

# THE CEDARS

*This report was written on November 3, 1982.*

**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as The Cedars is located at 123 Grandin Rd. in Charlotte, N.C.

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

The present owner of the property is:

Cora Lee Hailey  
1901 Newland Rd.  
Charlotte, NC 28208

Telephone: (704) 392-6921

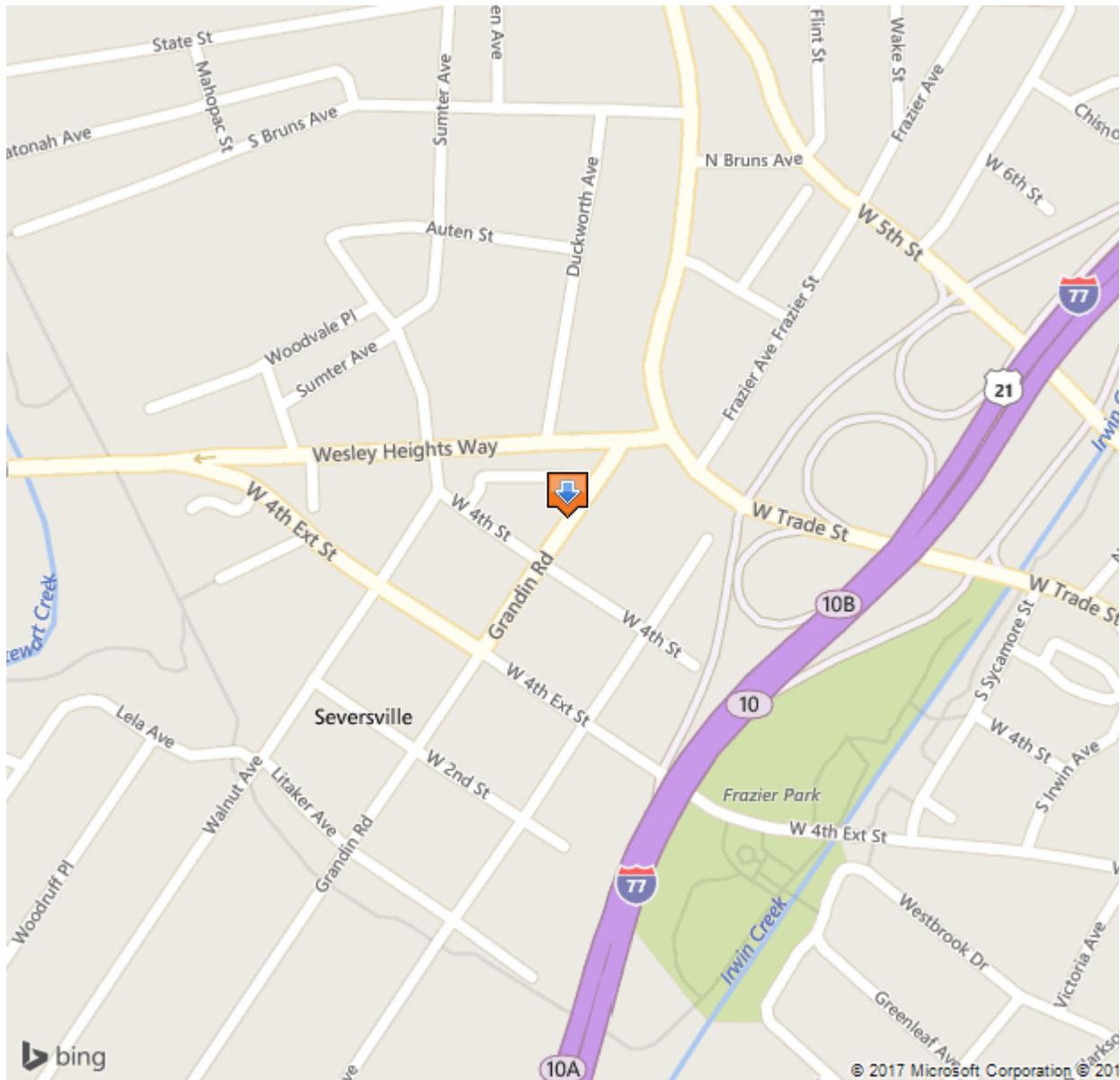
The present occupants of the property are:

Doreatha Johnson  
Johnnie Mack  
Betty G. Moore  
123 Grandin Rd.  
Charlotte, NC 28208

Telephone: Not listed.

