

WILLIAM L. BRUNS HOUSE



This report was written on October 2, 1989

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the William L. Bruns House is located at 1618 Elizabeth Avenue, Charlotte, North Carolina.

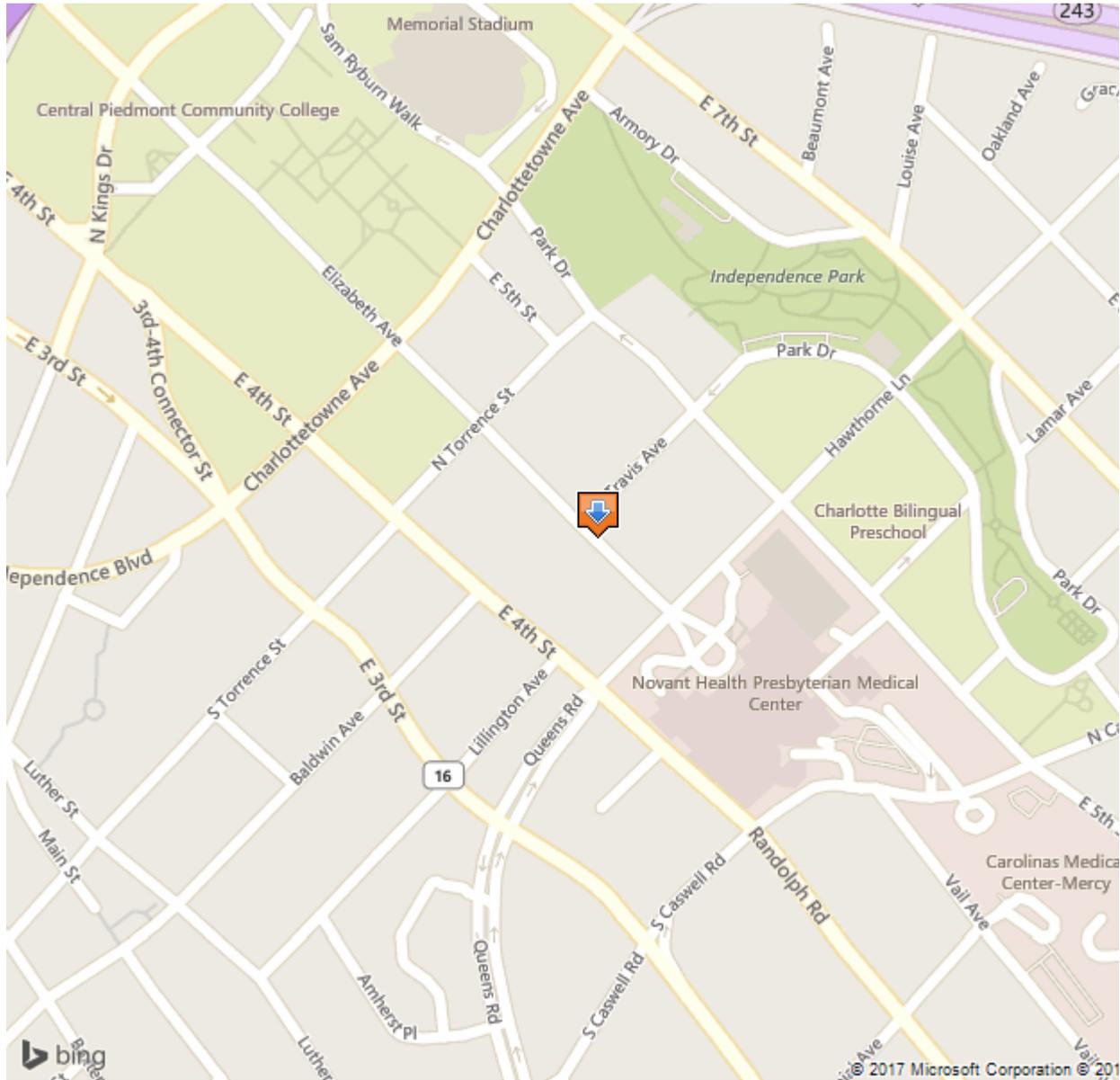
2. Name, address a telephone number of the present owner of the property: The owner of the property is:

Aphrodite K. Anderson
6800 N. Baltusrol Ln.
Charlotte, N.C. 28210

(704) 333-3491 (Anderson's Rest.)

