

Survey and Research Report

On The William Henry and Elizabeth Bell House



1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the W. H. and Elizabeth Bell House is located at 3513 Grey Road in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner of the property:

The present owner of the property is:

Five Bells, LLC

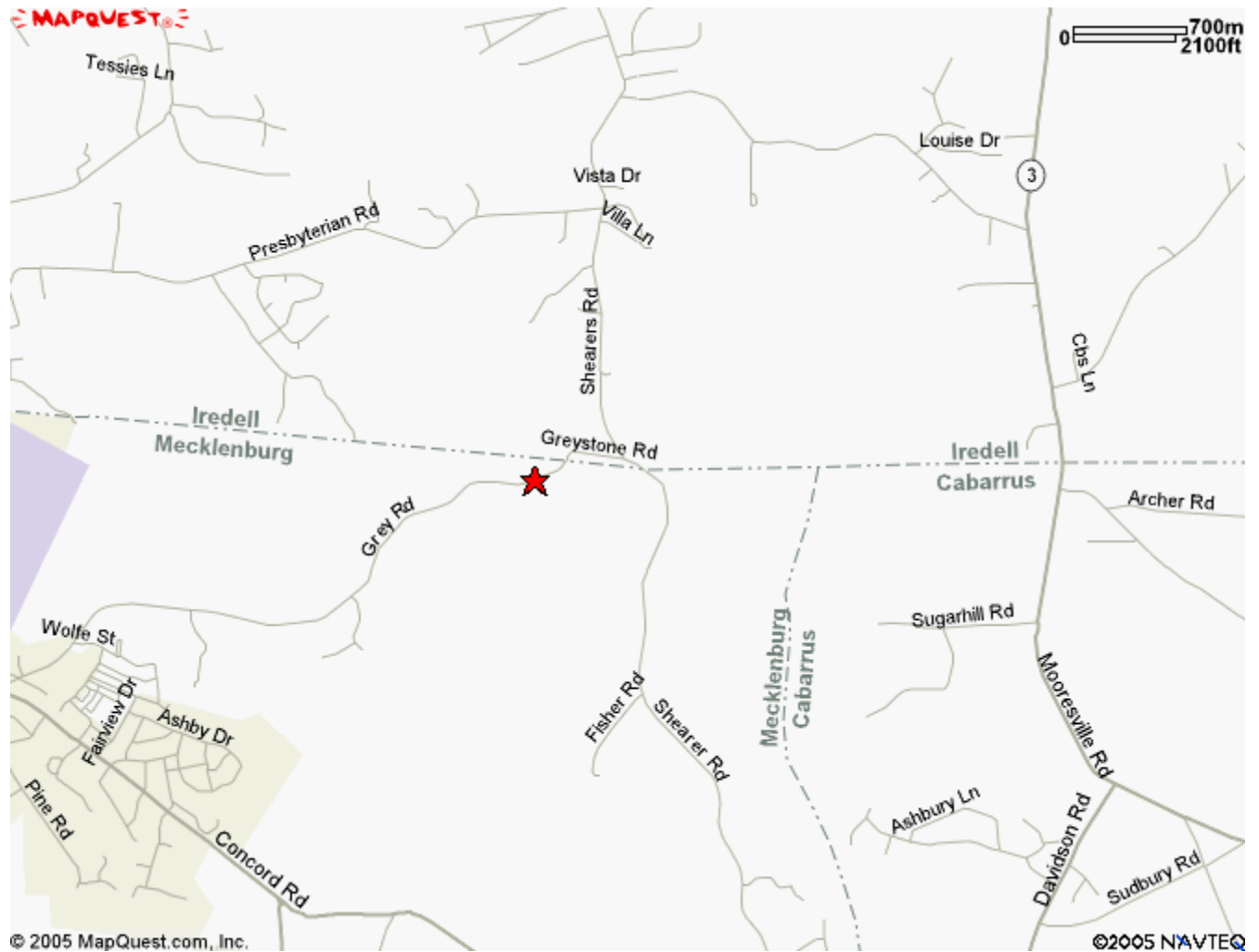
304 Ponderosa Circle

Mooresville, NC 28117-5501

Telephone: Unknown

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

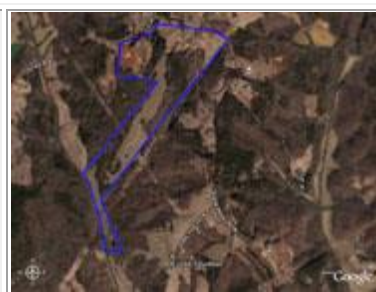
4. A map depicting the location of the property: This report contains a map which depicts the location of the property. The U.T.M. of the property is 17 518328E 3929193N.



