



DAVID HENDERSON HOUSE

[Click here for photo gallery of the David Henderson house.](#)

★ ★ ★ MECKLENBURG NEIGHBORS Wednesday, June 7, 1989 3

Making History: The David Henderson House



Location: 1510 Russell Ave.

Built: 1830 by David Henderson, a Mecklenburg County plantation owner.

Architecture: Built in the Federal style, the house is typical of the homes of prosperous Piedmont farmers during the early 19th century.

History: This antebellum farm house is one of the oldest surviving structures in the Charlotte city limits. The house has had several owners and has witnessed the

most important periods of transition in Charlotte, notably the economic growth of the region after the Civil War into the 20th century. The land around the house became Biddle Heights Annex in the 1940s. Now the plantation house stands in the midst of contemporary brick ranch houses, a representative of the long-gone era of agricultural economy in Charlotte.

SOURCE: The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission Survey and Research Report. Historical Report by Dr. William H. Huffman. Architectural Report by Joseph Schuchman. Compiled by Paula Stethoke.

This report was written on March 5, 1986

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the David Henderson House is located at 1510 Russell Avenue, Charlotte, North Carolina.

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

The owner of the property is:

Matthew Brown & Wife, Lillie Mae
c/o James Jose Brown
1510 Russell Avenue
Charlotte, NC 28216

Telephone: (704) 333-3933

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 3547, page 265. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 075-061-04.

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 Mr. Joseph Schuchman.

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

a. Special significance of terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the David Henderson House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the David Henderson House (c.1830) is one of the few antebellum plantation houses which survive within the David Henderson House current boundaries of the city of Charlotte; 2) David Henderson (1805-1879), the original owner and occupant, was a prominent cotton planter of the nineteenth century, who also participated in the economic life of Charlotte; and 3) the house is a

locally significant example of a Federal style plantation house, especially when one considers its location so near to the center of the largest city in North Carolina.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description included in this report demonstrates that the property known as the David Henderson House meets this criterion. Admittedly, the house has lost its context, and several alterations and additions have been made over the years. However, on balance, the Commission believes that the David Henderson House possesses individual architectural significance, especially when one takes into account how little of the antebellum built environment survives in Charlotte, in any form.

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 improvements is \$20,530. The current appraised value of the land is \$6,500. The total appraised value of the property is \$27,030. The property is zoned R6.

Date of Preparation of this report: March 5, 1986

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
1225 S. Caldwell St.
Charlotte, NC 28203

Telephone: (704) 376-9115



Historical Overview

Dr. William H. Huffman

The Henderson House, a tall, white antebellum farmhouse with a commanding view of Charlotte's central business district some two miles away, is a surprise to find in the middle of a street mostly lined with modern brick ranch homes. It is located on Russell Avenue, not too far from Beatties Ford Road, and appears to have been built by David Henderson in the late 1820s or early 1830s. To find such an intact house of this age so close to the city center is a rare occurrence.

David Henderson was born July 20, 1805, in North Carolina and possibly in Mecklenburg County, and died November 24, 1879.² For most of his life he farmed his plantation of about 240 acres just two miles north of town, and prospered well (with the likely exception of during the Civil War). On February 7, 1827, he married Minty S. Wallace of Mecklenburg County, who unfortunately died in 1833.³ Three years later, on November 15, 1836, he wed another Mecklenburg County woman, Harriet C. Henderson (28 September 1815 - 26 March 1883), to whom he may have been related.⁴ By 1850, the Hendersons had five children and personal property worth \$3000, and by 1860, they had doubled the number of children and quintupled

their net worth: their land was worth \$6000, and their personal property was valued at \$14,900.⁵

For reasons that are not clear from the records, ownership of the Henderson home place seems to have passed about the time of the Civil War to James Henderson, perhaps a brother, who was a nearby farmer five years younger than David Henderson.⁶ The latter continued to own plantation land in the area which he devised to his wife and sons Charles, Miranda, Thomas Edwin and Isaac, as well as various lots and houses in Charlotte, one of them being on Tryon Street. The real estate in town was devised to daughters Laura Henderson Ahrens, Susan Henderson, and Lilly Henderson Neal, except the Tryon Street house, which went to son Thomas Edwin. In his will Henderson also left stock in the [Merchants and Farmers National Bank](#) and the Traders National Bank of Charlotte.⁷

Thus it is clear that whatever losses were incurred during the war did not prevent David Henderson from enjoying a good measure of the prosperity he had built up over the years. It is also apparent that much of his success was due to the fact that Charlotte and Mecklenburg County began to mushroom in economic growth after the early 1850s. When the first railroads were put in, which eventually gave Charlotte easy access to the port of Charleston, through Columbia, and direct connections with the markets of the Northeast through Norfolk, VA.⁸ Another notable fact is that he was typical of wealthy planters of the area in that he invested in real estate and banking in Charlotte. This showed his confidence in the town's future growth and as has been shown, it was fully justified. At the same time, his investments and those of others like him, provided the capital for the city's expansion.

