Renewal target in the 1960s and 1970s, destined to be replaced by warehouses, offices, and industrial buildings. By 1985, 153 and 155 Bland Street were all that remained of the old black neighborhood, and their survival was due largely to the persistence of long-time owner and resident Lula McCullough and her son James. Both shotgun houses date back to the late 1890s.

The street facades of the two dwellings are virtually identical. The front porches of the houses feature balustrades and elegant turned columns. It is probable that both houses were originally identical two-room shotgun houses, lit by kerosene lamps and serviced by outhouse privies in the rear yards. The McCullough family modified both structures as finances permitted, with the major work being done in 1947-1948 by a local lumber company, according to Mrs. McCullough. Today 153 Bland Street has a rear kitchen-bath wing. It has not been possible to gain access to this structure. 155 Bland Street also has a rear wing, plus a side wing that holds a kitchen and bath. The foundations of both houses originally consisted of brick piers, but are now enclosed.

One enters 155 West Bland Street through a front door that is not centered, as with the East Ninth Street house, but rather is off center. Like the Ninth Street dwelling, this house has a molded baseboard in the two front rooms, but there is no cornice molding. Walls are of rough plaster that Mrs. McCullough recalls dates from the 1940s remodeling. The mantel of the front parlor room is an extremely simple composition of dark-stained varnished wood.

Just as in the Ninth Street shotgun, one moves from the parlor to the bedroom of this house through a door located to the right of the fireplace. There is a similarly massive chimney-stack, and a similar closet in the second room. Doors are composed of six horizontal panels.

Two doors in the rear wall of the second room open onto the rear wing. The right door leads to a screened porch which is included within the mass of the wing, rather than added on to it. The left door leads to the plainly-trimmed rear dining room. Mrs. McCullough indicates that this space was originally used as the kitchen, until construction of the new kitchen-bath wing.

The kitchen-bath wing is appended to the left side of the house, beginning at about the middle of the second room and running all the way to the rear of the dwelling. Inside it is clear that it is an addition, because doorways are not as tall as in the remainder of the structure, and because door

and window surrounds are trimmed with narrow molding rather than being left plain. The bath is entered from the bedroom. It has room for a bathtub, commode, and sink, and it is trimmed with a wooden chair-rail. The kitchen is entered from the dining room. It is finished on the walls and ceiling in tongue-and-groove siding. It has a single nine-over-nine-pane window, a sink, a work-table, and a gas stove. One can still see the stove-pipe hole that served the original wood stove. The door from kitchen to dining room was likely salvaged from an earlier structure, because it is a five-panel mortise-and-tenon unit that appears to date from the nineteenth century, and is unlike any other in the house.

Beyond the purely structural aspects of this shotgun house, there are other things that add to the visitor's impression of it as the long-time home of the McCullough family. Furniture is crowded together in the rooms, and much of it is quite old and handsome, the reminders of a long life. Floors are covered with layers of colorfully-patterned linoleum. At the rear of the house a peach tree bears fruit, and Mrs. McCullough is proud that she still plants a vegetable garden each year, a practice she learned from her mother and father. And she still has the kerosene lantern that she used before electricity.

THE FUTURE:

City policy dictates that the sites of these three houses be cleared. It would be exciting if these three houses could be moved to a new site and become part of an exhibit on Charlotte's black history. They might be arranged in a row, as most shotguns in Charlotte were, and left with their various alterations intact to show how residents adapted this once-common form to their own needs. Such an effort would be an important step in celebrating the region's African-American heritage, and in illustrating the history of the common people.

Historical Overview

Dr. William H. Huffman
April, 1985

The shotgun houses at 153 and 155 W. Bland Street were probably built in the late 1890s. They were typical of many of the shotgun-style residences built in parts of the city from the 1890s to the early 1920s. In the early part of the century, one could find them in Charlotte's First, Second and Third Wards, as well as in the northwest suburbs of the city. as a rule, they were built as rental housing for many black residents of the city, but a number of them later became owner-occupied.

