



Survey and Research Report on the William Little House



1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the William Little House is located at 2301 Red Fox Trail, Charlotte, North Carolina.

2. Name and address of the present owner of the property: The present owners of the property are:

Cecil P. and Laura V. Poole
2301 Red Fox Trail
Charlotte, NC 28211-3764

3. Representative photographs of the property: This report contains photographs of the property.

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



5. Current tax parcel information for the property: The tax parcel number of the property is 183-052-01

6. UTM coordinates: UTM 17 516835E 3890737N

7. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property.

8. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property.

9. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets 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 Commission judges that the property known

as the William Little House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

- 1) The William Little House is significant as a rare example of Modernist residential architecture with a high degree of material integrity in the City of Charlotte.
- 2) The William Little House is unusual as an example of single-family residence built using commercial/institutional materials and building techniques.
- 3) The William Little House was a collaboration between William Little, a prominent commercial builder, and Harold Cooler, a prominent Modernist architect active in Charlotte for nearly fifty years.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the physical and architectural description which is included in this report demonstrates that the William Little House meets this criterion.

10. 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 a designated "historic landmark." The current total appraised value of the improvements is \$102,600. The current appraised value of the lot is \$540,000. The current total value is \$642,600.

11. Portion of property recommended for designation: The exterior and interior of the house, and the property associated with the tax parcel are recommended for historic designation.

Date of preparation of this report: August 2003

Prepared by: Stewart Gray and Dr. Paula M. Stathakis

Historical Overview



The William Little House, completed in 1960, is one of the few remaining examples of modern residential architecture in Charlotte. The house, built by William Little, was designed to reflect his desire for a modern, functional and low maintenance dwelling.

Very few Charlotte homeowners in the post war period were interested in homes with exterior modern design, but everyone wanted a home full of all available modern conveniences.^[1] Indeed, this remained the trend throughout the second half of the twentieth century. In spite of a short-lived interest in modernism, house styles remained conservative and traditional. With regard to residential style preferences in the post-war period, Wilmington builder C.L. Reavis noted that "...styles have changed, but they haven't changed that much." The public's tastes were still in the traditionalist camp, assumptions that North Carolina's post-war population was better educated and more sophisticated, as well as more prosperous notwithstanding. With the exception of public buildings, the state's reputation for progressivism was not strongly evident in its architecture.^[2]

In addition to the public's reluctance to embrace any style that was a dramatic departure from the traditional form, financial considerations also account for the prevalence of conservative building designs. The Federal Housing Administration, a primary financing agency for many housing developments, encouraged developers to pursue low-risk projects. This resulted in the preponderance of Colonial Revival and other historically influenced, and therefore financially prudent, styles. Traditional architecture was also easier and cheaper to construct.^[3]

Although most individuals preferred to live in a modern suburban home built in a Colonial Revival style, a number of prominent Charlotte architects, such as A.G. Odell, J. Norman Pease, Jr., Jack Boyte, Walter Bost, Murray Whisnant, and Harold Cooler, were proponents of the modernist movement. Examples of their work are scarce, either because they have been torn down or because the demand for buildings and homes in the modernist style was minimal. However, even in modest proportions, these designers imprinted the city landscape through such public edifices as Garinger High School, The [Charlotte Coliseum \(now Cricket Arena\) and Ovens Auditorium](#), The [Home Federal Building](#), and the J. N. Pease and Associates Building.^[4]

William Little was a general contractor; he owned Little Construction, which subsequently developed into Little and Company, a real estate development and financing firm, which specialized in the construction of institutional buildings. Some of Little's most notable projects were two dormitories at the University of North Carolina (Craig and Erhinghaus), two dormitories at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, branch libraries, and the first major renovation of Charlotte Memorial Hospital [now Carolinas Medical Center].^[5] The requirements around which his house was designed was the desire to have a low maintenance, family friendly, and fire proof structure. A reflection of his institutional building experience, the house has terrazzo floors, built-in cabinets in the bedrooms, and bathrooms clad entirely in tile.^[6]

William Little asked his friend, architect Harold Cooler, to design the house. Little already had the framing plan prepared by J.N. Pease, and Cooler worked from this plan. Cooler's instructions were that the house had to be modern and that it was to be built from commercial materials, because as Little told Cooler, "That's what my people know." Aside from these requirements, Cooler had complete freedom with his design plan.^[7]

