

Survey and Research Report  
on the  
Eli H. and Francis M. Hinson Store



1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Eli H. and Francis M. Hinson store is located at 8925 Arlington Church Road.
2. Name and address of the current owner(s) of the property:

The current owner of the Eli H. and Francis M. Hinson Store is:

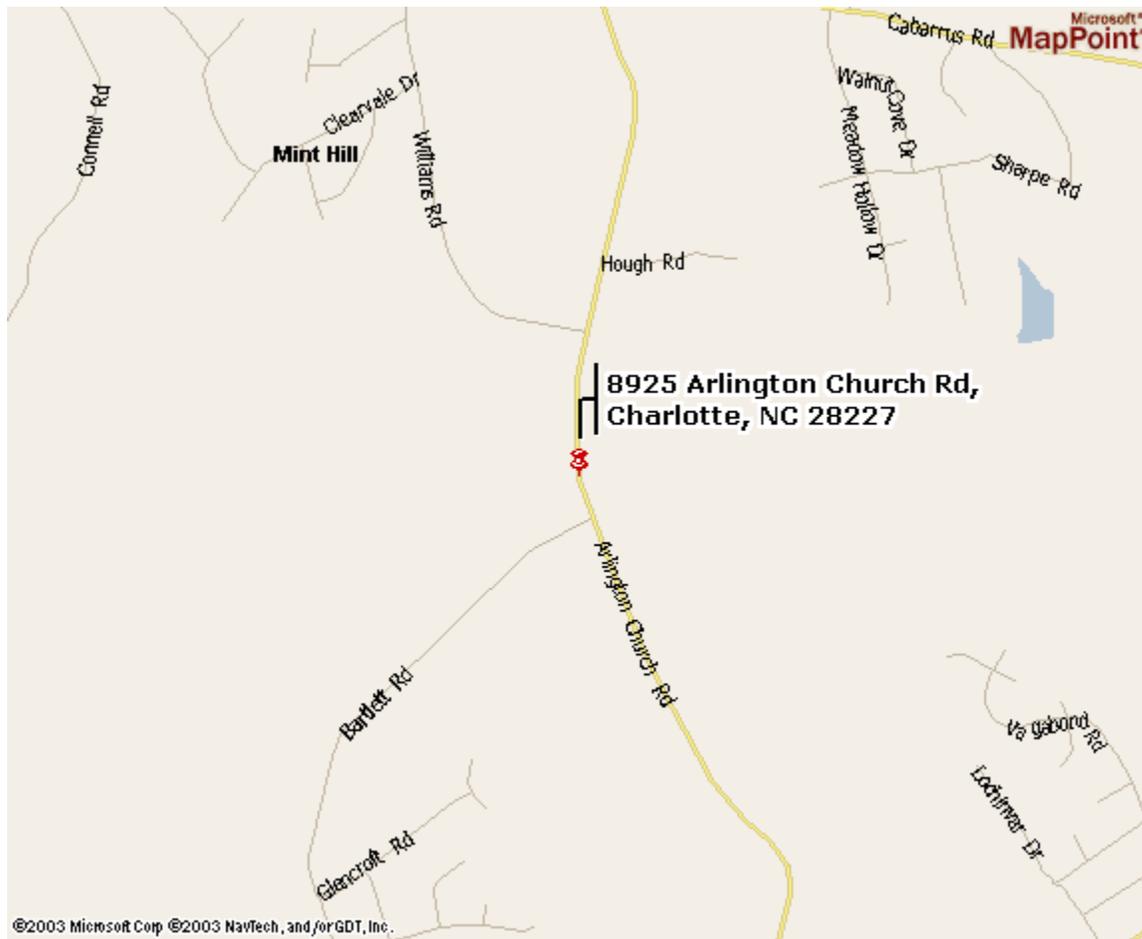
B. David Houston, Henry and Margie Y. Houston

8916 Arlington Church Road

Charlotte, NC 28227

(704) 545-9896

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 depicting the location of the property.