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.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 3278, Page 41. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 125-111-19.

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 Lisa A. Stamper.

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

a. Special significance in terms of its historical, prehistorical, architectural, and cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the William L. Bruns House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the William L. Bruns House, erected in 1914-15, was designed by Louis Asbury (1877-1975), an architect of local and regional importance; 2) the William L. Bruns House occupies a place of strategic importance in terms of the historic gateway to the Elizabeth neighborhood; and 3) William L. Bruns (1872-1937), the initial owner, was a prominent jeweler in this community for many years.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description by Lisa Stamper which is included in this report demonstrates that the William L. Bruns 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 property which becomes a "historic landmark." The current appraised value of the .317 acres of land is \$82,800. The current appraised value of the improvement is \$138,580. The current total appraised value of the property is \$221,380. The property is zoned B2.

Date of Preparation of this Report: October 2, 1989

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill
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1225 S. Caldwell St.
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Historical Overview

Dr. William H. Huffman

Sitting solidly on its stonework near the upper end of Elizabeth Avenue, the Bruns house was built in 1914-15 according to a design by one of Charlotte's finest architects, Louis Asbury.

William L. Bruns (1872-1937) was born of German immigrant parents, George A. and Elizabeth Feinbeth Bruns, at their home in Columbia, S.C., where the senior Mr. Bruns was a silversmith. As a young man, William came to Charlotte and started work with Farrier Jewelers, where he repaired jewelry and did the engraving in the evening after a day of selling. In 1896, he joined with a co-worker, Joseph Garibaldi, who had done the watch repairing (also at night) in opening their own partnership, Garibaldi and Bruns. The jewelry business became Garibaldi, Bruns and Dixon in 1903 when a friend, Harry Dixon, came in the firm as a partner and bookkeeper, but it reverted to the former name when Dixon died in 1916. ¹

Incorporated as a stock company in 1925, Garibaldi and Bruns had the good fortune to start a business and see it grow during a period of extremely rapid expansion and prosperity for the city as a whole. Starting in the 1880s and continuing almost unabated until the end of the Twenties, Charlotte was a focal point of the New South industrial boom of the Piedmont Carolinas, and the jewelers prospered along with the rest of the banks, merchants and industries (particularly cotton mills and mill suppliers). About 1910, Garibaldi and Bruns built a handsome double storefront, designed by Louis Asbury, just off the Square on S. Tryon Street. Bruns bought all the

company's stock in 1936, a year before his death, and the firm has continued in business as one of the city's well-known jewelry stores.

In October, 1913, W. L. and Mamie Arledge Bruns (1875-1968), who had been married in the 1890s, bought a lot on fashionable Elizabeth Avenue, and hired a first-rate architect, Louis Asbury, to design a house for them. ³ The Elizabeth neighborhood was originally developed by the Highland Park Company, which was formed in 1891 by some of the city's most prominent developers, including Edward Dilworth Latta, W.S. Alexander, Peter Marshall Brown and Walter Brem. Until 1915, when the company dissolved operations, "Highland Park" was laid out as the city's second streetcar suburb with the main boulevards of Elizabeth, Hawthorne, Clement and Central containing the well-designed homes of many of the town's professional and business leaders, and the side streets lined with a mix of style and size of others houses. From the Square, the trolley followed Trade Street down the hill, then up to Elizabeth College at the top of the next and after the long climb up Elizabeth Avenue, turned left on Hawthorne, and then turned back south on Seventh after passing Independence Park.