Harold Cooler, a South Carolina native, graduated from Clemson College in 1943. After serving in the Army Corps of Engineers during the Second World War, he settled in Charlotte, because "that's where the work was." He began his career with Wooten and Wooten Architecture and Engineering, whose offices were in the Latta Arcade, near A.G. Odell's. He subsequently took a position with C.W. Connelly, where he worked on the Myers Park County Club. Following his experience with the Connelly firm, he ventured out on his own, partnering with Marshall McDowell, and by the 1970s, was the principal of his own firm. His commercial projects include various medical buildings, the Hawthorne Medical Center, the Sutton House Apartments, Kimbrell's Furniture store on South Boulevard, and the Epicurean Restaurant. He also designed a number of houses, but few of them strayed from the traditional designs preferred by Charlotte clients. The Little House and the Holbrook House (located at 4141 Arbor Way) are two examples of his modern residential

designs in which home owners allowed him considerable latitude in which to experiment and, as he put it, “to have fun.”^[8]

Cooler’s primary concern when designing the Little residence was that his modern plan would not find acceptance in Foxcroft, an otherwise traditionally styled neighborhood. Much to his surprise, a free hand perspective submitted for pre-construction approval was approved; however, once construction started and the distinctive aspect of the house became evident, neighbors and the neighborhood agency was unreserved in their displeasure of the house. Pressure was put on Little to modify the exterior by changing the flat roof, but Little insisted the house be built according to plan -- plans that had received prior approval by the neighborhood regulating agency.^[9]

The aspects of the Little House design in which Cooler takes the greatest pride are the exterior details, such as the carport screening device, and the interior “demarcation of zones.” The nighttime, daylight, and service areas are all distinct from each other. When asked how he might explain the philosophy of his design to someone unfamiliar or unappreciative of this architectural style, Cooler offered the following: “Anyone who is critical of the house from the curb needs to look inside. They’ll see that it is a well organized house-organized around the needs of a family.”^[10]

In 1968 Mr. and Mrs. Cy N. Bahakel, purchased the house from the William Littles. Mr. Bahakel is perhaps best known as a broadcasting magnate. He owns several television and radio broadcasting stations. Bahakel also served as a state senator in the mid-seventies and his support was instrumental in the establishment of the Medical School at Eastern Carolina University.^[11] The Littles later purchased the house back from the Bahakels.^[12]

Architectural Description

The Little House is a large but low, masonry, concrete, and glass flat-roofed house facing north on a corner lot that slopes steeply to the southeast. The house stretches approximately 95 feet east to west and is set back about 100 feet from the principal neighborhood street, Red Fox Trail. As an example of domestic Modernist Style architecture, the house is unique in the immediate streetscape.



This Colonial Revival home is typical of the Red Fox Trail Neighborhood houses.

The house features solid masonry exterior walls veneered with white brick laid in a running bond. These wall sections are interrupted by floor to ceiling openings filled with aluminum frames containing glass, panels, or doors. The flat roof is supported by steel bar joists resting on the masonry walls and in some locations supported by steel posts. While not a traditional Split-Level, there is a short set of steps leading up to the bedroom wing from the principal section of the house. The principal section of the house sits on a slab poured on grade and consists of the living room, dining room, kitchen and entrance hall. The bedroom wing, taking advantage of the slope of the lot, is constructed over a large basement. Extremely unusual in residential architecture but common in commercial construction, is the bedroom wing's elevated reinforced concrete floor.

A short driveway coming off of Pomfret Lane leads to a large and prominent carport supported by brick pier/walls in a saw tooth design, infilled with decorative masonry screens. Somewhat overshadowed by the carport, the house's main entrance faces Red Fox Trail, and was approached originally by a terrazzo walk adjacent to the back wall of the carport. The walk has been recovered with concrete, as the terrazzo was extremely slippery when wet^[13]. The original terrazzo, sectioned into large squares by inset brass bars, remains in place on the front door's stoop, and continues inside in the front hallway. Four tube steel posts resting on a white brick retaining wall line the front walk. Mitered to these posts and resting on the brickwork of the carport and the house are tube steel beams supporting a flat walkway canopy.

While the carport obscures a short utilitarian section of the front elevation, the remainder of the façade can be divided into three distinct sections, the recessed front entrance, a large bank of windows, and the shallow projecting westernmost bay. The double solid-core front doors feature fifteen rectangular colored lights (single units of glass) of various sizes set into the door in a nonlinear pattern. Large clear five-light

transom/sidelights in a simple aluminum frame integrated with the doorframe fill the wall opening to the soffit and ceiling heights. Notable are the Modernist Style horizontal door handles similar to those found on the [Praise Connor Lee House](#).



