

Survey and Research Report

Sydenham B. Alexander, Jr. House

250 Cherokee Road
Charlotte, North Carolina
28207

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission
2007



1. Name and location of the property. The property known as the **Sydenham B. Alexander, Jr. House** is located 250 Cherokee Road, in Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner of the properties.
The owners of the property are:

Alexander and Paige Waugh
250 Cherokee Road
Charlotte, North Carolina 28207
Telephone: (704) 996-0188

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 maps which depict the location of the property.

5. Current deed book references to the properties. The most recent reference to Tax Parcel Number 155-06-261 is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 7481 at page 852.

6. A brief architectural description of the property. This report contains brief architectural description of the property prepared by Frances P. Alexander and Richard L. Mattson.

7. A brief historical sketch of the property. This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Richard L. Mattson and Frances P. Alexander.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the properties meet criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-400.5.

a. Special significance in terms of history, architecture, and cultural importance. The Commission judges that the property known as the Sydenham B. Alexander, Jr. House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Alexander House, erected in 1929, is exemplary of the Georgian Revival style built in the Eastover neighborhood and other well-to-do neighborhoods in Charlotte between the 1920s and World War II; 2) the Alexander House is among the earliest houses in Eastover, the first exclusive automobile-oriented subdivision in Charlotte.

b. integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association. The Commission contends that the architectural description by Richard L. Mattson and Frances P. Alexander included in this report demonstrates that the Sydenham B. Alexander, Jr. House 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 properties which become designated historic landmarks. The current appraised value of the improvements to Tax Parcel Number 155-06-61 is \$781,000. The current appraised value of the land associated with Tax Parcel 155-06-261 is \$1,000,000. The total appraised value of Tax Parcel 155-062-61 is \$1,781,000. The property is zoned R100.

Date of Preparation of this Report.

25 November 2007

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Sydenham B. Alexander, Jr. House

Statement of Significance

Constructed on Cherokee Road in exclusive Eastover, the 1929 Sydenham B. Alexander, Jr. House ranks among the first and finest residences in this neighborhood, the first automobile subdivision in Charlotte. In its setting, scale, and sophisticated architecture, the Alexander House exemplifies the large, Georgian Revival residences on spacious lots that characterized some of the earliest platted sections of Eastover. The house remains well-preserved, and the setting of the house on a large, formally landscaped parcel continues to illustrate wealthy suburban development in the early twentieth century. Grand, Georgian-style houses continue exist along Cherokee Road. However, as one of the city's most desirable neighborhoods, Eastover's historic houses are being torn down for new construction at an alarming rate. Consequently, intact examples of the earliest residences, executed by the city's most important architects of the period, are now increasingly rare.

Physical Description

The Sydenham B. Alexander, Jr. House is situated in the Eastover neighborhood of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Eastover is located on the east side of Providence Road, a major artery leading southeast from the center city. The Alexander House occupies an approximately one acre site on the west side of Cherokee Road, a curvilinear street that has access to Providence Road at either end. The Alexander House is sited in the center of the large parcel that slopes gently down to Cherokee Road. The driveway is located on the south side of the property. The house faces onto a lawn bisected by a brick walkway. Both the front and rear yards contain mature plantings, including oak trees and boxwoods. In addition to the house, there is a former garage/servant's quarters (now a pool house), and a modern swimming pool in the backyard.

The Sydenham B. Alexander, Jr. House is an excellent example of formal Georgian-style domestic architecture of this period. The house is two-and-a-half stories tall with a red-brick veneer laid in a common bond. The original massing survives substantially unchanged, consisting of a side-gable slate roof over the main block, and two-story wings on the north and south elevations. A modillion cornice defines the roofline. Unless otherwise noted, windows have six-over-six sash, and cast-stone sills and lintels with decorative keystones. Matching cast-stone lintels with keystones also cap the original French doors on the side and rear elevations. The house has tall, brick chimney stacks, including an exterior chimney on the south gable end embellished with cast-stone trim in the shoulder.

The balanced, five-bay façade features a center entry bay with a curved classical portico. This portico has Doric columns, a modillion cornice, and a decorative iron railing, repeated in the portico's roof balustrade. A fanlight tops the doorway, which is flanked by small, double-hung, sash windows. The louvered outside door and six-panel main door are both original. The first story includes four French doors with decorative iron railings that open into the two principal front rooms. On the second story, a striking Palladian-inspired window consisting of four casements topped by a central lunette fills the center bay. Allowing natural light into the upper half story are two gabled dormers with pilasters, lunettes, and replacement eight-over-eight windows. There are two small attic windows with replacement sash in each of the two gable ends. On the south side, these windows also have replacement cast-stone sills and lintels with keystones, while the sills and lintels on the north attic windows are original.