The W. Bland Street houses were built by Charles E. McClure, who bought the property in 1896, and very likely had the shotgun houses constructed not too long afterwards. ¹ McClure and his

wife Rosa lived next door to the west in a large one-story house at the corner of W. Bland and what was Church Street (Church Street has been relocated and the McClure house is no longer extant.)² At the time he bought the property, Charles McClure was an engineer with the Charlotte Oil and Fertilizer Co., a cotton oil processing plant, which was located on South Boulevard near Bland Street.³ By the 1920s, there were numerous shotgun houses built in that part of Third Ward, particularly along the west side of Church Street and along Winnifred Street (runs parallel with Church).⁴

Charles McClure died about 1911, and his widow continued to rent the houses for ten more years.⁵ During the Twenties, the houses were sold three times (J. E. and Emma Wilson, 1921; S. B., Jr. and Mildred Tanner, 1925; and J. C. and Mamie Batten, 1927).⁶ As happened with so many other Charlotte properties during the Depression, the site was acquired by the Mechanics Perpetual Building and Loan in a mortgage foreclosure in 1934.⁷ Six years later, Mechanics sold it to the Thomas F. Kerr Co., which rented the houses for forty years, from 1940 to 1980, when the property was acquired by the City of Charlotte.⁸

A longtime resident of 155 W. Bland Street, Lula McCullough, recalls that when she and her husband, C. Henry McCullough (d. 1968), first moved there (about the mid-1930s), the house was "only a hull." The toilet was an outdoor privy in the back, and the only source of water was from a single spigot, also out back. After dark, light was provided by kerosene lamps. Mrs. McCullough said that she and her husband had much of the house repaired to make it livable, and over the years indoor plumbing and electricity were put in.⁹

The shotgun house at 810 E. 9th Street in First Ward, was also built in the 1890s, sometime between 1891 and 1897. Robert Gibbon, a physician with offices on N. Tryon Street, bought a large plot of ground fronting E. 9th in 1891, and when he sold a portion of the then subdivided land six years later, the legal description is followed by: "whereon is situate two tenants houses." (Now 808 and 810 E. 9th Street).¹⁰ Both houses were on a single plot, and they went through a series of owners. From 1912 to 1925, they were owned by George and Emma Clement, and in the latter year were bought by Belle Cathey, who owned them until her death in 1947.¹¹ They passed by inheritance to her sister, Zenobia Hoagland, who rented the property to others from 1951 to 1960, when she herself moved into the smaller of the two houses, the shotgun at 810 E. 9th. Her children, Gordon and Otelia Hoagland moved into the house in 1968 after Zenobia's death, and acquired an undivided title to it from their brother, Sandy Hoagland, in 1975. The City of Charlotte acquired the property in 1982.¹²

Unlike the houses on Bland Street and in other places in the city, the shotgun house at 810 E. 9th was not part of a row of similar houses. With its companion at 808 E. 9th, which is a larger bungalow-style house, it stood alone in a block that was otherwise filled out, in that entire square, with much larger one and two-story middle-class dwellings.¹³ It first appears in the Charlotte City Directory in 1897/98 as the residence of Jasper Tate, who was the only black resident listed on 9th Street. Later directories confirm that in First Ward, black and white residents were intermingled until about the last four decades and that for a number of years, the two houses on E. 9th were the only ones with black residents on that street.¹⁴ Thus this shotgun house was unusual because of its singular character.

The few remaining shotgun houses in the city are historically important because of both the unique character of their design and the distinct role they have played in the lives of many black residents of Charlotte. Not only did many leading citizens of the city and elsewhere spend part or all of their early lives in a shotgun house, they were the homes of some three or four generations of black Charlotteans, and thereby became a significant part of the city's history.

NOTES

¹Deed Book 116, p. 15, 18 Nov. 1896.

² Charlotte City Directories, various dates.

³ Ibid., 1896/7, p. 236; 1900, p. 382.

⁴ Sanborn Insurance Map, 1929, p. 53.

⁵ Mecklenburg County Estates, Record of Accounts, Book 14, p. 277; Charlotte City Directories, 1911-1921; Deed Book 450, p. 75, 1 June 1921.

⁶ Deed Books 585, p. 385, 15 May 1925; 657, p. 236, 1 Aug. 1927.

⁷ Deed Book 853, p. 132, 14 Aug. 1934.

⁸ Deed Books 995, p. 269, 15 Apr. 1940; 4281, p. 663, 20 Feb. 1980.

⁹ Interview with Lula McCullough, Charlotte, NC, 23 April 1985.

¹⁰ Deed Books 81, p. 326, 27 Oct. 1891; 121, p. 128, 24 Aug. 1897.

