

THE HEATH AND REID GENERAL STORE



This report was written on November 5, 1980

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Heath and Reid General Store is located at 196 N. Trade St. in Matthews, NC.

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

John Harrison Biggers & Rachel T. Biggers
c/o Biggers Furniture Co.
196 N. Trade St.
Matthews, NC 28105

Telephone: (704) 847-9848

The present occupant of the property is:
Biggers Furniture Co. (see above)

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 on this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 3676 at Page 70. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 215-013-01.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property:

General stores were the economic and social centerplaces of rural communities throughout Mecklenburg County in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On February 20, 1888, Everard Jefferson Heath (1851-1912) and Edward Solomon Reid (1864-1934) on this site, which was situated next to the tracks of the Carolina Central Railroad.² On December 15, 1874, the Carolina Central Railroad had completed a line which ran from Wilmington, NC, via Charlotte to Rutherfordton, NC.³ This event had transformed the economy of eastern Mecklenburg County, especially at those points where railroad depots were erected. The Town of Matthews, named for Mr. Watson Matthews, a member of the Board of Directors of the Carolina Central, had been established in 1879 by Jeremiah Solomon Reid (1831-1906), the father of Edward Solomon Reid.⁴

The 1889 Charlotte City Directory contains a drawing of the Heath and Reid General Store in Matthews. For its day, the building was an impressive edifice. The signs on the structure attest to the spectrum of activities in which E.J. Heath and E.S. Reid were engaged. They were bankers, cotton buyers and wholesale and retail merchants.⁵ After E.J. Reid moved to Charlotte, where he became a member of Second Presbyterian Church and became a partner in a highly successful cotton and yarn brokerage firm, E.J. Heath took on his eldest son as his partner and, accordingly, changed the name of the business to E.J. Heath & Son.⁶

Everard Jefferson Heath was a skillful and adroit businessman. In the opinion of the *Charlotte Observer*, he was "one of the most prominent men in the county," and, the newspaper continued, he elevated his mercantile enterprises "to commanding proportions."⁷ The *Charlotte News* was also expansive in its assessment of E.J. Heath's abilities as an entrepreneur. "He conducted a large store...and managed to so

successfully that he thereby laid the foundation of a fortune." The newspaper contended that Mr. Heath "had the Midas touch."⁸

Mrs. Sanford L. Forbis, a resident of Matthews, remembers visiting the store in the early years of this century. It was a beehive of activity. Groceries were sold in the rear section of the building. In the front, ladies could buy a rich assortment of items and notions, including cloth, ribbons, hats, pins, needles, zippers, buttons, and thimbles. But farm supplies were the mainstay of Mr. Heath's operations. Farmers would come to Matthews on Saturdays to purchase fertilizer, seed, flour, sugar, etc. E.J. Heath also derived a substantial amount of income from loaning supplies to sharecroppers in the spring and exacting payment in the form of crops in the fall. Mr. Heath was known to drive a hard bargain.⁹

Evarard Jefferson Heath died on March 4, 1912. A native of Lancaster County, SC, he had moved to Monroe, NC as a young man and had settled on a farm near Matthews in the mid-1880's. He bequeathed his property to his wife, Annie M. Heath, by whom he had eight children.¹⁰ On October 30, 1919, she sold the building to J.B. Hemby and W.L. Hemby, who continued to operate a store there.¹¹ In 1926, John McCamey Caldwell, a prominent farmer in the nearby Providence Community, purchased the building and rented it to John Paxton, who operated a grocery store there for many years.¹² On December 18, 1959, T.A. Biggers bought the building.¹³ His son, John Harrison Biggers, acquired the property in 1974 and continues to operate the Biggers Furniture Company there.¹⁴ Happily, therefore, this structure, which is the oldest commercial edifice in Matthews, persists as a useful component of the town.

NOTES

¹ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 60, p. 76. Gravestone of E.J. Heath at Elmwood Cemetery, Charlotte, NC. Mary Louise Phillips, Margaret Phillips and Mrs. L.E. Funderburk, "Pleasant Hill Cemetery, Matthews, NC" (a manuscript in the Carolina Room at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library).

