

SURVEY AND RESEARCH  
REPORT ON  
THE ROBERT GRIER  
HOME AND PROPERTY

1. Name and location of the property. The property known as the Robert Grier House is located on Waddington Rd., approximately three miles south of Matthews, N.C., in the southeastern portion of Mecklenburg County.

2. Name, addresses, and telephone numbers of the present owners and occupants of the property.

The present owner of the property is: Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Chambers Parson  
1400 Scotland Ave.  
Charlotte, N.C. 28207  
Telephone Number: 332-8400

The present occupants of the property are: Mary Hudson  
Jody Hudson  
Arrie Hudson  
Virginia Hudson  
Route 2, Matthews, N.C.  
Telephone Number: 847-5725

3. Representative photographs of the property. Representative photographs of the property are included in this report.

4. A map depicting the location of the property. This report contains a map depicting the location of the property.

5. Current Deed Book Reference of the property. The most recent Deed information on this property is found in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 57, Page 268. The Parcel Number of the property is 22713103.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property. The antebellum dwelling known as the Robert Grier House was most likely erected after October 5, 1833. On that date John M. Fulwood conveyed three hundred acres to Robert Grier, who made the house the focal point of what was to become a highly successful cotton plantation. According to local tradition the house was erected between 1833 and 1840. Although partitions have been added to create central halls on both floors, the house retains its original characteristics. For its day it was an impressive structure. It communicated to even the casual observer that Mr. Grier was a prominent farmer of southeastern Mecklenburg.

The balcony on the second floor once overlooked a lake. No doubt Robert Grier sat there on many an evening and surveyed the plantation which he created. The sandy soil of this region was well suited to the cultivation of cotton. Born the son of John and Mary McCombe Grier on February 17, 1807, Robert had ample opportunity to learn the skills of the successful businessman. His father was a farmer, a merchant, and the operator of a gold mine. Even before 1833 Robert began to assemble land in the area. By 1868 he had acquired 566 acres. That he was an astute businessman is certain. For example, in 1870 the value of the real estate which he owned was set at \$8000 and that of his personal estate at \$2,150. His wealth outdistanced that enjoyed by the vast majority of the farmers of Mecklenburg County.

Robert Grier was a Presbyterian. He was a member and elder of Providence Presbyterian Church, the earliest Presbyterian congregation in southeastern Mecklenburg. His wife was Elizabeth Reid, whom he married in January 1832. They had four sons: William W., Edward S., John C., and Robert H. Grier. Tragedy caused Mr.

Grier to turn to his Christian faith for sustenance on many occasions. Tragedy was not unknown to this man. His wife died in 1859. His youngest son, Robert S. Grier, was killed by Union forces in the Civil War. Inevitably struck Edward S. Grier. Indeed, local custom suggests that Edward's screams of sadness could be heard by travelers along the road. One can imagine the agony which Mr. Grier must have experienced. He doubt he shared his grief with his second wife, Mary Bea, whom he married in 1861.

Robert Grier died on February 5, 1889, at the age of 82. The next day he was buried in the graveyard at Providence Presbyterian Church. William W. Grier, his eldest son, came into ownership of the Grier plantation. In the early 1900's William's children, William W. Grier, Jr., and Annie E. Grier, began to sell portions of the property. On December 15, 1910, they sold 130 acres which included the house to George W. Chambers. He never lived there. He continued to reside in Charlotte. Indeed, he almost immediately rented the house to the Fortis Family, who lived in the house until the mid-1960's. In 1966 Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Chambers Fortis, who inherited the house and property from her father, rented the house to the Hudson family. The Hudsons still live there.

7. A brief architectural description of the property. This report contains an architectural description prepared by Jack C. Boyte, A. I. A.

8. Recommendation of who and in what ways the property meets the criteria set forth in R. G. O. S. 10A-309.4.

a. historical and cultural significance. The historical and cultural significance of the Robert Grier House rests upon two factors. First, architecturally speaking, there is no other house in Mecklenburg County like this structure. Of the few antebellum buildings which survive in Mecklenburg County, the Robert Grier House is unique in having an original two story, columned portico. Quite frankly, the house is somewhat of a folly. Certainly it has none of the characteristics of an academic style. Worth noting is the fact that this is the only antebellum home still standing in this section of Mecklenburg County. Second, the house is a visual reminder of the social and economic lifestyle which dominated rural Mecklenburg in the nineteenth century.

b. suitability for preservation and restoration. The house is in a considerable state of disrepair, as are the surviving outbuildings. It lacks many of the amenities of contemporary domesticity. There is reason to believe that the house is approaching the state of being structurally unsafe. However, it could probably be restored as a residence. Worth noting in this regard is the fact that it is located in a fashionable residential area.

c. educational value. The house has been featured in several books dealing with historical houses in Mecklenburg County. This fact attests to the educational value of the structure. The educational value of the house rests upon its historical and cultural significance to Mecklenburg County.