The architect for the Bruns home, Louis Asbury (1877-1975), was the first in the city to be specially trained for that profession. A Charlotte native who attended Trinity College (now Duke University) and MIT, Asbury returned to establish a long and distinguished career here. In nearly five decades of practice, he designed many fine residences, churches, schools, hotels and businesses in the area. Among them are the J. P. Carr house (1909), the Charles Moody house (1913), the J. B. Ivey (1914) and Bishop Kilgo (1914) residences; the Myers Park Methodist Church (1929), the County Courthouse (1928), the Law Building (1926), the Hawthorne Lane Methodist Church (1915), Efir's Department Store (now part of Belk's, 1922), St. Peter's Hospital (1922), and, as noted above, the Garibaldi and Bruns store on S. Tryon (1909). Louis Asbury had a major impact on the look of Charlotte in the first half of the twentieth century. ⁵

Construction of the Bruns' home appears to have begun in late 1914, and it would therefore have been completed sometime in 1915. There, for the next twenty-two years, they raised their children, three daughters and one son, in the growing neighborhood of other middle class professional and business families along the main streets. ⁶

In 1931, when times were rough financially for many because of the Depression, two of the daughters, Elizabeth Bruns (who, in 1959, opened her own jewelry store which still bears her name) and Mamie Choate, opened the Jack and Jill Kindergarten School in the house. (One of their students who became well-known was Arthur Dye, Jr., of Big Band era fame.) After W. L. Bruns died in 1937, Mrs. Bruns and the daughters continued the previous enterprise until the 1950s, when they moved out and the house was used for a doctor's office. Mrs. Bruns died in 1968, and three years later the heirs sold their former home to James and Aphrodite Anderson, proprietors of Anderson's Restaurant across the street. For the last twenty-odd years, it has been occupied by various craft, gift and service businesses.

The Bruns house is one of the last remaining original houses on Elizabeth Avenue, and it provides an excellent example of a neighborhood and a style of living that are both disappearing.

As an anchor for the last of the middle class houses along the street that was designed by one of the city's finest architects, the house is eminently worthy of preservation.

NOTES

¹ Undated letter from Garibaldi and Bruns (1964?) on file in Mecklenburg County Public Library; *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 25, 1937, Sect. 2, p. 1.

² *Ibid.*

³ Deed Book 316, p. 392, 9 Oct. 1913; Louis Asbury's Job Book, Louis Asbury Papers #4237, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁴ Record of Corporations, Book A, pp. 235 and 335; *Ibid.*, Book 4, p. 283.

⁵ Asbury's Job Book, note 3; information on file at Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission.

⁶ Mecklenburg County Grantor-Grantee Index, 1848-1918, W. L. Bruns to Thos. W. Alexander, 13 Oct. 1914.(Mortgage).

⁷ Information of file at Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission; Certificate of Death, Reg. No 697, March, 1968.

Architectural Description

by Lisa A. Stamper

In 1914-1915, the Bruns House was built for William L. Bruns, one of the founders of the prestigious Garibaldi and Bruns Jewelry stores. He commissioned one of Charlotte's most popular architects of the time, Louis Asbury, to design his family home. Facing northeast on Elizabeth Avenue, then a nice middle-class residential street, the Bruns house is an interesting example of the Rectilinear Style popular in the early 1900's.

This two-story clapboard home comes complete with a first story Bungalow style porch (an architecturally modern feature of the early 1900's), stone chimney, projecting bay windows, and slightly complicated tripped roof concealing a large attic. The foundation of the front portion of the home is of stone, while the back foundation is of brick. By comparison to the 1927 Sanborn Insurance Map, it appears that the only exterior alterations have been the removal of part of the northwest side porch, and the building of one story additions to the back of the house.

The wide eaved roof is interesting and can best be described as a combination of tripped roofs. A large tripped roof tops the main section of the home, while a smaller hip covers the front section. Two smaller hips cover the two projecting bay windows on either side of the house. Gabled

dormers grace each side of the roof, allowing ample light to enter the attic. All eaves are decorated with unobtrusive straight brackets.