5. Current deed book reference to the property: The most recent deed to the Eli H. and Francis M. Hinson Store can be found in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 4241 Page 996. The Tax Identification Number for the property is 139-37-103. The property is zoned R.
6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Lara Ramsey.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Lara Ramsey.

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 history, architecture, and/or cultural

importance. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the Eli H. and Francis M. Hinson Store possesses special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1. The Eli H. and Francis M. Hinson Store is a physical representation of rural commerce in Mecklenburg County in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The simple brick store, constructed in the late 1880s or early 1890s, served as a center of commercial activity for the farmers in Clear Creek Township. The Hinson Store, and others like it scattered throughout Mecklenburg's countryside, provided a vital link for relatively isolated rural communities to the larger economy of the county.
2. The Hinson Store was built by Eli Hinson, a well-known and successful gold miner, farmer, and businessman, along with his son Francis Martin Hinson, who was also a prominent merchant. Both men were respected and important members of their small rural community located in the center of Clear Creek Township. Eli had been a founding member of Arlington Baptist Church and had donated the land on which the first church building was built. Martin was a teacher at both the Mount Pleasant School and Rutherford College before taking over his father's farm and store. The brick store that remains today replaced the original wood frame store that Eli had opened across Arlington Church Road many years before, and was part of a number of enterprises (including a grist mill and brick yard) that encompassed the Hinson farmstead.

b. Integrity of design, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association.

The Commission contends that the architectural description prepared by Lara Ramsey demonstrates that the Eli H. and Francis M. Hinson 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 that becomes a designated “historic landmark.” The current appraised value of the entire 44.09-acre parcel on which the Hinson store sits is \$18,562.00. The current appraised value of the store building is unknown.

Date of preparation of this report:

July 10, 2004

Prepared by:

Lara Ramsey

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Chicago, IL 60647

**Statement of Significance**  
**Eli H. and Francis M. Hinson Store**

**Summary**

The Eli H. and Francis M. Hinson Store, located at 8925 Arlington Church Road in Mecklenburg County, NC, is a property that possesses local historic significance as an excellent example of the small rural stores that served Mecklenburg County’s farming communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although the years following the Civil War witnessed unprecedented growth for Charlotte and small towns like Davidson and Matthews, Mecklenburg County remained a rural place, populated by modest farms scattered throughout the countryside. Because many farmers were still miles from the nearest railroad town or village, let alone the booming city of Charlotte, rural general stores were a vital commercial center for these families. Usually owned and run by well-off planters, these unassuming stores

provided most of what local families needed or wanted but could not produce themselves, from tools and farm equipment to buttons, ribbons and kitchenware. The Hinson Store was just such a commercial hub for the small community of Allen in Clear Creek Township. Run by Eli Henderson Hinson and his son Francis Martin Hinson, the store sold everything imaginable to its customers, from common household and farming tools to coffins.

The Hinson Store is also significant for its association with Eli Hinson and his son Francis M. Hinson. Eli Hinson had already made a name for himself as a successful gold miner when he moved from his native Union County to Clear Creek Township in the 1850s. Through the last half of the nineteenth century, Eli established a large farmstead that included the general store, brick yard, cotton gin, and grist mill. He also continued to use his knowledge of mining, acting as manager of the Surface Hill gold mine for many years. After a religious conversion that is said to have happened on a Civil War battlefield, Eli also founded Arlington Baptist Church, providing land and funds for the building of the sanctuary. Eli's son Francis Hinson (known in the community as "Martin") followed in his father's footsteps—after attending Rutherford College and teaching school for several years, Martin began working with Eli in the running of the farm, mill, and store. Martin received the deed to the farm in 1887 and continued to operate the store until his death in 1935.