**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 listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 4003 at page 108. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 071-016-13.

**6. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Thomas W. Hanchett, architectural historian.

**7. A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. William H. Huffman, Ph.D.

**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 Historic Properties Commission judges that the property known as The Cedars does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: (1) The Cedars is one of a small sample of antebellum houses which survives in the present boundaries of Charlotte; (2) The Cedars is a good example of Greek Revival architecture, a style which is rare in Mecklenburg County; (3) The Cedars is a unique remnant of the Seversville community of the old Charlotte Township.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials feeling, and/or association:** The Commission contends that the attached statement of architectural significance prepared by Thomas W. Hanchett, architectural historian, demonstrates that The Cedars 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 land is \$3,480. The current appraised value of the house is \$10,200. The property is zoned 06.

**Date of preparation of this report:** November 3, 1982.

**Prepared by:** Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission  
218 N. Tryon St.  
Charlotte, N.C. 28202

Telephone: 704/376-9115

### *Historical Overview*

*Dr. William H. Huffman*

From its prominent place high on the hill opposite downtown Charlotte just over a mile northeast from the Square at Trade and Tryon Streets, the [Greek Revival](#) style house known as "The Cedars" has enjoyed its commanding view since the mid-nineteenth century. The extensive farmhouse dominated the cultivated land immediately around it, and was a part of the small Charlotte Township community of Seversville in Mecklenburg County.

Unfortunately, the available records do not reveal the exact details of the house's origins. The earliest traceable occupants of The Cedars appear to have been Harvey Marion Sossamon (1824-1900) and his wife, Nancy (Nancy) Wilmettie Wadsworth Sossamon (1828-1894).<sup>1</sup> It is not known when H. M. and Nancy Sossamon came to Mecklenburg County, but they were married on August 11, 1847 in Rowan County,<sup>2</sup> and do not appear in the U. S. Census for Mecklenburg until 1880.<sup>3</sup> However, Mr. Sossamon was admitted to membership by certificate in the old Tryon Street Methodist Church on November 14, 1875,<sup>4</sup> and that year may have been when they took up residence in the Seversville community. In 1880, Mr. Sossamon's occupation was listed, not

surprisingly, as a farmer, and his wife and two remaining children at home were noted as helping on the farm. Also, in 1885, Harvey Sossamon went into business with two other men in the area, J. P. Carr and H. C. Severs, to put up and operate a cotton gin and grist mill on Beatties Ford Road.<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Sossamon died in 1894,<sup>6</sup> and on the occasion of her husband's death six years later, he was described as "one of the best known of Mecklenburg's citizens,"<sup>7</sup> and a "prominent and useful citizen of this county."<sup>8</sup>

The Cedars appears to have been, at one time, if not originally, a part of a large farm known as the "John W. Wadsworth model farm,"<sup>9</sup> and it is quite possible that Harvey Sossamon, who was Mr. Wadsworth's brother-in-law, was in charge of the operation. John Wesley Wadsworth (1835-1895) was an entrepreneurial giant of late nineteenth-century Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. Originally from Davidson County, he came to Charlotte about 1865 following his service in the Confederate army.<sup>10</sup> Although he arrived nearly penniless, the enterprising young man soon found great success in trading in horses and mules, and shortly afterward opened a highly profitable livery stable ("the largest in North Carolina") at the corner of Tryon and 6th Streets in Charlotte, and took up residence three doors away on College Street between 6th and 7th.<sup>11</sup> From 1866 to 1895, J. W. Wadsworth acquired large land holdings in the city and county, which included the lots for the livery stable and his home, as well as scattered farm property in the county, and encompassed the Seversville model farm.<sup>12</sup> Wadsworth probably bought the land on which The Cedars stands in the 1860's or 70's, but it has not been possible to trace that specific site. When he first came to Charlotte, J. W. married Mary Houston of Providence Township in the county, and, following her death after the birth of their son, John C., married Margaret Barbara Cannon, of the Cannon Mills family, of Concord, in 1867.<sup>13</sup>

