

**SURVEY AND RESEARCH REPORT**  
**ON**  
**Martin's Grocery**



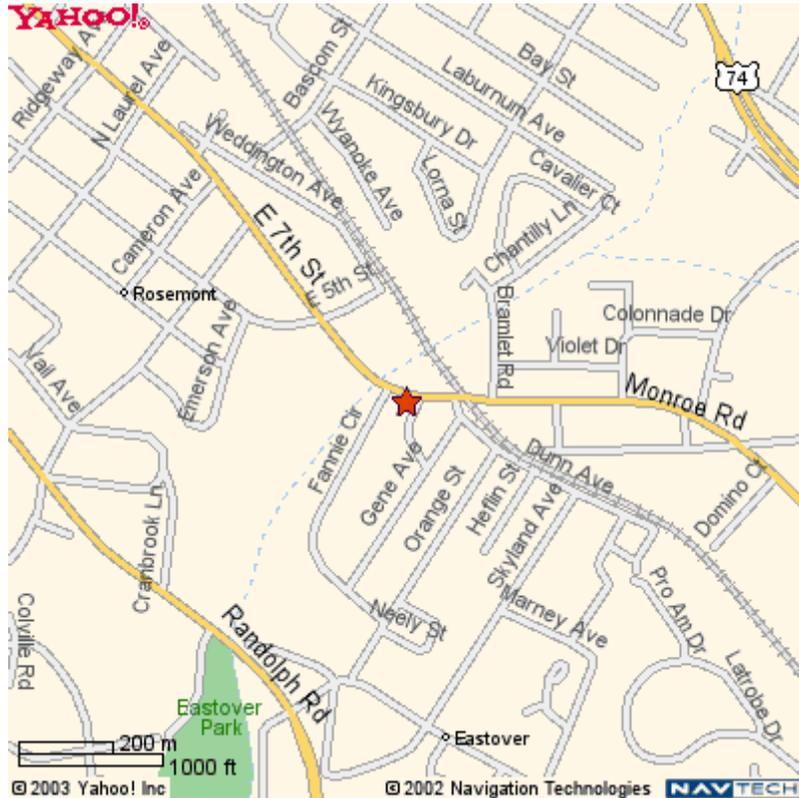
**1. Name and location of the property: The property known as Martin's Grocery is located at 2718 Monroe Road, Charlotte, North Carolina.**

**2. Name and address of the present owner of the property: The present owner of the property is:**

**Hard Times Café Inc. and Lupie's Café  
2718 Monroe Road  
Charlotte, NC 28205**

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

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



**5. UTM coordinate: 17 517398 E 3895481 N**

**6. Current deed book and tax parcel information for the property: The tax parcel number of the property is # 15701535. The most recent deed book reference is 07387-030.**

**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 Martin's Grocery does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:**

**1) The Martin's Grocery and the attached Keller's Garage addition are significant for their association with Arthur S. Grier, an important civic leader and businessman.**

**2) The Martin's Grocery is significant as one of the very few pre-World War II commercial buildings associated with Mecklenburg County's African American Community.**

**3) The Martin's Grocery is significant as a rare example of an African American businessman developing commercial property that was rented to a white tenant, Rex Martin.**

**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 Martin's Grocery 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 \$98,800. The current appraised value of the lot is \$211,300. The current total value is \$310,100.**

**Date of preparation of this report: August 2003**

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

## Historical Overview



Arthur  
S.  
Grier

**Arthur Samuel Grier, a prominent African American community and civic leader, built the Martin Grocery building in 1938. This structure has been subsequently occupied by other businesses such as a Texaco gas station, Witt's Body Shop and Lupie's Café.**

**By the time Arthur Samuel Grier died at 82 years of age in 1969, he was well known as a successful and well-respected citizen and businessman. Grier was born in 1887 on the Sarah Grier Farm on Providence Road. His origins were humble; Grier grew up as a farm laborer and only had a third grade education. Grier overcame these liabilities and became a civic leader in the African American Community and was well connected and influential within the city at large. His achievements were a result of his business acumen. By the end of his life he wore many hats; he was the developer of one of the first suburban neighborhoods**

for blacks; he was an entrepreneur; he was active in local civic and political arenas; and he was a high ranking figure in the Catawba Presbytery.<sup>[i]</sup>