The porch is another interesting feature of the Bruns home. It curves on the east corner of the house, continues across the front to the north corner where it cuts at a right angle to continue around to the northwest side for a relatively short distance. The use of stone for the foundation of the porch gives a feeling of friendliness to an otherwise formal house. Elements such as elegant round piers with simple capitals and bases, a flat roof covering the porch, and wide eaves make the blending of rectilinear and bungalow designs work. Today, the porch has been enclosed on both ends, leaving only the center portion open for access to the front door. Most of the porch is enclosed with large glass windows which do not distract greatly from the overall design.

Most of the windows appear to be original and in good condition. All windows except for five are double-hung and wooden framed. Two flanking the northwest projecting bay are casement, while one on the opposite side is horizontally paned. In the middle of the southeast bay are two rectangular stationary windows. The first story one is leaded in a geometric pattern. All other first story windows are one-over-one pane while all second story windows are six-over-one panes. The small dormer windows vary in shape slightly.

The front facade is dominated by the porch and roof. The second story contains two symmetrically positioned sets of two windows in its foremost section. The recessed main section has one window at the second story.

Unfortunately, a very ornate wooden door frame is hidden in the shadows of the porch, between the two enclosures. The front double door has a rectangular beveled glass pane at the top of each door, with two vertical wooden panels underneath. Beyond the door is a small entryway, to catch the draft, and then a second double door, also with beveled glass.

The southeast facade is also visually interesting. It is filled with windows. However, the prominent features are the exterior end stone chimney, with shoulders only on its back side and located near the front of the home, and a two story projecting bay window in the middle of the facade. These two main elements balance each other.

The northwest facade is also dominated by windows, but it does not have as many as the southeast one. This is understandable in terms of keeping the interior warm. The projecting bay window on this side is only one story high.

The southwest (back) facade is fairly complicated. It is difficult to discern which first story openings or which parts of the structure were original. A first story door on the western corner could have been original; however, it is not at ground level, there is an opening underneath it presumably to the basement, and there is no mention of a porch in that area on the 1927 Sanborn Map. A one story back addition presently exists where the Sanborn Map shows a porch and possibly an enclosed sleeping porch. At the southern corner is located an unfinished wooden lean-to shed on a concrete foundation. It is doubtful that this structure is original. In the middle of the second story back facade a notch was created which is just large enough for two one-over-

one pane windows topped with a large rectangular leaded glass transom. This huge set of windows allowed light into the interior great stair.

The interior has been divided to accommodate at least five businesses: PK on Elizabeth and Peoples's Natural Food Market on the first floor, Twice Treasured and McLellan/Design on the second floor, and The Magic Attic in, of course, the attic. Approximately one-third of the first floor is not open to the public, and appears to be used as storage. Each business has altered the interior plan and finishes in some way to suit their needs, with the exception of The Magic Attic.

Although the interior has had significant space planning alterations, the bulk of these have been confined to the first floor. In many places, the original placement of partitions can easily be determined. Early mantels are still intact, as well as interior floor and ceiling moldings. The great stair seems to be in good condition, as is a smaller stair to the attic. Most of the paneled doors seem to be in their original places, although not all are in use. They also display their original hardware, including glass door knobs; however, many have had modern locks and/or knobs added above the old.

The Bruns House is one of no more than half-a-dozen residential buildings left on Elizabeth Avenue. Today, to the southeast of the Bruns House is a parking lot for Presbyterian Hospital and a commercial strip containing such businesses as Anderson's Restaurant and City Nights Disco. Fortunately, to the northwest of the house are two residences from the same time period. These three buildings make a treasured Post-Victorian residential grouping.

The Bruns House, as well as its two neighbors, are seriously threatened by the modern construction prevalent on Elizabeth Avenue. The exterior architecture of the Bruns House has had few alterations, and the interior still holds its turn-of-the-century ambience. Its architectural integrity, historic value, and location are all significant reasons for Charlotte to protect and honor the Bruns House as a significant historic treasure.