## **Historical Background Statement**

### ***Rural Stores in Mecklenburg County***

The period between the Civil War and the turn of the twentieth century was one of unprecedented growth and prosperity in Mecklenburg County. This economic expansion was most apparent in the emergence of Charlotte as North Carolina's most important trading and manufacturing center, and in the emergence of several small towns along the newly-laid railroad lines that crossed the county. Charlotte had already risen to prominence within the county and among neighboring towns for several reasons:

The railroad, in addition to the discovery of gold in 1799, followed by the establishment of a branch of the United States Mint in 1837, brought Charlotte into the forefront of the Carolinas' economy. By 1860, four converging railroads had made Charlotte a trading center surrounded by a few prosperous plantations and numerous small farmers. The city's population had doubled between 1850 and 1860.<sup>[1]</sup>

Charlotte continued to progress through the Civil War as a center of war time industry, producing cannons, gunpowder, chemicals, and other supplies; these same

industries would provide the base for the city's post-war boom.<sup>[2]</sup> The expansion of the rail lines throughout the county and the coming of cotton textile mills in the late nineteenth century aided in Charlotte's growth, and encouraged the growth of several smaller towns—Pineville, Huntersville, Matthews -- within the county.

Despite the obvious increase of industry and commerce in Charlotte, the county's post-bellum economy remained firmly rural and agricultural. This was partly due to increased production of cotton made possible with the newly discovered fertilizer Peruvian guano. Also, because the vast majority of farms in antebellum Mecklenburg County had been too small to require slave labor, most planters were able to recover quickly after the end of the war, and the number of farms increased steadily in the years following the conflict.<sup>[3]</sup> In 1860, Mecklenburg contained 1182 farms; by 1880, the county had 2645, over twice as many.<sup>[4]</sup> Most of these were modest farms of less than 100 acres, on which were grown a variety of crops, including wheat, corn, and cotton. While many of these farms were within an easy distance of one of the growing railroad towns like Pineville or Matthews, there were many more that remained outside the reach of these commercial centers. These farmers relied upon small country stores, as well as mills, blacksmiths, and other establishments, usually clustered near rural crossroads.



**The Hinson Store retains its rural setting.**

Of course, there had been country stores in Mecklenburg long before the Civil War. In their survey of Mecklenburg's rural resources, Sherry Joines and Dan Morrill explain that "as the number of farmers increased [in the first decades of the nineteenth century], blacksmith shops, carpenters, grist mills, and country stores developed in

Charlotte, Paw Creek, Hopewell, Providence, Sugar Creek, and Rocky River, as well as other rural sections of Mecklenburg County.”<sup>[5]</sup> These modest shops were the commercial backbone of the county, providing farmers with goods and services that had previously required travel to a larger trading center like Charleston or, later, Charlotte. Most of the county’s early dry goods stores offered an array of household goods, as well as tools and other farming aids. The inventory for an early dry goods store owned by James Torrence, son of prominent planter Hugh Torrence, is indicative of the goods offered by most general stores in the county: “James purchased most of his initial inventory from merchants in Philadelphia. According to the receipts from his first buying trip in May and June, 1805, James spent nearly \$4000.00 to purchase ribbons, cloths, buttons, dishes, jugs, tools, kettles, shovels, curry combs, rat traps and hardware.”<sup>[6]</sup> Farmers in ante-bellum Mecklenburg rarely paid for these goods with cash—most traded portions of their harvest or other products from their farms in exchange for merchandise, with cash sometimes given as partial payment. This system of exchange continued to be used by many rural stores through the mid-1800s. Store owners also extended credit to customers.<sup>[7]</sup>

As the number of small farms increased in Mecklenburg County in the late 1800s, so did the number of rural stores. Many owners of existing general stores simply expanded to accommodate the new customers; others built new establishments. Some of these stores were built along one of the many new rail lines crossing the county, others were built at rural crossroads or near other establishments like mills or blacksmith shops. Like the early dry goods stores established almost a century before, these country stores provided an important commercial center for Mecklenburg’s farming communities.