Grier's achievements are all the more impressive when viewed in the racial and social context of early twentieth century Mecklenburg. Grier and other African American businessmen who established themselves during this period encountered an array of complex obstacles. For example, Jim Crow culture stifled entrepreneurial growth, since most black shopkeepers and service providers could only cater to a black clientele. Segregation also limited employment opportunities for African Americans. It was difficult for an aspiring African American to refine a public image that would satisfy whites; blacks who appeared to have too much ambition were considered "uppity," and blacks who seemed to have no ambition were labeled "shiftless." Perhaps the ideal African American was described in civic promotional literature published by The Greater Charlotte Club in 1913. This pamphlet praised the friendly and co-operative relationship that existed between Mecklenburg's white and African American communities and concluded by saying that "*the Negro is welcomed in the pursuits to which he is best adapted, [italics not original]* and there is nothing of the race prejudice felt elsewhere and he is given every opportunity to better his own condition and that of his children."<sup>[ii]</sup>

African Americans in the south got along best when they "knew their place and they stayed in it." The majority of African-Americans in Charlotte worked as common laborers or in the service sector. A minority were merchants or small business owners, and an even smaller minority was in the professional class. Clergymen dominated in the black professional and upper class. In 1911, there were two attorneys, fourteen barbers, one dentist, five physicians, five nurses, two funeral directors, and sixty-seven clergy, in addition to proprietors of billiard rooms, drug stores, eating houses, as well as several other types of businesses that were listed in the Charlotte City Directory.<sup>[iii]</sup> With the exception of the professional classes, most blacks in Charlotte had no education, no skilled training, and no political voice.

By the early twentieth century, thanks to vagaries of segregation laws and customs, the African American

business community was fairly well self-contained. Black businesses were sequestered in a separate location from the larger white district. If African Americans wished to eat inside a restaurant, they had to patronize a black-owned establishment; if they required legal, financial, or medical services, they sought the services of black professionals. There were a few businesses that were used by clients of both races, such as barbershops and shoe repair shops; but generally, in the urban setting, the white and black worlds drifted apart. These economic and occupational trends continued well into the first half of the twentieth century. By 1940, 88.8% of the non-white employed workers fourteen and older in the city of Charlotte were concentrated in the following categories: operative, domestic worker, service, and non-farm labor. By contrast, 77.6% of white employed workers fourteen and older in Charlotte were concentrated in the categories of professional, managerial, clerical sales and operatives.<sup>[iv]</sup> These statistics demonstrate the significance of Grier's achievements during his lifetime.

Grier's first public employment was with Cole Manufacturing Company; and he bought his first piece of real estate, a house in the Cherry neighborhood, with the money he saved from this job. His entrepreneurial career began in 1911 when he opened Grier's Grocery on Monroe Road.<sup>[v]</sup> He built a large and stylish home across the street from the store in 1922. This two-story eclectic style home with craftsman details was as impressive as any African American middle or upper class home to be found in the Brooklyn neighborhood in the city's Second Ward.

Grier's Grocery was one of the few groceries in the area just beyond the city limits on Monroe Road and served the surrounding neighborhoods of Elizabeth, Chantilly, and Elizabeth Acres, later known as Griertown and now known as Grier Heights.<sup>[vi]</sup> Former Charlotte City Council member Fred Alexander had fond memories of Grier's Grocery. Alexander said, "his little country store on Monroe Road was one of the closest places to buy firecrackers." Grier could sell these since his store was just beyond the city limits and not subject to the laws prohibiting the sale of fireworks.<sup>[vii]</sup>