In 1868, a neighbor, F. W. Ahrens, who also owned real estate in Charlotte, bought the plantation, and the following year Ahrens sold off 174 acres, (of the original 240) to another landowner, John S. Means.⁹ In his will of 1877, Means left a diminished tract of 117 acres of "the Henderson place" to his daughter, M. L. Creighton (wife of Hiram L. Creighton).¹⁰ In 1910, the same property was bought by a J. J. Wisenheimer, who a number of years later, sold portion to Adele L. Hendrix and Ervin Construction Company for development.¹¹ Mrs. Hendrix had a development map first drawn up for that part of Russell Avenue, in what was known as Biddle Heights Annex, in 1945.¹² It encompassed thirty-three acres on both sides of Russell Avenue, and extended about four and a half blocks. As that development progressed

to meet the demand for housing during that period, the Henderson place became surrounded by modern, post-war houses, and its identity forgotten. Since 1948, it has changed hands four times, but was bought twice by the current owners.¹³

The Henderson House is a relatively rare piece of Charlotte and Mecklenburg's history that serves as a rich reminder of the connection between the two. The movement from prosperous antebellum plantation life to living and investing in an up and coming commercial rail crossroads is embodied in the career of David Henderson, and the simple plantation house he started in two miles north of town is a striking monument to how far the city and county have come in such a relatively short time.

NOTES

¹ Since Henderson was period in 1827 and 1836, it is probable that the house was built during that period.

² Cemetery listing of Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church, Third Cemetery.

³ Ibid., Second Cemetery; NC Marriage Bonds, Grooms.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 1850 US Census, Mecklenburg Co., NC, p. ff; 1860 US. Census, Mecklenburg Co., NC, p. 94. In the census of 1830, Henderson owned two female slaves (p. 376); by 1840, he owned seven, three women and four men (p. 292).

⁶ Mecklenburg Co. Deed Book 5, p. 690, 29 June 1868. Since he was then in his sixties, it may be that he had retired from farming, but I have been unable to locate him in the 1870 census.

⁷ Mecklenburg Co. Will Book K, p. 354, dated 30 January 1879, probated 3 November 1879.

⁸ Thomas Hanchett, "Charlotte Neighborhood Survey," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1983.

⁹ Mecklenburg Co. Deed Book 5, p.690, 29 June 1868; Ibid. Book 5, p. 708, 1 February 1869.

¹⁰ Mecklenburg Co. Will Book K, p. 256, probated 23 Day 1877.

¹¹ Mecklenburg Co. Deed Books 1332,p.205, 30 November 1948, and 1885, p. 45, 17 January 1957.

¹² Mecklenburg Co. Map Book 5, p. 3.

¹³ See note 11; Mecklenburg Co. Deed Books 2107, p. 370,11 February 1960; 2816. p.603, 6 December 1966; 3547. p.265, 16 March 1975.

Architectural Description

Joseph Schuchman

The Henderson House is one of the oldest surviving structures within the Charlotte city limits. This simply executed building was constructed in the late 1820s or early 1830s by David Henderson (1805-1879) and originally served as the seat of his two hundred and forty acre plantation. The Federal style house is simply executed, typical of the homes of fairly substantial Piedmont farmers during the early nineteenth century. The symmetrical massing and balanced arrangement of fenestration are indicative of the long-standing tradition of classically inspired building patterns. Although the house has received subsequent alterations and additions, a significant amount of original detailing survives.