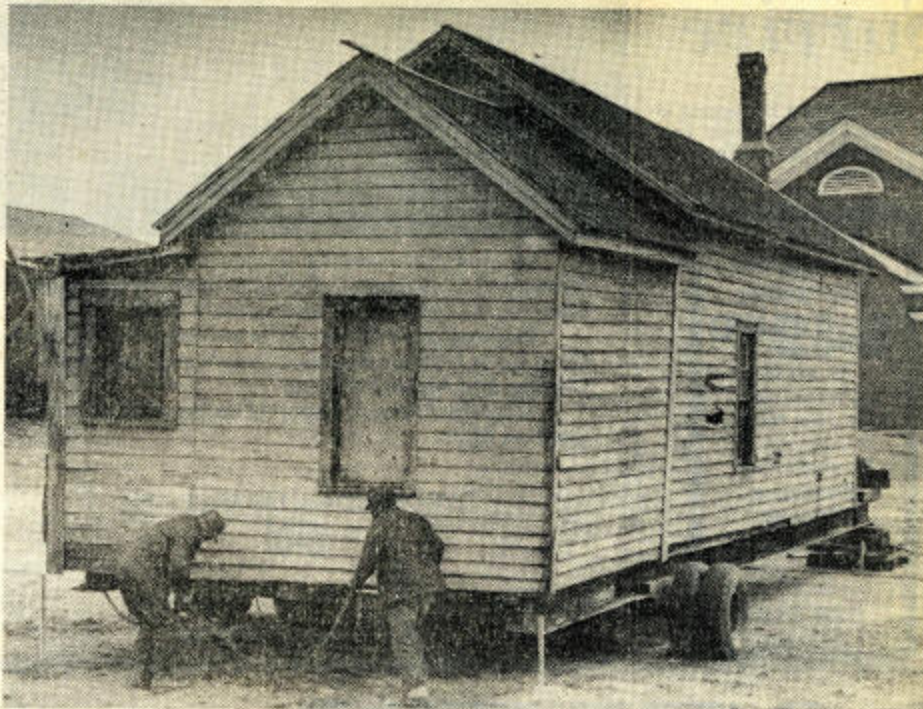
¹¹ Deed Books 352, p. 312, 29 Feb. 1916; 598, p. 23, 1 Aug. 1925; Meck. Co. Estates, Special Proceedings, File No. 75-SP-1408, film 82-31-1061.

¹² Special Proceedings, cited above; Deed Book 4524, p. 578, 6 April 1982.

¹³ Sanborn Insurance Map, 1911, p. 55.

¹⁴ Charlotte City Directory, 1897/98, p. 99, and subsequent issues.

"Shotgun" House, Charlotte Observer January 28, 1986



Staff Photo By DIEDRA LAIRD

Emory Stephens (left) and Willie Harrell move a house Monday

2 Humble 'Shotgun' Houses Moving Into Cultural Spotlight

By WENDY McBANE
Staff Writer

A tiny frame house moved down Charlotte streets to the Afro-American Culture Center Monday, completing another step in its transition from eyesore to landmark.

The three-room structure is one of two "shotgun" houses recently designated historic properties by the Charlotte City Council. They are among the last examples here of a style of home that once dotted Charlotte and the South.

The houses get the name, some say, because a gunshot fired through the front door could go straight through the house and out the back door without hitting any walls.

Once prevalent in Charlotte's Second and Third Wards, most of the houses have been torn down. Only two, at 153 and 155 W. Bland St., remained of an entire neighborhood following an urban

renewal push in the late 1970s. Built in the late 1890s, they were part of a group of rental properties originally named Blandville and located just southwest of downtown.

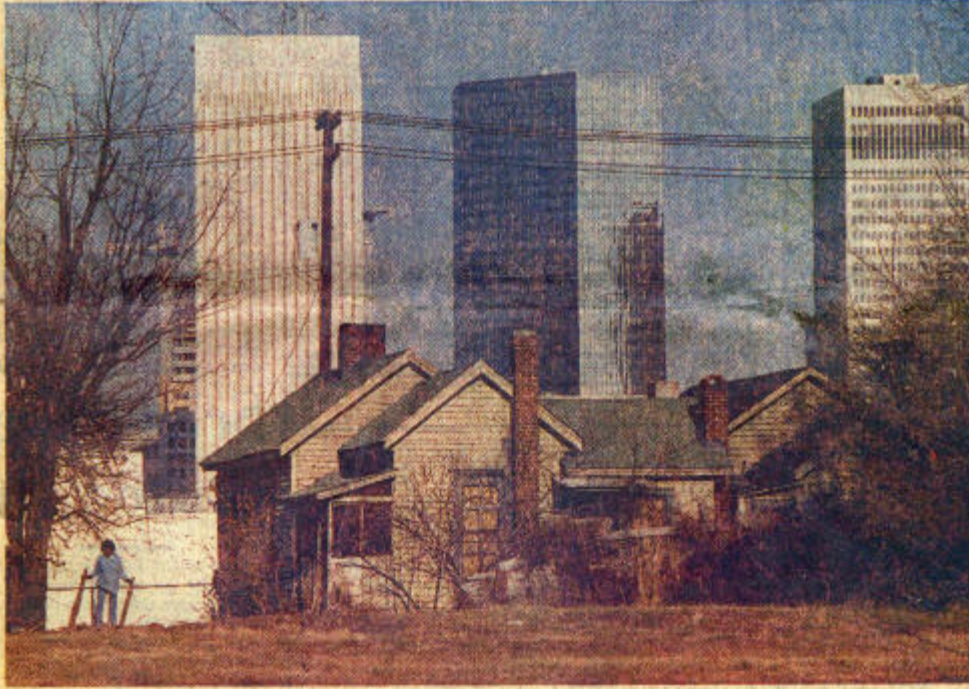
When they're gone, only a line of trees that once shaded people's backyards will show that Blandville ever existed.