Grier left the grocery business in 1932 to establish Grier and Thompson Funeral Home. His brother Leroy took over the

grocery business as Arthur Samuel Grier focused on the organization of the new enterprise. Leroy Grier joined his brother and nephew in the business in 1938 as president of Grier and Thompson.<sup>[viii]</sup>

Before Leroy Grier left to join his brother in the funeral business, the grocery was rebuilt across Monroe Road at its present site in 1938. Brick masons and builders who lived in Grier Heights, such as Ed Wallace and Haywood Polk, built the new store. The space was rented to Rex Martin, a white shopkeeper, who owned and operated the business until the late 1960s. After Martin went out of business, other grocery stores occupied the site, under the ownership of Bill Brown and later the Murphy Brothers. During the tenure of the Murphy Brothers, part of the building was leased to Mr. Keller who ran a Texaco Service Station. Keller eventually built a new station across the street, and his space was leased by Witt's Body Shop. The entire building is currently owned and occupied by a café.

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<sup>[i]</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, February 19, 1969, "A.S. Grier, Negro Developer, Dies." Mamie Zillman.

<sup>[ii]</sup> The Greater Charlotte Club, *Charlotte*, Charlotte, N.C., 1913, "Charlotte's Negroes."

<sup>[iii]</sup> *Charlotte City Directory*, 1911. The business section of the 1911 City Directory indicates an African-American presence in the following occupations: Attorneys: 2 of a total of 48; Barbers: 14 of 34; Billiard & Pool Rooms: 2 of 6; Boarding Houses: 2 of 36; Tobacco shops: 2 of 16; Cleaning & Pressing: 12 of 21; Clergy: 67 of 112; Dentists: 1 of 15; Dressmakers: 3 of 22; Drug Stores: 3 of 21; Eating Houses: 22 of 24; Fish, Oyster & Game: 2 of 5; Funeral Directors: 2 of 4; General Merchandise: 1 of 20; Grocers: 13 of 154; Hairdressing: 1 of 4; Hotels: 1 of 14; Insurance: 4; Papers: 2 of 12; Nurses: 5 of 17; Physicians: 5 of 61; Schools & Colleges: 2 of 14; Shoemakers & repairs: 13 of 29; Tailors: 3 of 19; Wood & Coal: 9 of 23.

<sup>[iv]</sup> U.S. Census of the Population, 1940. The total number of non-white employed workers in Charlotte was 14,906; the total of white employed workers was 30,419. The non-white category included Chinese, Japanese, and Indians as well as Negroes, but in Mecklenburg County the number of

Chinese, Japanese, and Indians was so small as to be negligible, and “non-white” can be assumed in this case to mean African Americans.

[\[v\]](#) Ibid.

[\[vi\]](#) Interview with Arthur Eugene Grier, Jr. [A.S. Grier’s grandson and current owner of the family home].

[\[vii\]](#) *Charlotte Observer*, 2-19-69.

[\[viii\]](#) Interview, Arthur Eugene Grier, Jr.

## **Architectural Description**

African American businessman Arthur S. Grier built the Martin’s Grocery building sometime shortly before 1938<sup>[1]</sup>, and the attached Keller’s Garage around 1940.<sup>[2]</sup> Martin’s Grocery building was built to replace a smaller building (now demolished) across Monroe Road from the present structure. Arthur S. Grier and his brother Leroy David Grier operated a grocery out of the smaller building until around 1932, when Arthur left the operation of the grocery to his brother and established Grier and Thompson Funeral Home.<sup>[3]</sup> in the Brooklyn section of Charlotte. Arthur S. Grier built the present building along with the attached commercial garage building, using skilled labor from the nearby Billingsville Neighborhood, which later became the Grier Heights Neighborhood. Ed Wallace and Haywood Polk were among the masons and builders from the neighborhood who worked on many projects with Arthur S. Grier, including Martin’s Grocery and Grier’s house on Montrose Street. Leroy Grier moved his grocery business to the present building, but soon joined his brother in the funeral home business. Rex Martin, a white grocer, began leasing the building and operated it as Martin’s Grocery for about 25 years.<sup>[4]</sup> The original tenant of the gas station was a Mr. Keller who sold Texaco fuel. When Mr. Keller moved to a larger station, the building became an auto body shop, operated by a Mr. Witt's.