² Charlotte City Directory (1889), p. 207.

³ "Charlotte. Railroads Seaboard." (a folder in the vertical files in the Carolina Room of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library).

⁴ *The Southeast News* (November 10, 1975), pp. 1-24. Charlotte City Directory (1889), p. 207. Dellmann O. Hood, *The Tunis Hood Family: Its Lineage and*

Tradition (Metropolitan Press, Portland, Oregon, 1960), pp. 346-347. For the obituary article on Jeremiah Solomon Reid, see the *Charlotte Observer* (March 12, 1906), p. 6 and the *Charlotte News* (March 12, 1906), p. 3.

⁵ *Charlotte City Directory* (1889), p. 207.

⁶ *Charlotte News* (March 4, 1912), p. For the obituary article on Edward Solomon Reid, see the *Charlotte Observer* (September 11, 1934) Sec. 2, p. 1 and the *Charlotte Observer* (September 11, 1934), p.14. His death notice is recorded in Mecklenburg County Death Book 44, p. 213.

⁷ *Charlotte Observer* (March 5, 1912), p. 7.

⁸ *Charlotte News* (March 4, 1912), p. 9.

⁹ Interview of Mrs. Sanford L. Forbis by Dr. Dan L. Morrill (October 23, 1980).

¹⁰ Gravestone of E.J. Heath at Elmwood Cemetery, Charlotte, NC *Charlotte News*, p. 3.

¹¹ Interview of Mrs. Sanford L. Forbis by Dr. Dan L. Morrill (October 23, 1980).

¹² Mecklenburg County Deed Book 640, p. 438. Interview of Mr. Irving Caldwell by Dr. Dan L. Morrill (October 23, 1980).

¹³ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 2061, p. 172.

¹⁴ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 3676, p.70.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Professor Mary Alice Hinton, Architectural Historian.

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 commission judges that the property known as the Heath and Reid General Store in Matthews, NC, does possess special historic significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations. First, it is the oldest commercial building which survives in Matthews,

NC, the major community which emerged along the railroad in eastern Mecklenburg County in the nineteenth century. Second, except for the first-floor level of the front facade, the building retains its essential integrity. Third, E.J. Heath was a merchant of great significance in the early history of Matthews, NC.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials feeling and/or

association: The Commission judges that the architectural description included herein demonstrates that the property known as the Heath and Reid Store 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 Ad Valorem appraisal on the Heath and Reid General Store is \$12,600. The current Ad Valorem appraisal on the .086 acres of land is \$5,640. The most recent Ad Valorem tax bill for the structure and land was \$153.22.

Bibliography

Charlotte City Directory

Charlotte News

Charlotte Observer

"Charlotte. Railroads Seaboard." (a folder in the vertical files in the Carolina Room of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library).

Gravestone of E.J. Heath at Elmwood Cemetery, Charlotte, NC.

Dellmann O. Hood, *The Tunis Hood Family: Its Lineage and Traditions* (Metropolitan Press, Portland, Oregon, 1960).

Interview of Mr. Irving Caldwell by Dr. Dan L. Morrill (October 23, 1980).

Interview of Mrs. Sanford L. Forbis by Dr. Dan L. Morrill (October 23, 1980).

Mary Louise Phillips, Margaret Phillips and Mrs., L.E. Funderburk, "Pleasant Hill Cemetery, Matthews, NC" (a manuscript in the Carolina Room at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library).

Records of the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office.

The Southeast News

Vital Statistics of Mecklenburg County.

Date of Preparation of this Report: November 5, 1980

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director
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3500 Shamrock Dr.

