

Survey and Research

Report On The

William and Rachel Newell Neill House



1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the William and Rachel Newell Neill House is located at 1412 West Rocky River Road in the Newell Community of Charlotte, N.C.

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

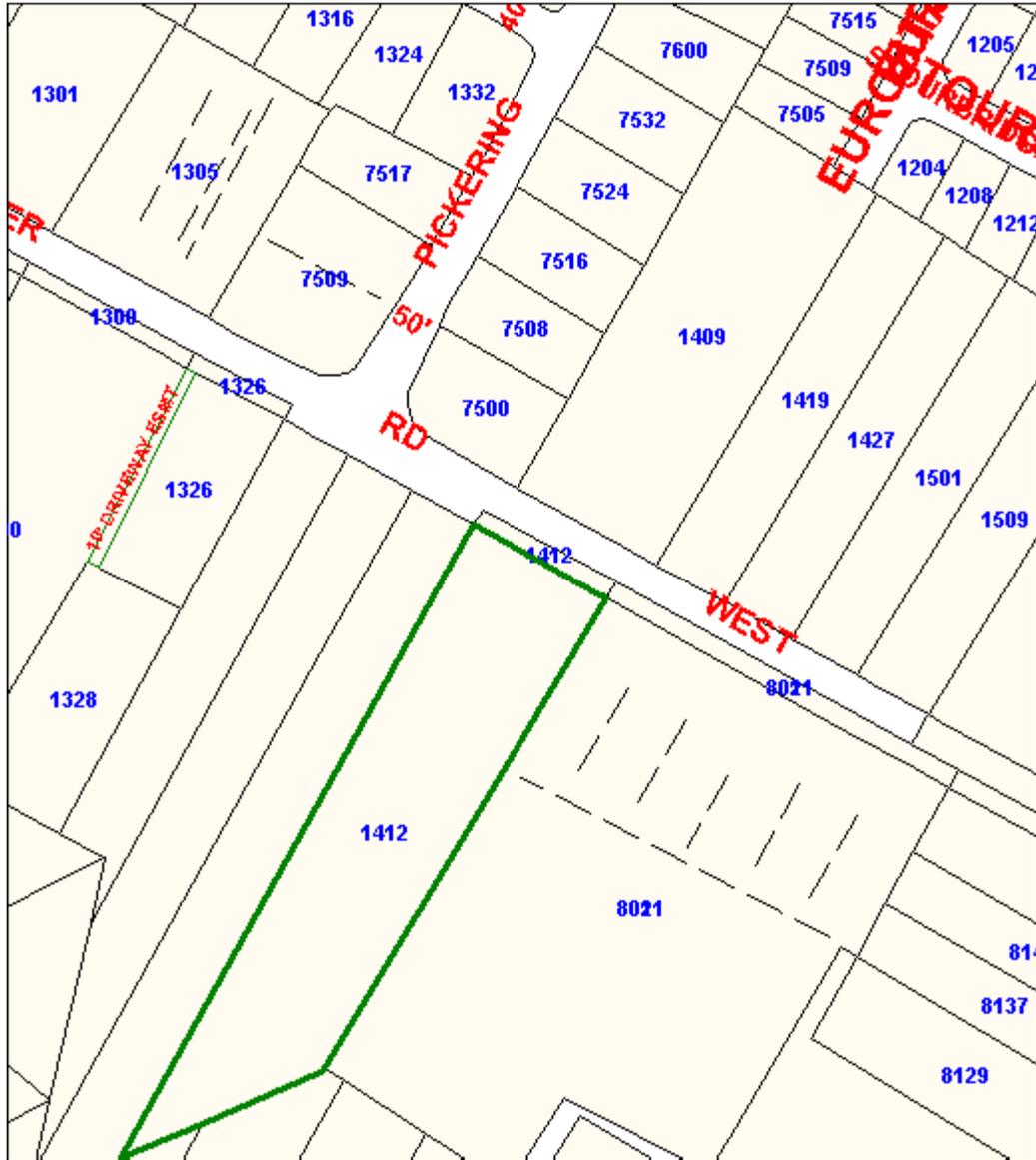
Ann W. Greer
6131 Woodbridge Road

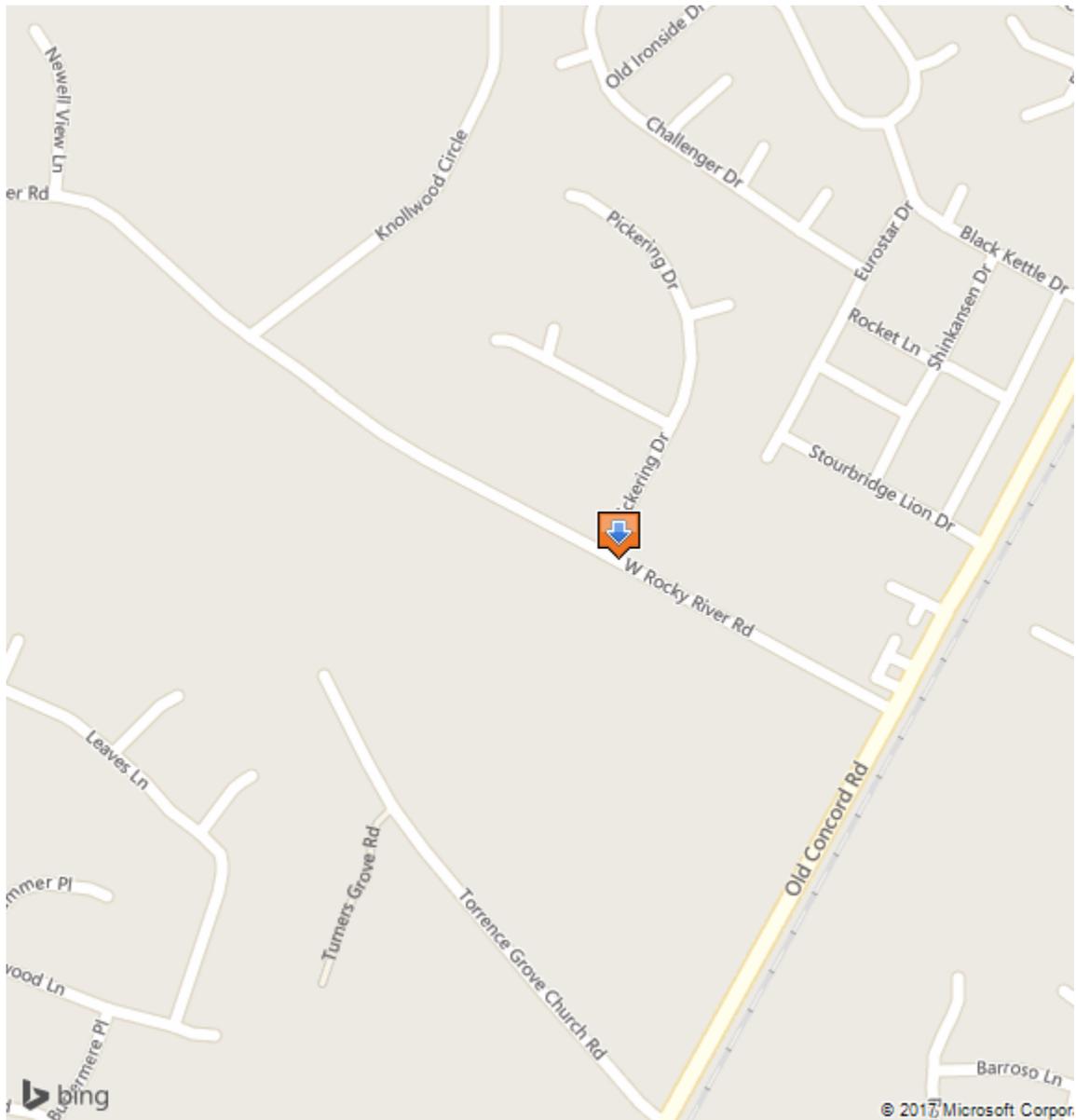
Charlotte, N.C. 28227-3036

Telephone: (704) Not Listed

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 that depicts the location of the property. The Universal Transverse Mercator coordinates of the property are 17 523671E 3903833N





5. Current Deed Book Reference to the Property: The most recent deed to the William and Rachel Newell Neill House is found in Deed Book 3588, page 453.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

7. A brief architectural sketch of the property: This report contains a brief architectural sketch of the property prepared by Stewart Gray.

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.

Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural

importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the William and Rachel Newell Neill House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1. The William and Rachel Newell Neill House is architecturally significant as a striking local example of an embellished farmhouse of the mid-1920s, especially noteworthy because of its incorporation of Craftsman style Bungalow elements into the more traditional I House form.
2. The William and Rachel Newell Neill House was constructed and owned by John A. Newell, the principal founder of the Newell community and a person of outstanding social and political importance in Mecklenburg County.
3. The William and Rachel Newell Neill House, which includes elements of the Newell Cotton Gin, is a significant component of the built environment of the Newell community, the principal cotton ginning and cotton pressing center of northeastern Mecklenburg County in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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

association: The Commission contends that the attached architectural description by Stewart Gray and Dr. Dan L. Morrill demonstrates that the property known as the William and Rachel Newell Neill House 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 tax value of the improvements on the property is \$103,760. The current appraised tax value of the 2.77 acres of land is \$37,720. The total appraised tax value of the property is \$141,480. The property is zoned R3. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 049-191-21.

10. Portion of property recommended for designation: The Commission judges that the following portions of the property meet the requirements of historic landmark designation: the interiors and exteriors of all improvements and the entire tax parcel.

Date of Preparation of this Report: April 20, 2002

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill and Stewart Gray
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission

2100 Randolph Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28207

Telephone: (704) 376-9115

William and Rachel Newell Neill House

Historical Overview

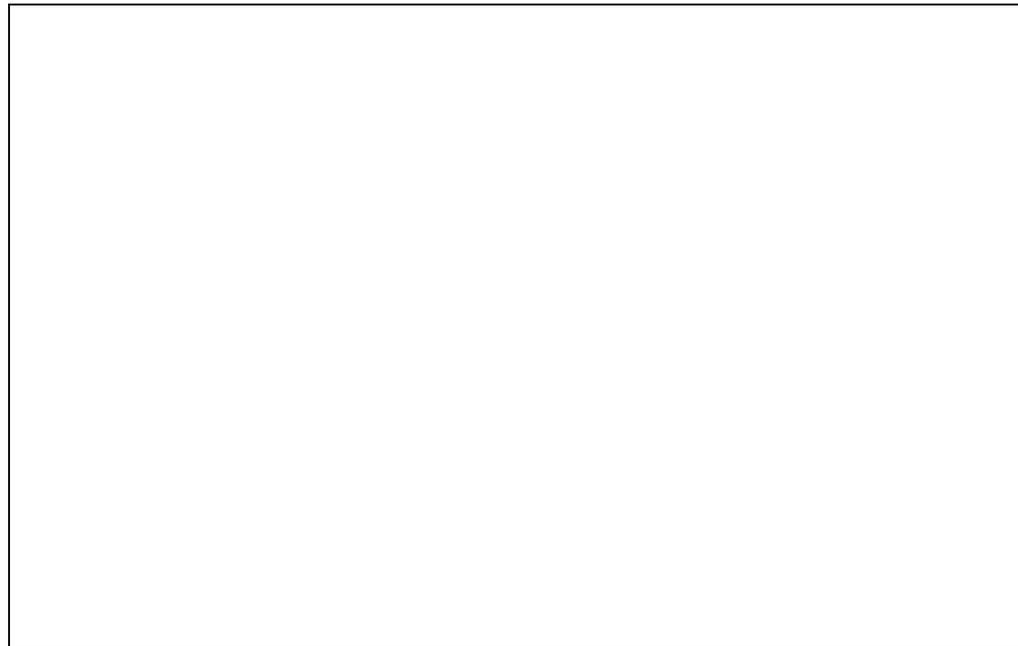


John A. Newell

The history of the William and Rachel Newell Neill House (c. 1925) is inextricably linked with the evolution of the Newell community and with its principal founder, John A. Newell (1854-1937). An aggregate of synergistic forces transformed the economic standing of the land in and surrounding Newell in the second half of the nineteenth century. The first and most momentous of these developments was the construction of the North Carolina Railroad from Goldsboro via Raleigh, Greensboro, and Salisbury to Charlotte, a distance of 223 miles.¹ The first train traveled the entire route on January 31, 1856.² In 1871, the railroad was leased to the Richmond and Danville Railroad Company, and the Southern Railroad acquired the right-of-way by lease in 1894.³ "We now have a rail-road connection with Raleigh, Petersburg, Richmond, and with all the cities of the North, on to the lines of Canada," the *Western Democrat* proclaimed on February 5, 1856.⁴ Thereafter, the shipment of Mecklenburg cotton to distant markets became more feasible. Consequently, cotton platforms, cotton presses, and cotton gins began to appear

along the railroads of this region. Although the major cotton processing facilities of Mecklenburg County were in Charlotte, cotton platforms in outlying sections were also established.