"(The neighborhood) was very much a boiling pot of humanity," says Dan Morrill, director of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission. "It was very congested. Lot of people in the streets, lot of people on front porches, lot of people in front yards, lots of clothes hanging on clotheslines."

The second house will be moved to the new site at 110 E. 7th St. today. They will sit behind the old Little Rock AME Zion Church building, which will soon become the culture center's new home.

The center plans to restore one of the houses as a museum and use the second for storage.

The Last Shotgun Houses



Staff Photo By DON STURKEY

One of downtown Charlotte's last shotgun houses awaits its date with a moving truck Monday for a trip to the Afro-American Cultural Center. The three-room structure is one of two shotgun houses recently designated historic properties by the Charlotte City Council. Story on Page 8C.



Staff Photo By TOM FRANKLIN

West Bland Street shotgun houses being readied for moving

Charlotte Has Historic Treasure In These Small Frame Houses

Every building, even the most humble, has a story to tell and lessons to teach, if you're willing to listen.

Her name was Lula McCullough; and for more than 50 years she lived in the little frame house, built about 1896 by Charles E. McClure, at 155 W. Bland St., named for Dr. M. A. Bland, one of Edward Dilworth Latta's partners in



Dan Morrill

the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company, developers of Dilworth. When Lula moved in, about 1935, the house had no electricity.

Kerosene lamps were the sole providers of light, and the only source of water was a single outdoor spigot. Where was the bathroom? In a shack out back, of course. Lula and her husband, C. Henry McCullough, were resourceful and energetic folks. Over the years they were able to persuade their landlords to install electricity and indoor plumbing. Henry crawled over and under, in and out, always looking for a leak to plug or a hole to fill in. But it was Lula who labored in the yard, raising beautiful flowers, especially wisteria and roses, transforming her tiny yard into a showcase of beauty, her sensitive, black fingers deftly moving through red and lavender, sweat beading on her delicate forehead.

Looking Back

Lula's house was to be moved today; the one next door was moved Monday. The emergency properties fund of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission is paying \$5,000 to haul them to the Afro American Cultural Center, formerly the Old Little Rock AME Zion Church, where they will be placed in the backyard and fixed up. The McCulloughs will not be able to see this dramatic event. Henry died in 1968. Lula died late last year, about two months after she moved off West Bland Street.

Some might think that the houses are ugly. Some might think that they remind us of a time best forgotten. There's no denying that Lula and Henry lived through a period of bitter and ravaging discrimination, but they managed nonetheless to make their little dwelling a home. The nobility and dignity which Lula and Henry McCullough achieved in the face of such enormous obstacles make the little house at 155 W. Bland St., one of my most cherished historic landmarks in Charlotte. Plant roses and wisteria! Plug up leaks and fill in holes! Lula and Henry McCullough remind us of thousands of black Charlotteans who endured difficult times. We need to honor our black heritage.

The writer is executive director of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission.

There wasn't no light to go out by... A lot of people they would come up on your porch... I was scared to go out... I finally got me a dog and named Fido and I put him on the porch and he didn't allow nobody back there.]]

I didn't go through the street begging for nary nickel or nary dime. I worked. I worked at Lance Packing Co. and I worked at U.S. Rubber Co. And I cut sand at Charlotte Pipe And Foundry for two years.]]

... I work from one in the day until two at night, and they say I was too much like a man to be woman. Cuttin' sand at Charlotte Pipe Foundry. But I raised my children; everyone of 'em got learning... and I thank God for being so good to me.]]



Huffman

The comments quoted above are excerpts from an April, 1985 interview with Lula McCullough by Dr. Bill Huffman, a history professor at Sacred Heart College and administrator of the emergency properties fund of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission. The city of Charlotte provided the money for the fund, which is paying \$5,000 to move the two shotgun houses, so called supposedly because if you fired a gun through the front door, the blast would go through every room and out the back door.