The Bell property at an elevation of 750 feet. The road bordering at the north is Grey Road/State Highway 2418.



The Bell property at an elevation of 8000 feet. The house is located to the north of the map.



The Bell property at an elevation of 8000 feet. The blue line represents the boundary of the property.

5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to this property is listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 9649 at page 798. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 003-331-01.

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 an architectural description of the property.

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

1. The Bell House and its associated outbuildings are rare survivors of the rural built environment that once dominated this section of Mecklenburg County.

2. The Bell House, despite having undergone one major physical alteration, is an especially well preserved example of a vernacular Folk Victorian farmhouse.

3. The acreage and setting of the Bell House constitutes a once-prevalent rural landscape within this section of Mecklenburg County.

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 a designated historic landmark. The total appraised value of the Bell House and property is \$1,585,100.00. The property is zoned R3.

Date of Preparation of this Report: December 20, 2005.

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill

Summary of Historical Significance

The William Henry and Elizabeth Bell House has special historic significance for the following reasons. First, the William Henry and Elizabeth Bell House and its associated outbuildings are a rare survivor of the rural built environment that once dominated this section of Mecklenburg County. Second, the acreage and setting of the house constitute a rural landscape once prevalent but fast disappearing from this section of Mecklenburg County. Third, the William Henry and Elizabeth Bell House is an especially well preserved example of a vernacular Folk Victorian farmhouse.

Historical Context Statement

The William Henry and Elizabeth Bell House illustrates the sustained prosperity that characterized farming in Mecklenburg County in the decades following the Civil War

and continuing into the 1920s.¹ In 1860, Mecklenburg County had 1182 farms. The number had grown to 2645 by 1880 and to 4190 by 1900. The principal cash crops were corn, wheat, and cotton. This economic expansion resulted from three fundamental factors. First, ante-bellum Mecklenburg County had few large plantations and was made up mostly of farms averaging about 100 acres. This circumstance meant that most local agriculturalists had relatively limited investments in slave labor and could, therefore, recover relatively easily from the emancipation of their bondspersons. Second, the size of marketable cotton crops in Mecklenburg County and throughout the South increased substantially with the introduction of Peruvian guano as fertilizer. Between 1860 and 1880, cotton production in Mecklenburg county rose from 6,112 bales to 19,129 bales. Third, and most importantly, Mecklenburg County and its environs emerged as a major center of textile manufacturing in the second half of the nineteenth century.²

Charlotte took advantage of its strategic location on the railroads of the Piedmont and became the home of several cotton mills between 1880 and 1910, including the Charlotte Cotton Mills in 1881, the Alpha, Ada, and Victor Cotton Mills in 1889, the Highland Park Manufacturing Plant in 1891, and the Atherton Cotton Mill in 1893. Cotton mills also appeared in the outlying towns of northern Mecklenburg County, including Davidson, where the Linden Cotton Factory opened in 1890 and the Delburg Cotton Mill began operations in 1908. Cornelius got the Cornelius Cotton Mills in 1888 and the Gem Yarn Mills in 1907. The Anchor Mills started up in Huntersville in 1898.³

The W. H. and Elizabeth Bell House

William Henry Bell and his wife Elizabeth demonstrated their success in farming by occupying a two-story frame Folk Victorian style farmhouse near the turn of the last century at the top of a hill on Grey Road.⁴ Although modest by today's standards, the house and its outbuildings formed the centerpiece of a farmstead that was more or less typical of successful Mecklenburg farmers of the early twentieth century. The family most likely superintended tenant farmers who hauled their cash crops, including cotton, to Davidson, Cornelius, or Huntersville, where they would have been either locally consumed or shipped by rail to regional markets. The earliest photograph of the William Henry and Elizabeth Bell House includes the family with one child sitting atop a mule. Clearly, the Bells were prospering.