From the front doorway the façade extends to the west and, taking advantage of the slope of the lot, prominent horizontal lines, and some cantilevering, gives the impression that the house's large white mass is somewhat suspended above the landscape. Centered in the fully exposed section of the façade, a long ribbon of eight metal-framed window units provide light and ventilation for two bedrooms and a bath. Each window unit, approximately 40" wide, is divided into three sections. The top section contains a large single light. Below the single light and near the midpoint of the window unit is a short, operable hopper sash with an exterior screen. The bottom section is filled with a panel covered with one-inch square ceramic tiles. An abstract pattern is achieved with red, yellow, green, and light blue tiles over a background of blue tiles. While the patterns may appear to be random, some of the same relationships between colored tiles can be seen in the various panels. A wide sloping stuccoed soffit protects the ribbon of windows. Water on the flat-roof drains through scupper holes without aid of downspouts.



The westernmost section of the façade features a shallow cantilevered wall section supported by two short but massive reinforced tapered concrete brackets. The section of the façade extends to the edge of the soffit. According to the architect, Harold Cooler of McDowell & Cooler Architects, the brackets were added during construction. The original design for the cantilevered section called for an unsupported cantilevered concrete slab with steel support imbedded in the concrete. The construction crew that poured the elevated slab floor, left out the extra steel, and when masons began building the brick wall section on the cantilevered section, the concrete began to deflect. Harold Cooler rushed to the site and designed the reinforced concrete brackets, which are integrated with concrete piers that run to the floor of the basement.^[14] The cantilevered wall features geometric patterns designed by the architect, formed by projecting bricks. The small east wall formed by the projection is filled by a narrow window unit.

The relatively narrow west elevation features a wall composed solely of the same metal-framed three-part window units found on the front elevation, also with tiled lower panels. The windows are protected by a generous overhang and by shallow projecting sidewalls. The basement wall on the west elevation appears to be fully exposed and is pierced by short hopper windows set high in the wall.

On the east elevation a single metal-framed three-part window unit with a cream/yellow solid “Transite”^[15] asbestos/cement panel in the lower section of the window is separated from a pair of the window units by an unadorned section of brick wall. To the south of the paired windows is an expanse of brick decorated with the same geometric designs found on the projecting section of the front elevation.

The rear elevation features the same metal-framed three-part window units found in the other elevations. The versatility of these window units is demonstrated on the rear elevation where the solid lower panels found on the other elevations have been replaced with glass.

The interior of the Little House has retained a good degree of integrity. The principal section of the house features a two-way fireplace (open on two side so that the fire can be viewed and felt from two different rooms) that pierces a large masonry mass topped by metal framing now exposed for renovation. A cast hearth projects from the masonry mass. The entrance hall features a built-in tiled bench. Close by, an expanded-metal guardrail topped with a wood cap borders steps leading into the basement. In the principal section of the house some original floor coverings have been removed, including vinyl and wood parquet tiles glued to the slab subfloor. Originally the ceiling in the principal section of the house was suspended acoustical tiles, which are now being replaced with drywall. The current restoration of the property has revealed that at least some of the interior walls are of solid masonry construction. Various types, sizes, and colors of brick and masonry block were used in the construction of the house's interior and exterior walls where the odd masonry would be covered either by paneling, or by the white brick found on the exterior and interior walls of the house.

The entrance to the bedroom wing is accented with open decorative block, like those used in the masonry screens in the carport. In the bedroom wing solid masonry walls skimmed with plaster are flush with the metal interior door frames. Architect Harold Cooler indicates this design minimized the need for interior trim. Wardrobes in the bedrooms were likely stock institutional fixtures.^[16] Bathrooms feature tiled floors and walls without any intervening moulding or trim.

Significance of the Architectural Features

The 1960 Little House is a rare example of a single family residence built largely with commercial building techniques and materials. Harold Cooler describes the design of the house as a collaboration between himself and the owner/builder William Little. William Little owned Little Construction, a firm specializing in institutional buildings. Little was building a major addition to Charlotte Memorial Hospital while he was planning and building his home on Red Fox Trail. Cooler recalls that Little was insistent on a flat roof, because he wanted to use bar joists, lightweight steel girders composed of steel angle connected by welded angled steel bars, because he was familiar with and liked using the product. Little's other requirement was that the fenestration be designed around the metal-framed three-part window units used in the

house. Cooler believes these window units were part of a much larger order for some commercial or institutional project like Memorial Hospital. With those two conditions, the flat roof and the window units, Cooler had a generally freehand in the design of the house. Cooler describes the period when he designed the house as an “Experimental time,” and that clients generally gave him a lot of freedom to be creative in his designs. The geometric designs found in the brickwork and the front doors were Cooler’s.