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ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Heath and Reid General Store (now Biggers Furniture Company) is the oldest extant commercial structure in the town of Matthews. The store anchors a critical corner of the town's main street, North Trade, and suggests the pedestrian scale which once unified the business district. The store is a two-and-a-half story brick box. The store is three bays wide and eight bays deep and stands on a cellar which runs the length of the building. The brick is laid in **common bond**. The store is a well-preserved example of the genre of vernacular brick commercial buildings which were prevalent throughout the Piedmont in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The flat roof steps up to North Trade Street by means of four shallow gradations. The main (north) facade is capped by a corbeled cornice. A strip of headers set as a dentil cornice underlines the rows of corbeling. Corbeled endblocks close the cornice at each corner. Three small, segmentally-arched vents, evenly spaced along the attic level, hold cast iron grilles.

Four star-shaped earthquake bolts, their metal rods sunk into the body of the structure, are regularly placed at the second story level. Immediately beneath them runs a stringcourse which repeats the three segmental arches into which six-over-six **sash windows** are set. Each window is framed by a pair of wooden louvered shutters. Between the ground and the second stories runs another string course.

The elevation of the ground story, with its broad expanse of glass, functions as both a shop-front and a show-room. A heavily bracketed cornice calls attention to the entrance and to the merchandise shows windows flanking it. This wooden cornice is a permanent, if abbreviated, awning. The cornice surmounts a ten-light [transom](#) which stretches like a ribbon window across the store facade, lighting the interior and lightening the lines of the elevation. Only one of the two original recessed entrance survives. Although the show windows which flank the surviving entrance have been remodeled, thus altering the proportions of the panes, the general character of the alterations is not dissonant with the details of the facade. The south (rear) and west elevation are largely blank.

The west elevation contains a small door and more than two dozen star rods. The east elevation, running along West Chamber Street and facing the railroad tracks, serves as a secondary facade. It carries accordingly, more ornament and more openings. In addition to the corbeled cornice, which wraps around the entire length of the east elevation. Beneath this is a long, narrow recessed panel which originally bore six-over-six sash, capped by segmentally-arched corbeled hoods. On the ground story a two-over-two sash punctuates the fourth bay; a double-leaf wooden door, the fifth bay; and a double-leaf glass-paneled door beneath a two-light transom stands at the eighth and final bay. The latter door sports an ornate cast iron lock whose surface is enlivened by a Greek fret encircling a foliate quatrefoil. There are two ventilator shaft openings at the basement level of the east elevation.

The store interior is, one each floor, a single large open space. The plan is clearly a utilitarian one. The main floor is bisected by a row of five wooden posts. The posts are at irregular intervals along the central axis of the room. Each post is chamfered into base, shaft, and molded capital. The posts are space-defining elements, not load-bearing ones. The walls are plaster over brick. The floors are heart pine, and inch-and-a-half thick and aged to a dark, warm brown. The floor joists are fifty feet long and the sills are thirteen inches by three inches. A [staircase](#) (a quarter-turn-with-landing recently enclosed by a balustrade for safety) rises east-to-east along the rear wall. The second story, spartan in design, is covered by thin beaded ceiling boards. An open straight run leads from the ground floor to the cellar. It begins at the sixth bay and descends south-to-north, parallel to the east elevation. Between the stair and the wall is a James Bates freight elevator, patented in 1871. The cage track runs from the cellar to the second story. This elevator is an excellent example of those platform lifts which played an essential role in the development of commercial architecture.

In the cellar, to either side of the elevator foundations, are large ventilator shafts. The brick bearing walls of the cellar are exposed and concrete covers the original dirt floor. Four floor-to-ceiling brick piers, each four inches by sixteen inches wide, are built along the center axis. Three of the piers are reinforced by roughewn cedar posts

from which shreds of bark still hang. Each post measures roughly one foot in diameter and provide an instructive lesson in vernacular guilding techniques. Like the earthquake rods in the brick walls above, this coupling of posts with piers reveals the builders' intense concern with structural stability.

The Heath and Reid General Store played an important part in the commercial history of Matthews. The building pedestrian oriented scale and detail recall the nineteenth century street fabric in which the general store, an architectural type now largely vanished, flourished.