The earliest known photograph of the William Henry and Elizabeth Bell House



William Henry Bell and Elizabeth Bell and their five children gather for a family photograph in the early twentieth century.

An early twentieth century photograph of the Bell family reveals that William Henry Bell and Elizabeth Bell were people of some economic means. The mother, father, and children are bedecked in formal clothes. Also indicative of Bell's economic standing was their ability to make a major addition to their house, most likely in the second decade of the twentieth century. The Bells were not alone. The production of cotton in Mecklenburg County reached 27, 466 bales in 1910 -- its apogee. The resulting prosperity impacted the built environment, as farmers like the Bells constructed new or expanded existing houses.⁵ Other examples in northern Mecklenburg County of Folk Victorian farmhouses include the Ewart House, the S. W. Davis House, and the Cashion House (destroyed).



Ewart House



S. W. Davis House



Cashion House (destroyed)



Notice the large addition to the rear of the Cashion House



This August 2005 photograph shows the major modification to the Bell House that was made about 1913. A large, gable-roofed rear addition was completed and became essentially the new front of the house. The original front porch was removed, and a new porch was built on the new front.

Agriculture began to decline in importance in Mecklenburg County in the 1920s partly because new mechanized equipment increasingly replaced such traditional methods of cultivation and production as the use of mules, plows, hoes, and the tenant system. Farmers, such as the Bells, did not have sufficient financial resources to acquire expensive, new equipment -- acquisitions that became even more essential after the arrival of the boll weevil, also in the 1920s. The final blow for many middle class farmers came with the New Deal of the 1930s. The Agricultural Adjustment Agency of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal encouraged farmers to reduce farm acreage and livestock production. One consequence of this Federal initiative was to drive small farmers and sharecroppers from the land.⁶



This photograph was taken in recent years of two of W. H. and Elizabeth Bell's daughters. It is interesting to compare the clothes worn by these women with those worn by family members in the earlier family portrait.

Architectural Description

The William Henry and Elizabeth Bell House consists of two principal parts -- the original block of the house facing north and a large rear el. The hipped-roofed original block of the house is a two-story frame Folk Victorian style farmhouse three bays wide and one bay deep that rests upon brick piers with later infill. A one-story front porch has been removed, but the original block does retain its 4/4 double hung sash windows. A gable with patterned siding and vent is atop the center of the original front facade which still has its original entry door. The eaves of the original block of the house are unembellished.

The rear el is a one-story frame structure with a gable roof. A hipped roof porch with wooden columns extends from the front of the original block of the house to the far end of the eastern side of the rear el. Exposed rafters extend above the fascia of the porch, and a low-pitched gable is above the new front entrance. A brick chimney with a corbeled cap is at the rear of the original block of the house, and a more modest brick chimney extends through the roof of the rear el.



The interior appointments of the William Henry and Elizabeth Bell House are modest but largely unchanged from the original. Flush board walls, beaded ceilings, and exposed light bulbs predominate. The stairway leading from the first to the second floor of the main block of the house is narrow with simple, unturned pickets in the balustrade and a broad, flat handrail.

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1. Some of the information in this report is taken selectively from Matt Williams, "Bell House," December 16, 2005 (<http://www.dancourse.org/>). The reader should be cautioned that some of the data in Williams's report is incomplete or inaccurate.
 2. Lara Ramsey, "Survey and Research Report on the J. Leonard Cashion Farm," August 10, 2004 (<http://landmarkscommission.org/surveys&rcashion.htm>).
 3. Richard L. Mattson, "Historic Landscapes of Mecklenburg County: The Small Towns," July 1991 ([Charlotte](#)). Dan L. Morrill, "A Survey Of Cotton Mills In Charlotte and Mecklenburg County For the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission," July 1997 (<http://landmarkscommission.org/surveytextilesurvey.htm>). Stewart Gray and Dr. Paula Stathakis, "Survey and Research Report on the Davidson Cotton Mill, February 2004(<http://landmarkscommission.org/surveys&rDavidsonCotton.htm>).
 4. Williams.
 5. Sherry J. Joines and Dr. Dan L. Morrill, "Historic Rural Resources in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina," n.d. (<http://landmarkscommission.org/surveyruralcontext.htm>).
 6. Joines and Morrill.