### ***The Eli H. and Francis M. Hinson Store***

The Eli H. and Francis M. Hinson Store was one of these rural general stores that prospered along with Mecklenburg’s farmers in the late nineteenth century. The one-story brick building, constructed in the late 1880s or early 1890s, was meant to replace the frame store that Eli Hinson had opened years before. Born in 1824 in Union County, Eli Hinson had achieved modest success as a gold miner and farmer there before moving to Mecklenburg County in the 1850s.<sup>[8]</sup> Eli, his wife Tursey, and their young son R. Martin settled in Clear Creek Township, in a two-story brick house originally built by Colonel David Kerr in 1786.<sup>[9]</sup>

In 1863, at the age of 39, Eli Hinson joined the Confederate Army, enlisting as a private in Company I of the 48<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment North Carolina.<sup>[10]</sup> Local legend holds that Eli “dedicated himself to the Lord and wanted to put down his gun and pick up his Bible to promise the Lord’s work” on a Virginia battlefield in 1864.<sup>[11]</sup> Eli went on to found Arlington Baptist Church after the war:

Upon his return home, he, with other interested Christians, met for worship in a brush arbor on his plantation . . . In 1875, Mr. Hinson built a small one room house, twenty by thirty-five feet, and dedicated it to God and his people. . . . The first baptisms were held in the stream near Eli Hinson’s old gristmill, located back of the church. This was the community social center and the people voted here in county and state elections.<sup>[12]</sup>

In 1884, Eli and Tursey Hinson deeded a 4.5-acre lot north of their farmhouse to the church. A modest sanctuary was erected on this donated land, constructed of bricks “made by hand at the rear of the building by men in the community.”<sup>[13]</sup>

Eli established a large and productive farmstead during the 1860s and 70s. In addition to planting wheat and Indian corn and raising milk cows and hogs, Eli operated a grist mill, cotton gin, and thriving general store.<sup>[14]</sup> The original frame building that housed the store sat beside the Hinson’s farmhouse.<sup>[15]</sup> After the end of the war, Eli took on several tenants to cultivate land on the farm. Early meetings of Arlington Baptist were held in one of the tenant houses on Eli’s property; and church records indicate that by the 1880s, there were four tenant families living on the Hinson Farm.<sup>[16]</sup>

In addition to overseeing operations on the farm, Eli continued to work in gold mining, acting as manager for the Surface Hill Gold Mine in Clear Creek.<sup>[17]</sup> The *Charlotte News* described Eli’s mining work in his obituary in 1916:

Mr. Hinson was one of the pioneer gold miners of this county and successfully operated the Surface Hill mine in Clear Creek township for many years. He was considered one of the best informed men on mining subjects in the state and from time to time during his life had much experience in operating other mines than the one at Surface Hill.<sup>[18]</sup>

In 1887, Eli and Tursey Hinson deeded approximately 250 acres of their farmstead—including the brick farmhouse and surrounding land on the east side of Arlington Church Road and land directly across from the house, on the west side of the road—to their son Francis Martin Hinson.<sup>[19]</sup> Martin, who was 31, had attended Mount Pleasant Institute and Rutherford College, and had taught at both schools before returning home to the Hinson Farm.<sup>[20]</sup> Martin gradually took over the running of the farm, including the grist mill and gin, and the general store. Eli, approaching 70, continued working as manager at the Surface Hill Mine.<sup>[21]</sup> Eli and Tursey remained

in the brick house, and Martin built a white frame house on the property for his own family. The house, which sat perpendicular to the street, its front elevation facing the side of the brick farmhouse, has since been demolished.<sup>[22]</sup>