d. cost of acquisition, restoration, maintenance, or repair. The Commission has no intention of purchasing the property. Indeed, the Commission knows of no inclination of the present owner to sell. As noted above, the house is in considerable disrepair. Certainly, a considerable amount of money would have to be spent to make the home a comfortable abode. The Commission assumes that the owner of the property would pay all expenses associated with the preservation, maintenance, and restoration of the property.

e. possibilities for adaptive or alternative use of the property. The Commission believes that the house is not suited for adaptive use. It can survive as a residence or as a farm museum.

f. appraised value. The 1975 appraised value of the house itself is \$1470. The appraised value of the land is \$135,000. The Commission is aware that designation of the property would allow the owner to apply for a special tax classification.

g. The administrative and financial responsibility of any person or organization willing to underwrite all or a portion of such costs. As stated earlier, the Commission has no intention of purchasing this property. Furthermore, the Commission assumes that all costs associated with the structure and property will be met by whatever party now owns or will own the structure and property.

9. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria established for inclusion on the National Register. The Commission recognizes that the National Register of Historic Places was established to single out and to provide protection for properties of local and State historic significance. The evidence generated by this report and the data provided by the comprehensive inventory of the pre-1950 built environment performed by the Commission convinces the Commission that the Robert Grier House does meet the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places. Clearly, the Robert Grier House, as one of Mecklenburg's few surviving antebellum structures, does occupy a place of considerable significance in the local architectural fabric. It also provides visual evidence of the social and economic lifestyle which dominated rural Mecklenburg in the nineteenth century.

10. Documentation of why and in what ways the property is of historical importance to Charlotte and/or Mecklenburg County. The Commission believes that the Robert Grier House is significant to the history of Mecklenburg County because of its architectural significance and because of its association with the economic and social lifestyle which dominated rural Mecklenburg in the nineteenth century.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, Mecklenburg County was largely an agricultural region. Scattered farm communities centered in a number of villages located about a day's travel by wagon from the county seat, Charlotte. Pineville, Huntersville, Mint Hill and Matthews were among these villages, and at the time they rivaled Charlotte in size. In each community there were numerous small farms and a few larger plantations. Curiously, today there are several plantation manor houses extant in northern Mecklenburg, but south of Charlotte the only known plantation house remaining is that built by a prosperous Charlottean, Robert Grier, in the 1850's a few miles outside of Matthews on the road to Weddington.

The early history of the place is obscure, but the plantation obviously flourished and the fine house must have been the center of bustling farm life, possibly managed by an overseer for an absent owner. Robert Grier is said to have lived in Charlotte even while the plantation was in its hey-day. But, with the approach of the war between the states, he became a resident of the plantation, moving his family to escape the travail brought to Charlotte by the war. The move must have been effective, since the house stands today, relatively undisturbed and sound, on a high knoll some two hundred yard off the roadway. As the sole surviving structure of this antebellum south Mecklenburg plantation, the house conjures up vivid picture of a picturesque period of local history.

The house is an extraordinary example of regional architecture. It reflects strong influences of the Greek Revival of 1830 - 1860, while demonstrating a naive simplicity far removed even from the elegance of other Mecklenburg houses of the time, to say nothing of the sophistication of eastern Carolina or southern Virginia. Resting on widely spaced piers of hand made brick, the two story structure is a simple rectangular block, bilaterally symmetrical in door and window placement. At the front a wide portico is sheltered by a shallow pitched roof supported by four round brick columns. These columns are the most unique feature of the house. Resting on large square blocks of granite, with no molded base, the heavy circular shafts rise in a gentle taper to wooden doric capitals under the eave of the roof. Bricks are hand molded to fit the round shape and include rounded headers consistent with the English bond found in the chimneys. At the first floor a wooden porch spans the width of the front, and is matched at the second floor with a wooden balcony enclosed by a finely detailed balustrade. Set back about a foot from the brick column line, these floors are supported by turned, tapered wood columns, also with doric capitals. The delicate work in the balustrade surrounding the balcony is especially noteworthy. Under a rounded rail, small square balusters are closely spaced. Intermediate matching square members are placed diagonally between the balusters to form a repeated elongated diamond pattern. Above the centered front entrance and balcony doors, transoms

lights repeat this diamond pattern. Centered in each gabled end, large chimneys of hand made brick rise in English bond to stepped shoulders above second floor fireplaces. From here the chimneys set out from gable siding and extend high above the center ridge to unusual tapered brick caps. On the left (south) side a secondary, smaller chimney occurs toward the rear of the house. The details in this chimney match those in the main ones.

The exterior surface of the house is covered with sawn, square edge, lagged siding. The front wall under the portico roof, however, is covered with tongue and groove flush siding, typical of the mid 1800's. All windows, with the exception of several small units in the garret, have been replaced with sash manufactured at the turn of the century. However, in the garret one complete original nine light sash was found, matching half of the size of the window openings. So originally all windows were nine light over nine light. Window and door trim is uniformly wide molded casing. The overhang is moderate, wide, is simply boxed, and has no frieze. The eave line runs across each gabled end with the same overhang. Under the soffit a wide bed mold surrounds the house. At the top floor windows this molding returns to meet the cased openings. An unusually wide, intricate verge molding follows the roof line at each gable. The roof slopes in a strangely skewed double pitch, starting with a steeper slope over the center garret and flaring out to a flatter line over the front and rear, where the ceiling height is dropped to compensate for this flat line.