His stature in the community was such that at his funeral on March 5, 1895, the North Tryon Street Methodist Church was filled to overflowing, excluding "several hundred people" who couldn't get in, and the streets for a block in each direction were lined with people wishing to pay their last respects.<sup>14</sup> Since J. W. Wadsworth died intestate in 1895, his extensive holdings, including the Seversville land and The Cedars, passed to his widow and nine children. Fourteen years later, in 1909, the remaining heirs (Margaret Cannon Wadsworth died in 1907) petitioned the Superior Court for permission to sell all of the holdings except most of the model farm land, which was to be developed into the Wesley Park subdivision by the Wadsworth Land Company.<sup>15</sup> Of the eighteen parcels of land authorized for sale, which included the livery stable and old family residence on College Street, the ninth is described as:

That suburban lot in the suburb of the City of Charlotte known as Seversville upon which is located the frame dwelling hence known as the Sossamon house. This lot of land contains about one acre and joins the property of the Wadsworth Land Company.<sup>15</sup>

The sale of the property was subsequently authorized by the court, and in the advertisement of sale, the house is referred to for the first time as The Cedars.<sup>17</sup>

At a courthouse auction on 18 July 1910, the old farmhouse and one acre of land, now on Grandin Avenue (originally Wadsworth Avenue), were purchased by W. L. Shelby for \$4000.00.<sup>18</sup> William Leroy Shelby (1859-1944), a Mecklenburg County native,<sup>19</sup> farmed in the area until his retirement in the 1920's. He was married to Margaret Wearn in 1894, who

unfortunately died in childbirth four years later, and Mr. Shelby never remarried. His two daughters, Pearl and Daisy, were raised at The Cedars, and after Daisy's marriage to James F. Norris in 1920, the Norrises brought up a new generation of children there, Helen, Margaret and James W. F. Norris.<sup>20</sup> In 1929, W. L. Shelby deeded The Cedars to his daughter Daisy Norris,<sup>21</sup> although he continued to live there with her family until his death in 1944.<sup>22</sup> During World War II, the Norrises made the downstairs portion of the house into two apartments, and, after the war, the upstairs was similarly converted.<sup>23</sup> Following Daisy Norris' death in 1976, the property passed to her three children, who sold it the following year to the present owner, Cora Lee Hailey.<sup>24</sup> The Cedars was discovered as a potentially designated historical site by Tom Hanchett, who is directing the Charlotte neighborhood survey for the Historic Properties Commission, and is, no doubt, the oldest original house in the city, probably dating from the 1850's or 60's.<sup>25</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Elizabeth Quackenbush, Charlotte, NC 28 Sept. 1982; Orders and Decrees, Book 13, p. 599.

<sup>2</sup> N.C. Marriage Bond No. 131971, 11 August 1847.

<sup>3</sup> 1880 U.S. Census, Mecklenburg County, p. 353.

<sup>4</sup> Tryon Street Methodist Church records; information provided by Mrs. Jean Scranton, Archivist.

<sup>5</sup> Deed Book 46, p. 340, 30 April 1885.

<sup>6</sup> Monument in Elmwood Cemetery, Charlotte. <sup>7</sup> *Charlotte News*, Feb. 1, 1900, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 2, 1900, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Deed Book 263, p. 540.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Jane Fry Wadsworth, *The Wadsworth Family in America* (N.P., 1978), p. 418.