In September 1883, John A. Newell and his brother, W. B. Newell, purchased a cotton press from Liddell & Company of Charlotte.⁵ They located the press beside the tracks of the Richmond and Danville Railroad, thereby laying the economic foundation for the Newell community. The farmers of northeastern Mecklenburg now had a more convenient point from which to ship their cotton. A post office was established at Newell; and not surprisingly, John A. Newell, locally known as "Squire Newell," was the first postmaster. The Newell Presbyterian Church came into being, as well as a private school. Merchants established stores in the community.⁶ The locating of cotton processing facilities at Newell was fortuitous, because cotton production rose sharply in the late 1800s due primarily to the widespread use of Peruvian guano as fertilizer. Cotton output in Mecklenburg County increased from 6112 bales in 1860 to 27, 466 bales in 1910.⁷ "Thus," writes historian Sherry Joines, "the image, economy, and lifestyle of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County changed dramatically."⁸



This photograph of a Cotton Gin in Oklahoma demonstrates that two-story frame structures were used in such enterprises. The main block of the Neill House might well have resembled this building when it was originally built. Cotton was unloaded and taken into the two-story building for ginning, a process that separated seed from lint. The cotton lint was then sucked through a tube to the building on the left. This was the cotton press that packed the cotton into bales for shipping. The seed was sold to cottonseed oil mills.

According to the *Charlotte Observer*, John A. Newell was "one of the County's most prominent citizens."⁹ A native of Mecklenburg County, "Squire Newell" was an entrepreneur whose interests "centered mainly on agriculture."¹⁰ He had an affable personality and a generous nature. Illustrative of his standing in the community was the fact that Newell served

for eighteen years on the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners. He also amassed substantial amounts of property in and around Newell and joined with his wife, Dora Taylor Newell (1860-1951), in establishing a prosperous household in the family's home at the intersection of what is now West Rocky River Road and Old Concord Road.¹¹ Among the facilities that Newell erected was a cotton gin behind and across Rocky River Road from his house.¹²



Dora, Glendora, or Mrs. John A. Newell on left. Mrs. W. B. Newell on the right.

According to Joines, the growth in cotton production and its concomitant wealth, especially after the Panic of 1893, allowed some Mecklenburg farmers to abandon log construction and simple rectangular I-houses and build Folk Victorian abodes in an "L" or "T" plan and even incorporate some Craftsman elements into their farmhouses, such as one finds in the two shed or hip-roofed Bungalow style dormers atop the William and Rachel Newell Neill House. "I-houses were decorated with sawnwork, vergeboards, spindlework, and a wealth of other ornamentation indicating the farmer's wealth and status," says Joines.¹³ In their book, *Architects and Builders in North Carolina. A History of the Practice of Building*, historians Catherine Bishir, Charlotte Brown, Carl Lounsbury, and Ernest Wood III, comment on the same phenomenon. "Even the countryside," they assert, "experienced some refurbishing as prosperity increased after the agricultural depressions of the 1880s and 1890s."¹⁴ Some of the more striking local examples of "dressed up" farmhouses are the Ewart House and the John Milton Alexander House in northern Mecklenburg County and the [Sidney and Ethel Grier House](#) in southern Mecklenburg County. The most imposing extant example in Newell is the W. B. Newell House (1888).¹⁵



[John Milton Alexander House](#)



Ewart House



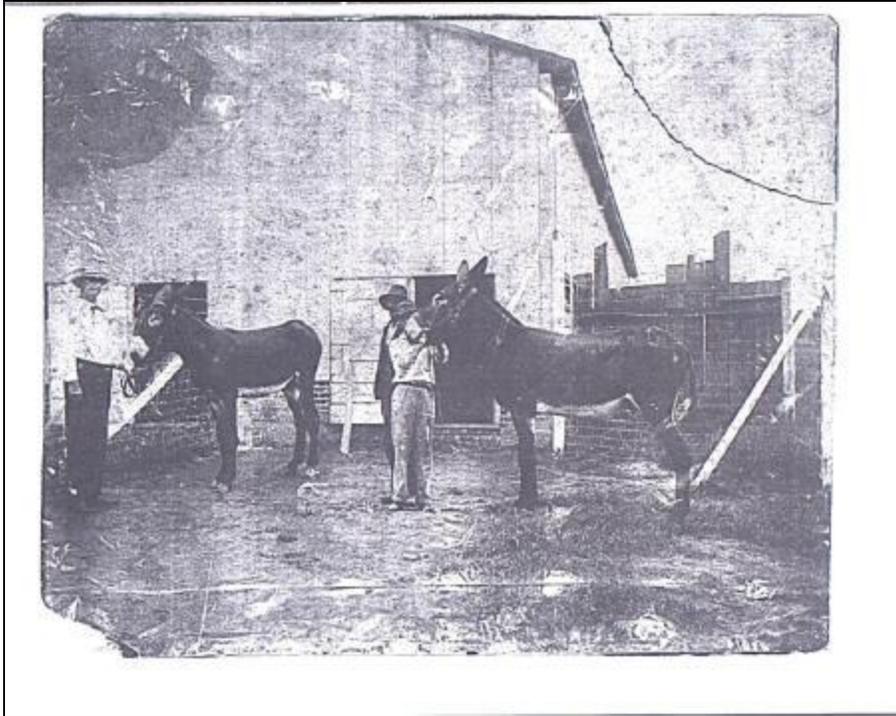
[W. B. Newell House](#)