Both the grocery and the attached garage are one-story brick commercial buildings, featuring parapet walls laid in common-bond. The white-painted grocery building is the narrower of the two buildings. The façade has been obscured by an enclosed hipped-roof porch addition with a rock foundation. A simple raised center parapet distinguishes the building. Original fenestration is symmetrical with three segmental-arched openings. The original double-doors are constructed of diagonal boards sandwich between tongue-and-groove beaded boards. Two wide single-hung windows openings border the door. The sash have been removed, but the original jams indicate the size and style of the windows. Two courses of corbelled brick accent the top of the front wall. The grocery building features a flat roof that drains to the rear. The east elevation contains two rectangular window openings, now bordered with wood trim. A single course of corbelled brick near the roofline decorates the elevation. The corbelled parapet wall found on the façade continues to the rear of the building, with no stepping-down. A short shed roof has been added to the rear of the building. Two segmental-arched openings in the rear elevation have been bricked-in. Numerous vents and rooftop fans dot the flat roof. A frame shed-roofed storage room addition obscures much of the grocery's rear elevation, and extends slightly across the rear elevation of the garage.



**It appears that the garage building is actually a three-wall addition to the grocery building. The garage's front parapet wall is the same height and design as the grocery's front wall, and the two facades line up smoothly. As with the grocery, the façade features a single raised parapeted section. On the garage the raised parapet is not centered on the facade, instead it highlights the principal front garage door entrance directly below the raised parapet. A ghost of a wide painted sign lingers under the parapet, and white paint clings to about half of the red bricks. Unlike the grocery, the garage is built on a concrete slab, and the fenestration is considerably lower. The front elevation is now four bays wide, and is dominated by the wide segmental-arched garage door opening, now filled with three tall multi-light windows. To the west of the garage door opening, an original segmental-arched window opening filled with a multi-light metal sash pierces the façade, and beside it a segmental-arched doorway is located close to the western edge of the building. Wooden headers set into the brick in the interior indicate that the original garage door rode on a track, and when open would have covered any opening in the wall east of the garage door opening, explaining the façade's limited fenestration. A rectangular window to the east of the garage door opening has been cut into the thick masonry wall.**



**The garage building's east elevation features a stepped parapet and fenestration limited to a single rectangular window. An abstract mural adorns the wall. The rear elevation, now infilled with masonry block, likely contained several more garage doors. Whereas the grocery featured a flat roof, the garage was constructed using two large curved metal trusses supporting wooden purlins and covered with a tar-composition roof and now coated with aluminum paint. Because the garage was built against the grocery's east wall, steel pipe posts were employed to support the steel trusses.**

**The two buildings now contain a restaurant, and no notable original interior features survive. New interior doorways have been cut into the shared brick wall to connect the restaurant's dining rooms and kitchens.**

### **Architectural Significance**

**Very few pre-World War II commercial buildings associated with Mecklenburg County's African American Community have survived. The 2001-2002 Mecklenburg African American Historic Resources Survey identified five commercial building types: office buildings, theaters, social clubs, barbershops, and groceries. Four groceries were identified, one of which has since been demolished. The Martin's Grocery is unique among the others, having been built by an African American but rented during its period of**

historical significance by a white grocer who served both the black and white communities.

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**[i] Interview with A. Eugene Grier, Arthur S. Grier's grandson, August 2003. According to Mr. Grier, Leroy Grier operated the grocery for a short time after it was built, and until he left the business to join his brother in the funeral business. City directories first associate Leroy Grier with the Grier and Thompson Funeral Home in 1938.**

**[ii] Mecklenburg County tax records.**

**[iii] "Known Cemeteries and Burial Records of Mecklenburg County, NC" 2003, Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, Charlotte, North Carolina**

**[iv] Interview with A. Eugene Grier. City directories list the H&W Superette as the tenant by 1969.**