The two-story wings on the north and south sides have copper parapets. The original, recessed, first-story porch on the south side has arched openings, slender, wooden porch posts, and a slate floor. The original

sleeping porch on the second story has replacement one-over-one window sash, though the transoms are original. The principal exterior modifications include the one-story kitchen addition with a slate roof and modillion cornice on the north elevation, a new kitchen window in the original body of the house, and a rear French doorway. These changes are executed in designs and materials that are sympathetic to the original and do not detract from the architectural integrity of the house.

The interior of the house has the original, symmetrical center-hall plan and Georgian Revival finish. There are plaster walls and ceilings, hardwood floors, paneled doors, and molded window and door surrounds throughout. The principal floor-floor rooms have crown molding. All the mantels, which vary in classical treatment, are intact. For example, the marble mantel in the living room (south front room) includes pilasters with molded caps and a center medallion. There is also a marble mantel in the rear library. The simpler wooden mantel in the upstairs master bedroom has decorative molding along the pilasters, frieze, and shelf. The main stairway in the spacious center hall rises in two flights from the rear of the hall. It has slender iron balusters and a wooden railing that curves gently as it rises to the second floor.

The major changes to the interior occurred in the 1990s, and include the modernization and expansion of the kitchen at the rear of the house, and the remodeling of the attic into bedrooms. A modern rear attic staircase, including wainscoting and a balustrade that echoes the balustrade along the principal stairway, was also installed during the attic renovation.

Bordered by trees and shrubbery, the backyard contains a modern swimming pool and the original garage/servant's quarters, which has been converted to the pool house. Reflecting the style of the main residence, this building has a story-and-a-half, rectangular form with a red-brick veneer, a slate, side-gable roof, and two dormers. The original garage door bays have been replaced with modern French doors, a pergola now extends across the three-bay façade, and the interior has been modernized.



Historical Background

This stately Georgian Revival residence at 250 Cherokee Road was completed in 1929 for local businessman, Sydenham B. Alexander, Jr. and his wife, Mary Watson Robertson Alexander. The Alexanders purchased the parcel from Eastover developer Edward C. Griffith in 1928. Alexander was from

a prominent Charlotte family. His father, Sydenham Sr. (1840-1921), was born at Rosedale plantation near Charlotte. A cousin of national political figure Adlai Ewing Stevenson of Illinois, the elder Sydenham was president of the North Carolina Railroad, and served as a state senator and United States congressman. Sydenham, Jr., graduated the University of North Carolina in 1894, and returned to Charlotte to operate the Crompton-Knowles Company, a loom works and cotton mill machinery firm. Sydenham Jr. and his wife, Mary, had one child, Mary Brevard Alexander (1901-1988), who married Charlotte businessman Billy Shaw Howell in 1922, and inherited the house in 1971. Active in local civic affairs, including a board member for numerous charitable organizations, Mrs. Howell resided at 250 Cherokee Road until her death in 1988. In 1990, the house was purchased by Charlotte banker Alexander Waugh and his wife, Paige, who are the current residents (Mecklenburg County Deed Book 696, p. 245; Howell Interview 2007; Howell Papers; *Charlotte City Directories* 1928-1991).



This cabinet card photograph was taken by Charlotte's first commercial photographer, Henry Baumgarten in the 1890s, the gentleman standing on the right

is Sydenham B. Alexander, a prominent Charlotte businessman, (owner of the S.B. Alexander House). Photograph Source: The Mary Brevard Alexander Howell Papers.

Despite researching newspaper records, building permits, and the official papers of Charlotte architects William Peeps and Martin E. Boyer, Jr., who designed many of the fine Georgian Revival residences in Eastover and Myers Park during the 1920s and 1930s, the authors of this report were unable to discover the architect of the Sydenham B. Alexander, Jr. House. One may assume that it was the work of a prominent architect (e.g., Boyer designed the Georgian Revival Major Alexander L. James House at 260 Cherokee Road).

Eastover

Eastover was established in 1927 by Charlotte developer Edward C. Griffith. Its residential development represented the culmination of the gradual shift among the city's wealthier residents from the center city to the southeast environs. With the coming of the electric streetcar to Charlotte in 1891, upper- and middle-class citizens began relocating from downtown addresses to the new suburbs of Dilworth, Elizabeth, Myers Parks, Chatham Estates along the Plaza, and Club Acres around the Charlotte Country Club. Providence Road, which forms the west side of Eastover, had been fashionable even before the development of posh Myers Parks in 1912, though in the early twentieth century, the road was still considered too far from downtown for easy commuting (Hanchett 1984; 1986; 1998: 227-228).

Griffith envisioned Eastover as a rival to Myers Park, both in social status and landscape design. In fact Eastover occupied a rolling hillside immediately across Providence Road from the earlier suburb. He contracted with the noted landscape architect and planner, Earle Sumner Draper, to create the Eastover plan. Draper had previously designed portions of Myers Parks, notably Queens Road West, distinguished by its long sweeping radius and lush landscaping. Thus the major streets of Eastover--Cherokee and Colville--are winding, embowered avenues lined with grand houses sited well back on large parcels (Hanchett 1986; Bishir 1990: 439-440; Bishir and Southern 2003: 521-522).