<sup>11</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, March 5, 1895, p. 4; Beers Map of Charlotte, 1877.

<sup>12</sup> Mecklenburg County Index to Real Estate. Grantees, 1840-1918, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> See note 10.

<sup>14</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, March 6, 1895, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Orders and Decrees, Book 13, p. 596, 3 Dec. 1909.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 599.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 617.

<sup>18</sup> Deed Book 263, p. 540, 19 August 1910.

<sup>19</sup> Certificate of Death, Book 67, p. 67.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with J.W.F. Norris, Charlotte, NC, 20 Oct. 1982.

<sup>21</sup> Deed Book 989, p. 187, 2 Jan 1929.

<sup>22</sup> See note 19.

<sup>23</sup> See note 20.

<sup>24</sup> Intestate Estate 76 E 131, filed 22 Jan. 1976; Deed Book 4003, p. 108, 24 Oct. 1977.

<sup>25</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 18, 1982, p. 1D.

### *Architectural Description*

*Thomas W. Hanchett*

The Cedars is a mid nineteenth century frame farmhouse on a hillside site overlooking Charlotte's center city. Its Greek Revival trim and cast iron door locks indicate that it was built in the 1840s or 1850s, one of less than a dozen pre-Civil war homes known to survive within Charlotte's present city limits. During its more than a century and a quarter of existence the house has had several additions, each of which can be dated to years when a new family took up residence. The oldest section of the house is a two story "L". Additional investigation may determine that one wing of the "L" was constructed before the other. The front wing consists of a side stairhall opening onto one large room on the first floor and another on the second. The back wing is built behind these two rooms and consists of one room up and one down. A single large chimney stack at the junction of the two wings has four fireplace openings, one serving each living space in the "L".

Decorative trim inside and outside the "L" is in the [Greek Revival](#) style. Outside, eaves are boxed and they extend in the gable ends to form "returns", a prime characteristic of the Greek Revival. Walls are sheathed in clapboard with cornerboards and baseboards. [Windows](#) are very tall and consist of double-hung, six-over-six pane sash in simple, flat surrounds. The front door is flanked by "[sidelight](#)" windows and topped by a rectangular [transom](#). The whole entrance is framed by a wide surround that flairs out at top and bottom and is edged with heavy molding.

Most interior doors in this section are of mortise-and-tenon construction with two tall vertical panels over two very short vertical panels. Of special interest are a number of cast iron door locks. These are square box locks with porcelain knobs, and are screwed to the face of the door. At least one, on a two-panel closet door under the stairs, is cast with its maker's name; "M & W Co. New Haven." According to David Black at the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, locks of this type were in use in the Carolinas from the 1830s into the 1870s, with the decades of the 1840s and 50s being the time of greatest popularity. These locks, together with the Greek Revival woodwork, which was popular in the state between 1830 and 1865, make it almost certain that the structure was constructed in the antebellum period.

The first major additions to the original four room "L" apparently came in the 1870s. These were a pair of one story wings flanking the front block of the "L". The new wings continued the Greek Revival returns and boxed eaves of the older structure. They gave the house a symmetrical tripartite form when viewed from the front, not unlike an older Mecklenburg plantation house, [Rosedale](#), still standing today at 3427 North Tryon Street in the city. It is not unlikely that the house also received its name, the Cedars, at the same time, turning the plain farmhouse into something of a "country seat." The work probably dates from when H.M. Sossamon, the house's earliest traceable occupant, took up residence. The wings were definitely built after the rear wing of the "L", because their doors open into it rather than into the front portion of the house. The work can further be attributed to Sossamon's time because, while the overall form of the additions follows the Greek Revival style of the old building, several aspects of the remodeling show influences of the [Italianate](#) style that was in favor in the 1870s.