It was probably sometime around the time of this transaction that the present Hinson Store was built, directly across Arlington Church Road from the Hinson Farmhouse. Descendants of the Hinson Family assert that Eli built the store soon after the sanctuary for Arlington Baptist was built, using the same handmade bricks from Eli's brick yard.<sup>[23]</sup> However, the transfer of the farm to Martin, as well as the listing of Martin as a merchant and owner of a grist mill and gin in several business directories, indicate that Martin Hinson had at least some measure of involvement with the store's construction. By the time of Eli's death at age 94 in 1916, Martin had had full control of the farm and store for decades.<sup>[24]</sup>



**The Hinson Store is currently used for storage.**

Martin Hinson operated the farm, mill and store into the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>[25]</sup> By 1920, however, Martin began to focus more of his energies into running and expanding the general store. The 1920 and 1930 census records list his profession as simply “merchant—general store,” and list several of his family as salesladies or clerks at the store.<sup>[26]</sup> Martin continued to manage the store until his death in 1935.<sup>[27]</sup> According to Martin's granddaughter Mildred Hartsell, Martin's son Raymond (who had moved into the brick house across the street from the store) attempted to keep the general store open after his father's death, but eventually gave up the venture.<sup>[28]</sup> In 1946, Martin's heirs sold the property, including the original Kerr farmhouse and brick store, to H. J. Houston and his wife Florence.<sup>[29]</sup> Houston

converted the store building for storage, adding a shed-roof lean-to onto the north end of the building to house farm equipment. The store has remained in the Houston family since 1946 and is currently owned by B. David Houston, Henry T. Houston, and his wife Margie Y. Houston.

## **Physical Description**

### *Site Description*

The Eli H. and Francis M. Hinson Store is located at 8925 Arlington Church Road, in the Clear Creek Township of Mecklenburg County. The store sits on a 44.09-acre site that borders the west side of Arlington Church Road, and faces northeast (approximately) onto the road. Located near the southeast corner of the lot, at the edge of the right-of-way for Arlington Church Road, the store faces the two-story brick house—built by Colonel David Kerr in 1786 and the former residence of Eli Hinson and his family—on the east side of Arlington Church Road. A number of farm buildings are located southeast of the store, including several storage buildings, two silos, three barns, and a grain bin. A dirt drive runs along the northwest elevation of the store, continuing past the rear of the building.

### *Architectural Description*



The Eli H. and Francis M. Hinson store is a one-story, gable-front, brick building with a half basement. The walls of the store are made of brick laid in common bond. The

low-pitched roof is covered with corrugated metal, as is the underside of the southwest gable and the shed-roof lean-to on the southeast elevation of the store. The lean-to, which runs along the entire length of the elevation, was added by H. J. Houston shortly after he purchased the property in 1946.<sup>[30]</sup> Exposed rafter tails provide a subtle decoration under the eaves along the northwest and southeast elevations.

The façade (northeast elevation) of the store is approximately two bays wide. A simple, shed porch supported with four metal poles stretches across the elevation just under the gable, protecting the storefront from the elements. Two large, six-over-six, wood frame windows dominate the elevation; underneath each window is a simple wood panel that continues to the ground. Centered between these two windows and flanked by two square brick pilasters, is the main entrance to the store. A large, two-light transom sits atop a set of wood doors, each with two glazed panels above a single wood panel. Many of the panes in the windows and doors of the façade (and on the rest of the store's elevations) have lost their glass, and the large storefront windows and door have been covered with wire. The brick pilasters that flank the doorway continue up along the gable wall; a large fan pierces the gable between the pilasters.

The northwest and southwest elevations are plain and unadorned, the brick interrupted only by windows and doors. Three lunette windows regularly punctuate the northeast wall of the store. Toward the rear (west corner) of the elevation are a doorway topped with a segmented arch leading into the rear of the store, and a segmented arch basement window. Another segmented arch doorway and window, similar to those on the northeast elevation, pierce the southwest (rear) elevation.

The author was not able to gain access to the interior of the store.