Detail of the carport

Working with Little, Cooler incorporated numerous commercial/institutional elements such as the elevated reinforced concrete floor of the bedroom wing into the house. The plaster walls in the bedrooms were typical for hospital construction because they were more durable than drywall and were thought to be more hygienic. The same can be said of the all-tile bathrooms.

Harold Cooler’s work in Charlotte includes the Hawthorne Medical Building, the Hardware Association Building on Louise Avenue, and several apartment buildings including the Sutton House at 511 Queens Road. Like the Little House, the Sutton House Apartment Building features abstract geometrical patterns in the brickwork. His single-family residential work was limited in Charlotte, but does include two Modernist/Contemporary homes not far from the Little House in South Charlotte.



Sutton House at 511
Queens Road

Harold Cooler, Architect

The 1999 - 2000 Post-World War II Survey of Buildings in Charlotte sponsored by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission and the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office identified two house types that could be applied to the Little House. Defined as a “Contemporary House” in the survey, the Little House best fit the sub-category “Formal”.

This contemporary type has an irregular layout like the William Little House, but it is less horizontal and usually noticeably more compact. Its exterior materials are less naturalistic than those found on other contemporary houses, thus lending itself to a more formal appearance. Tile and aluminum are common siding materials, and the type has a flat roof. Like other contemporary houses, the formal takes advantage of any natural landscape features. It may or may not use ribbon windows, and most use of windows and glass is reserved for the rear.^[17]

However, the horizontal nature of the rather large Little House, gives the home some association with the “Rambler Ranch” category.

It is long, with a facade that rambles across the width of the lot. Various projecting and receding planes on the facade further the rambling appearance. The rambler ranch is one-story high, has a very low pitch hip or gabled roof, and may or may not incorporate a cross gable. The facade usually contains a mix of ribbon windows

and large picture windows, and integrates natural and horizontally oriented materials, such as wood, stone, and Roman brick. A wide, low chimney often rises up from near the center of the house. In rare cases, when the homebuilder's lot did not permit the rambler to be constructed parallel to the street, the home is oriented so that the narrower end of the home faces the street. The rambler almost always incorporates a garage, either prominently on one end of the house, or discretely in the basement.^[18]

It is typical that Modernist Style homes do not fit as neatly into one form, sub-style, or category as do other styles. Among the limited number of architect-designed Modernist Style homes in Charlotte, their designs, scale, and forms vary wildly. While the basic tenant of the Modernist Movement emphasized “function and utility; abstract beauty, sculptural form, and symbolism; honesty in materials, and the use of modern materials and technology as well as an emphasis on the use of natural materials,”^[19] architects felt free to experiment^[20], and these homes appear to be very personal expression of architects, or in the case of the William Little House, the architect-client relationship. The Little House is one of only seven Modernist Style single-family homes identified as potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places during the Post-World War II Survey. While several additional significant Modernist homes have been identified as more attention has been paid to post-World War architecture, it can be concluded that all pre-1965 Modernist Style homes in Charlotte are rare; and those, such as the William Little House, with a high degree of integrity and associated with a local or otherwise prominent architect are significant.

[1] Post World War II Survey: <http://www.cmhpf.org/postww2survey.htm>. Harold Cooler also designed the James and Elizabeth Purcell House in Davidson. [Click here for Survey and Research Report.](#)

[2] Catherine Bishir, Charlotte Brown, Carl Lounsbury, Ernest Wood, Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1990), pp. 400- 401, 426. See the Post World War II Survey for examples of public buildings in this category in Charlotte.

[3] Post World War II Survey.

[4] Ibid. Also refer to the list of properties from the Post World War II Survey Eligible for The National Register of Historic Places:
<http://www.cmhpf.org/NationalRegisternew.htm>

[5] Interview, William Little II, August 2003; Interview Harold Cooler, August 2003.

[6] Interview, William Little II.

[7] Interview, Harold Cooler.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Deed 2541-483. *The Charlotte News*, January 5, 1983, p. 8A.

[12] See deeds 2541-483; 4596-51; 2981-76.

[13] Interview with William Little, Jr., the son of the builder in August, 2003.

[14] Interview with Harold Cooler, Architect, August 2003.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Interview with William Little, Jr.

[17] “Final Report: Post World War Two Survey” Sherry Joines Wyatt & Sarah Woodard for David E. Gall Architects, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 2000.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Interview with Harold Cooler.