Also like Myers Park, a key planning component was the creation of land-use covenants to ensure that the community would take shape as Griffith and Draper proposed. Minimum house costs ranged from \$4,000 on side streets to \$15,000 for the largest main avenue lots. The covenants also required that all property "shall be occupied and used only by members of the Caucasian race, domestic servants in the employ of occupants excepted." Garages, outbuildings, and servants' quarters had to match the style of the main house on each lot, and no "Spanish architecture" was permitted (E. C. Griffith Company 1938; Hanchett 1984; 1986).

In contrast to Myers Park and the other early suburbs geared to streetcar travel, Eastover developed as the city's first exclusive automobile subdivision. Although trolleys were still quite active in 1927, the residents of the new suburb were expected to have automobiles. The nearest streetcar stops were on Queens Road, many blocks from the Eastover entrance gates (Hanchett 1984).

House construction began in 1928, and by 1932, 42 residences had been completed. The earliest section encompassed Cherokee Road, Colville Road, Eastover Road, and Hempstead Place, and the houses along these streets set the architectural standard for the entire community. The Georgian Revival style was, by far, the popular choice, interspersed with a mix of Tudor Revival examples and other revival styles. Cherokee Road was situated in Eastover's "Block 1, Lot 1," where the subdivision ordinance required some of the more expensive houses on expansive lots. In this section, no principal residence was to be constructed for less than \$10,000, nor sited less than sixty feet from the street. The costliest dwellings

(\$15,000) were reserved for portions of Eastover and Colville roads (Hanchett 1984; Sanborn Map of Charlotte 1929, 1951; E. C. Griffith Company 1927).

The Alexander House was one of the first dwellings built in Eastover. It arose shortly after the adjacent Major Alexander L. James House (260 Cherokee Road), which is a Locally Designated Historic Landmark (1994) and also an imposing, red-brick Georgian Revival residence. Numerous brick and weatherboarded versions of the Georgian style followed. Among them were the 1930 A. Lloyd Goode House (165 Cherokee Road) and the 1931 John Paul Lucas, Jr. House (265 Cherokee Road). All these houses survive substantially intact, as do other grand Georgian Revival dwellings along portions of Cherokee Road, Eastover Road, Colville Road, and Hempstead Place (E. C. Griffith Company 1927; Hanchett 1984; Mattson, Alexander and Associates, Inc. 1994).

The houses along these streets set the architectural standard for the entire community. The Georgian Revival style was the popular choice, but there were also notable examples of the Tudor Revival. Architect J. Norman Pease, later known for his modernist work, designed a rambling two-story Tudor Revival house with a circular tower as his own residence (1929; 322 Eastover Road) (now gone). Architect M. R. Marsh designed sizable Tudor residences for insurance executive Peter D. Burks (1934; 345 Eastover Road), and textile mill owner Fritz Seifert (1938; 421 Hempstead Place) (N.R. 2007). At the corner of Cherokee Road and Fenton Place, Hamilton C. Jones III, a prominent lawyer and political leader, enlisted Martin Boyer to design a massive, asymmetrical stone version with half-timbered gables and elaborate chimneys (N.R. 2002). Several smaller versions, two stories high but on smaller lots, appeared on the side streets. For example, the Peter Jones House (1933; 263 Hempstead Place) has a cross-axial plan with the gable ends stuccoed and painted to simulate half-timbering (Hanchett 1984; Sanborn Map of Charlotte 1929, 1951).

Conclusion

Today, Eastover is among the city's most desirable neighborhoods and contains approximately 600 houses facing rolling, tree-shaded streets. The great majority of residences are substantial red-brick Georgian Revival designs. However, as in Charlotte's other historic neighborhoods, teardowns and remodelings are widespread in Eastover. Consequently, well-preserved expressions of the area's earliest and finest architecture are endangered and increasingly rare.

The Alexander House stands as one of the architectural keystones of Cherokee Road, which remains one of Eastover's best-preserved streets. The stretch of Cherokee Road between Fenton Place and Middleton Place is among Eastover's oldest sections and contains many of its grand houses. A windshield survey conducted by the authors of this report found that of the twenty houses here, three are modern and one has been heavily altered. The rest are substantially intact Georgian Revival and Tudor Revival piles constructed between the late 1920s and 1950. However, other nearby blocks that also represent the early phases of construction in Eastover are significantly changed. Eastover Road, which intersects with Cherokee Road south of the Alexander House, has been transformed in recent years. Of the nineteen houses facing Eastover between Cherokee Road and Hempstead Place, eleven are modern and two others have major additions and alterations. Nearby, the earliest developed section of Hempstead Place, between Colville Road and Eastover Road has also been modernized. Of the ten houses along this block of historically spacious houses commanding sweeping lawns, seven are now modern and one other has undergone a major remodeling. Thus, while Eastover is in the process of being redeveloped with modern residential construction, the Alexander House remains an Eastover landmark sited amidst the neighborhood's best collection of imposing historic domestic architecture.



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