Although in a state of disrepair, the Eli H. and Francis M. Hinson Store remains as an example of the many small rural stores that flourished in post-bellum Mecklenburg County. The modest brick building provided an important commercial center for farming families too far from large trading centers like Charlotte, and even from smaller railroad towns like Pineville or Matthews. The store also serves as a reminder of the influence of Eli and Martin Hinson within their small Clear Creek community.



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[1] Sherry J. Joines and Dr. Dan L. Morrill, “Historic Rural Resources in Mecklenburg County, North

Carolina” <<http://www.cmhpf.org/surveyruralcontext.htm>> (10 July 2004), Antebellum Period.

[2] Thomas Hanchett, “Growth of Charlotte: A History” <<http://www.cmhpf.org/educhargrowth.htm>> (10 July 2004).

[3] Joines and Morrill, “Historic Rural Resources in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina,” Reconstruction.

[4] University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, *United States Historical Census Data*

*Browser*, ONLINE, 1998, University of Virginia, Available: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/>

(10 July 2004).

[5] Joines and Morrill, "Historic Rural Resources in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina," Antebellum Period.

[6] Paula N. Stathakis, "Survey and Research Report on Cedar Grove and the Hugh Torrance House and Store," (written 22 April 1993)  
< <http://www.cmhpf.org/S&RR/CedarGrove-ToranceHseStore.html> > (10 July 2004).

[7] Ibid.

[8] "Mr. Eli Hinson, One of Oldest Residences in County, is Dead," *Charlotte News*, 23 October 1916.

[9] Joines and Morrill, "Summaries of All Rural Properties Identified," page 6  
< <http://www.cmhpf.org/ruralresourcesp6.htm> > (10 July 2004).

[10] Historical Data Systems, comp., *Military Records of Individual Civil War Soldiers*, [database online] (Provo, UT: [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com), 1999-).

[11] "Arlington Baptist Church 1880-1980: Centennial Celebration," (unpublished history of the church, 1980), 3.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid, 4.

[14] 1850 United States Federal Population Schedules, Union County, Roll M432\_647, Page 86; 1860 United States Federal Population Schedules, Mecklenburg County, Roll 906, Page 32; 1860 United States Federal Agriculture Schedules, Mecklenburg County, Page 7; "Arlington Baptist Church 1880-1980: Centennial Celebration," 3.

[15] Joines and Morrill, "Summaries of All Rural Properties Identified," page 5  
< <http://www.cmhpf.org/ruralresourcesp5.htm> > (10 July 2004).

[16] "Arlington Baptist Church 1880-1980: Centennial Celebration," 3.

[17] Levi Branson, A. M., ed., *Branson's North Carolina Business Directory, 1896* (Raleigh, NC: Levi Branson, Office Publisher, 1896), 419.

[18] *Charlotte News*, 23 October 1916.

[19] Register of Deeds, Mecklenburg County Courthouse, Deed Book 54, Page 214-215.

[20] *Charlotte Observer*, 27 September 1935, Section One, Page 12.

[21] Branson, 419.

[22] Mildred Hartsell, telephone interview with author, 21 June 2004.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] *Charlotte News*, 23 October 1916.

[25] *The North Carolina Year Book and Business Directory, 1905* (Raleigh, NC: The News and Observer, 1905), 388; *The North Carolina Year Book and Business Directory, 1914* (Raleigh, NC: The News and Observer, 1914), 295.

[26] 1920 United States Federal Population Schedules, Mecklenburg County, Roll T625\_1310, Page 14A; 1930 United States Federal Population Schedules, Mecklenburg County, ED 53. The household was assigned numbers for the agricultural schedules in both census years—it's likely that most of the farm work was being done by tenants.

[27] "Francis Hinson Dies at Allen," *Charlotte Observer*, 27 September 1925, Section 1/Page 1.

[28] Hartsell, interview.

[29] Register of Deeds, Mecklenburg County Courthouse, Deed Book, 1234 Page 485.

[30] Hartsell, interview.