The wings have attic vents with round arched tops, an Italianate characteristic, and the massive brick end chimneys have round arched recessed panels. Some interior doors in the wings have horizontal panels with more elaborate woodwork than the earlier Greek Revival units elsewhere in the house. All mantels in the "L" as well as the wings appear to date from Sossamon's remodeling also. All are built up of flat, scroll-sawn pieces whose curves owe more to the 1870s than to pre-Civil War tastes. The Italianate front door of the house, with its paired arched panels, was undoubtedly added at this time too, as was the bracketed cornice above the entrance. The next round of alterations are from the early years of the twentieth century, and coincide neatly with purchase of the property by William L. Shelby in 1910. Shelby's most visible additions were porches across the front of the house and behind the two wings. The decades around the turn of the century were the high point of popularity for the porch in America; earlier homes seldom had large porches. Square porch columns with vertical fluting were chosen, a Greek inspired design that matched the existing house. Other homes around Charlotte built in the 1910s have similar units, for example 813 Sunnyside Avenue. The exterior front wall of the house under the porch is now covered with "German" novelty siding, which probably replaced the original clapboard at this time. At least one porch ceiling is sheathed with similar wood. An elaborate wooden spindle screen door on the front entrance may also be of the same vintage. The house probably received its first indoor plumbing from the Shelbys.

A small [gable-roofed](#) room was added about this time above the southeast wing, opening off the second floor front room of the "L." It is used as a bathroom now, with recent fixtures, and was probably used as one then. Care was taken in its roofline and eave treatment to echo the old house, indicating it is the work of the same sensitive owner who specified fluted porch columns.

Some other interior remodeling was done while Shelby owned the home. A varnished Victorian mantel topped by columns and a mirror now dominates the downstairs front room, probably from this period. There are a number of doors with six horizontal panels, evidently a stock lumber-yard item at the time, because similar units may be seen in 819 Sunnyside Avenue which was erected in 1912. Round-arched cast iron inserts in the older fireplaces may also date from Shelby's ownership. After Shelby's daughter married James F. Norris in 1920 more work was done. The porch across the front of one wing was enclosed with siding and a horizontal strip of windows. "Dining porches" and horizontal windows were both popular in the 1920s, but these alterations interrupted for the first time the Greek-inspired vertical, symmetrical appearance of the house.

The Norrises, with three daughters to raise, also added a second story to an old kitchen area at the back of the house along side to rear wing of the "L". This new area included a second bathroom, which still has its claw-footed bathtub. Woodwork here consists of wide squarish molding with a raised lip at the edge, a motif found in many Charlotte homes from the late 1920s, for instance 2126-28 Greenway Avenue. Downstairs floors date from the same era, narrow boards covering the old six inch wide planks. One or both of the rear porches on the house may have been enclosed for added space at this time. During World War II the Norrises split the downstairs of the house into two apartments, nailing doors shut, adding two rudimentary bathrooms, and cutting two extra front doors where windows had been. After the War they converted the upstairs to two additional apartments, angling a second story inside wall to give the rear rooms of the floor access off the main stair.

A somewhat jerry-built second story addition on the roof of the dining porch, in front of the earliest bathroom, may be part of this conversion. Like the dining porch below, this shed-roofed addition detracts from the Greek Revival symmetry of the front facade. Since the Norrises divided the house into apartments there has been little change. Cora Hailey has owned the structure since 1979 and continues to rent it as three apartments, two downstairs and one up. She has panelled some rooms without removing the old woodwork, replaced plumbing fixtures where necessary, repaired the porch, and painted the building. The Cedars is a rare house in that each owner has not tried to erase what went before, but rather to merely add what he needed. Today The Cedars looks much as it must have when farmer W.L. Shelby lived there early in this century. The cedar trees are long gone as are all outbuildings except a 1920s frame garage ( a two story log "carriage house" stood behind the home until the late 1970s ). But the house, proud in its Greek Revival finery, still commands a spacious hillside site. From the front porch, through the trees that shade the lot, one can still look across to the next hilltop where downtown Charlotte rises.