The single pile main block rises two and a half stories to a [gabled roof](#). The overall appearance is representative of the popular I-house. The main block is of mortise and tenon construction and extends three bays in width and two bays in depth. The original weatherboard sheathing remains on the side elevations. Front and rear elevations are covered in German siding, which may have been installed during the early part of the twentieth century; German siding enjoyed a great period of popularity beginning in the 1910s and 1920s. A two-story porch, which shelters the main facade, also appears to be a later addition and may date from the early twentieth century when Mount Vernon style porches were widely incorporated onto new and existing

dwellings. The wooden porch piers rise to a [shed roof](#) which covers a boxed roofline cornice. The main entrance is set within a Victorian fluted surround with decorative corner blocks; this door frame was removed from another structure and installed on the Henderson House approximately thirty years ago by the father of the present owner, James Brown.² Six/six sash is the primary glazing material. Plain surrounds frame the [sash windows](#). The house originally rested upon random blocks of fieldstone and was later underpinned with brick.

Side elevations rise to a flush gable, a common vernacular motif of the Federal style. Single step shoulder chimneys are centrally placed within the gables. Each chimney is constructed of handmade brick arranged in [Flemish bond](#). The step brick bases rest upon fieldstone; freestanding stacks rise to a corbeled cap. On the east chimney, a portion of the stack and cap have been rebuilt using manufactured brick. Four pane casement lights, set in two-part surrounds, are placed in the attic and frame the chimneys.

A boxed cornice runs across the rear of the main block. On the second story, the center bay, which opens into the hall, is placed on a higher level than the flanking window openings. A rear shed, which runs across the first story, appears to have been constructed in two stages. The smaller west section is believed to be original to the house; weatherboards continue across the west side of the main block to the shed. The use of German siding and the appearance of brick underpinning on the east section indicates a later, possibly early twentieth century construction date.

The interior has been altered although some original detailing remains including two mantles, the pine flooring and the plain surrounds which frame window and door openings. Walls and ceilings were likely sheathed originally in flush horizontal board. Interior spaces have been plastered; rooms are encircled by a molded baseboard and cornice. Original doors have been replaced with two panel doors which appear to date from the early twentieth century. The main block presents a two room plan on the first floor and a center hall plan on the upper floor. The first floor may have originally followed a center hall plan, the partition wall having been removed at a later date. In the nineteenth century, a center hall represented gentility and respectability; it is quite possible that David Henderson would have preferred a center hall to

separate entrance and living spaces and to provide an appropriate atmosphere in which to greet visitors.

The main entrance leads into a parlor, the largest room within the house. A Neoclassical mantle, with Doric columns, a bracketed shelf and a beveled overmantle mirror, was removed from another dwelling and installed in the Henderson House approximately thirty years ago. It replaced an earlier mantle which was removed at that time.³ A straight run open string staircase rises from the parlor; the simply detailed stair displays rectangular balusters, two per stair tread, and rectangular newel posts which support a molded handrail. Several of the balusters have been replaced.

An adjacent sitting room, to the east of the entrance, contains a notably wide classically-inspired mantle. Paired fluted piers rest upon a rectangular base and rise to a molded capital. The plain frieze is set between a molded architrave and cornice, the latter supporting a projecting shelf. The mantle appears original to the house; a decorative cast iron grate is believed to date from the turn of the century.

On the second floor, a narrow center hall separates the two bedrooms. To allow for the addition of a bathroom at its rear, the east bedroom was reduced in size. The west bedroom contains the floor's only mantle. Federal detailing is evident in this noticeably wide mantle. Single fluted piers rest upon rectangular bases and rise to molded capitals. The mantle's entablature, consisting of a molded architrave, plain frieze and a molded cornice, is similar to that of the mantle found in the first floor's sitting room. A molded shelf rests atop the entablature.

The roof framing is evident within the unfinished attic. The original semi-circular pegged logs are interspersed with more recent two by four joining.

The house sits on a slight rise and occupies a standard size city lot. None of the original outbuildings survive but the remains of a well stand adjacent to the house's west side. Adjacent to the well is a two car garage. This weatherboarded structure rises to a gabled roof with exposed rafters. The garage doors are sheathed in vertical tongue and groove ceiling, boast wrought iron hinges and display angled corners.

Notes

¹ Based upon information in the North Carolina State University publication *Carolina Dwelling* and the researcher's own experience in this region's rural dwellings, the typical early to mid-nineteenth century farmhouse usually displayed a one-story porch, either shed or hip roofed, which either covered the front three bays or ran across the entire main facade.

² Interview with James Brown, present owner of the David Henderson House, August 28, 1985. Mr. Brown's father had previously owned the house.

³ *Ibid.*