From the entrance porch a center door enters a large front foyer. Toward the rear this foyer widens into a larger stair hall entered through an interior door, above which is a diamond light transom matching that over the front door. In the entrance foyer and rear stair hall the side walls vary. To the left the hall partition is formed of single vertical, tongue and groove, hand planed boards. On the right the partition consists of horizontal boards applied to load bearing studs, a pattern followed throughout the house. From the front foyer one enters a large dining room on the left and a matching parlor on the right through finely crafted six panel doors with beaded panel edges. Both rooms are carefully finished with fine millwork. A molded chair rail is applied to all walls, except the thin vertical board interior hall partition. Wainscoting in each room consists of small molded panels below the chair rail and just above an applied beaded base. Windows and doors are surrounded by wide, intricately molded casing. Matching fireplaces in the parlor and dining room are finished with simply detailed mantels reflecting little if any classical influence.

At the rear of the dining room a small anteroom includes a small fireplace with simple, molded wood surround. This ante-room has a rear exterior door, and was possibly a pantry for receiving food prepared in the exterior kitchen. The small fireplace served as a needed warming facility on such occasions.

At the rear of the parlor a curious little anteroom with a side window is an unusual plan feature. This room was possibly a library or study.

In the rear stair hall a centered exterior door is crowned with a diamond light transom like those over the front and interior hall doors. The stair rises in three flights to a wide second floor landing. The lower flight has a simple balustrade with a round rail and two small square balusters per tread. At the top flight, and enclosing the stair well on the second floor landing, is a balustrade which duplicates the delicate diamond pattern of the front balcony.

From the second floor landing a paneled door opens to the front hall, which extends to the balcony door. On each side of the front hall simple six panel doors open to bed chambers of equal size, featuring fireplaces and mantels similar to those on the first floor. Each bed chamber has a low ceilinged anteroom to the rear, balancing those on the first floor. These small rooms have no hall doors and provided only accessory spaces for the front rooms. Having no heat, they were possibly wardrobe or storage rooms. In the right front chamber a small steep stair leads to a low paneled door, opening to the garret stair. The garret is unfinished and has no flooring, so it served no useful purpose. However, at each gable end small six light windows flank the brick chimneys, and since the high pitched roof provides generous head room, the possibility of finishing the space was likely included in the original plans for the house.

The rafters and joists in the roof framing show the typical pattern of the early circular saw developed about 1830. At the ridge, the rafters are lapped and secured with tree nails(pegs). At the front wall and the rear main wall the joists are lowered and secondary rafters slope at a shallow pitch to the outside ends, thus creating the double roof slope mentioned above. Across the rafters on both are the original rough shingling planks remain in place, now covered with tin roofing. A few sawn shingles, showing heavy weathering and possibly original, are scattered about in the garret area.

An extraordinary feature of the house is the fact that no paint was ever applied to any of its surfaces. All of the original wood construction remains unfinished inside and out and has weathered to a uniformly rich patina.

In the context of determining important historic Neckienburg architecture, this house must be called unique. It shows a style and period not represented elsewhere in the county. Fortunately, the structure is still sound though it has suffered some deterioration through benign neglect. There is no question that it is a significant building, and should be preserved.

JACK O. BOTTE, A.I.A.

Bibliography.

An Inventory of Older Buildings in Mecklenburg County And Charlotte For the  
Historic Properties Commission.

Architectural Description Prepared by Jack C. Berts, A. I. A.

M. Eyer, "THE ANTISELLON HOME OF ROBERT SELLS."

Interview by Mary Lynn Morrill with Mrs. Eunice Perkins.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office.

Date of Preparation of this report:

April 8, 1976

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(first floor)

PORCH

KITCHEN

HALL

PORCH

26' 9" approximately

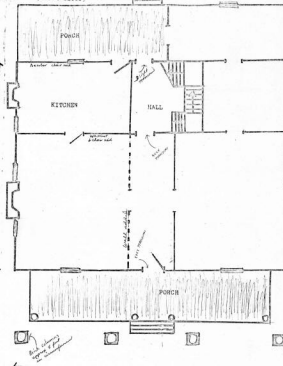
Handwritten note: *Handwritten note: 1/2" scale*

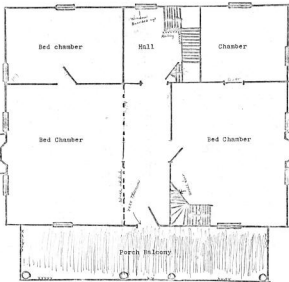
(Not in proportion)

36' 9" approximately

By Mary Boyer  
December 5, 1924

THE ROBERT GRISH HOME  
Bedminster Rd., Durham, N.C.





(second floor)  
 Robert Crier House

Geo. Allen D. Vossie  
 1007 CLAYBANK STREET  
 CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA 28202

*Not drawn to scale*

*Well in back of house - hand pump*