The William and Rachel Newell Neill House also exhibits ornamentation, albeit clumsily, beyond that which one would typically encounter in a Mecklenburg County farmhouse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Located across West Rocky River Road and west of the site where the John A. Newell House once stood, the main block of the house was originally part of the Newell cotton gin.¹⁶ John A. Newell transformed the building in c. 1925 into a home for his daughter, Rachel Newell Neill (1890-1968) and her husband, William E. Neill (1890-1963), a native of Rogersville, Tennessee.¹⁷ William, nicknamed "Shorty," had come to Charlotte as a trainee at Camp Greene, a World War I U.S. Army Camp and had met Rachel, his future wife, at a church in Uptown Charlotte. The newlyweds established their residence in Charlotte, but John Newell wanted his daughter and son-in-law to reside closer to him. An owner of considerable amounts of real estate, Newell dispatched laborers to the site of the former cotton gin and converted the structure into the Craftsman style home one sees today. His family believes that Newell used materials, including windows, that had been parts of other houses in the area.¹⁸



The William and Rachel Neill Newell House has an "L" Plan with a hipped roof, large shed dormers, and a wraparound front porch.

The Neills superintended a growing family in their home on West Rocky River Road. Four daughters were born to William and Rachel Neill within five years -- the first in 1921. William, a friendly, outgoing man, never labored in agriculture but spent most of his married life working for the Royal Crown Bottling Company. Rachel, a stern but compassionate mother, was responsible for running the house. Emma Elizabeth Neill Harper (1921 -) and Rachel Newell Neill Dunlap (1923 -) remember their childhoods and their parents with great fondness. The images and sounds of a rural community next to a railroad line come readily to their minds. Emma and Rachel would go swimming in nearby Toby Creek or play baseball with the boys in the neighborhood. They would visit the Newell Community House for instruction and social gatherings. The girls would walk barefooted to their grandfather's house every Sunday and watch the steam locomotives rumble by. Sometimes they would even go to the Newell Depot across the double tracks and ride the train for 25 cents to Charlotte. John Newell, whom Emma and Rachel called "Big Pappa," would let the girls wander in the barnyard where he raised mules for sale to local farmers. The large number of mules, horses, and donkeys prompted local residents to call West Rocky River Road "Jackass Avenue."**19**



This photograph was made between 1900 and 1905. John A. Newell is on the left, and his son, "Chub" Newell, is on the right. Standing behind them is a black laborer nicknamed "Uncle Sam."

Emma and Rachel can summon up images of their mother picking vegetables in the garden behind the house, standing for long periods of time starching clothes at the ironing board, or sometimes using a hickory stick when the girls misbehaved. "She wouldn't let us look at the funny papers," recalls Emma. William and Rachel Neill were loyal members of Newell Presbyterian Church, where she was a Sunday School teacher and where both are buried." I am proud of my heritage," says Rachel Newell Neill Dunlap.²⁰



Original Newell Presbyterian Church

Her husband having predeceased her and her four daughters having married and moved elsewhere, Rachel Neill Newell sold the home place in 1964.²¹ Since then the house has had several owners and has even been used as a fraternity house for students at the nearby University of North Carolina at Charlotte.²² It now stands vacant, and its future is uncertain. With

seemingly incessant traffic motoring along West Rocky River Road and Old Concord Road, with suburban sprawl virtually inundating the neighborhood, with gasoline stations and convenience stores cropping up seemingly on every corner, it is increasingly difficult to remember the rural lifestyles that were once predominant in Newell. Only the unmistakable sounds of the locomotives traveling along the railroad and the existence of the dwindling number of structures like the William and Rachel Neill Newell House can transport one back to yesterday.

Architectural Assessment

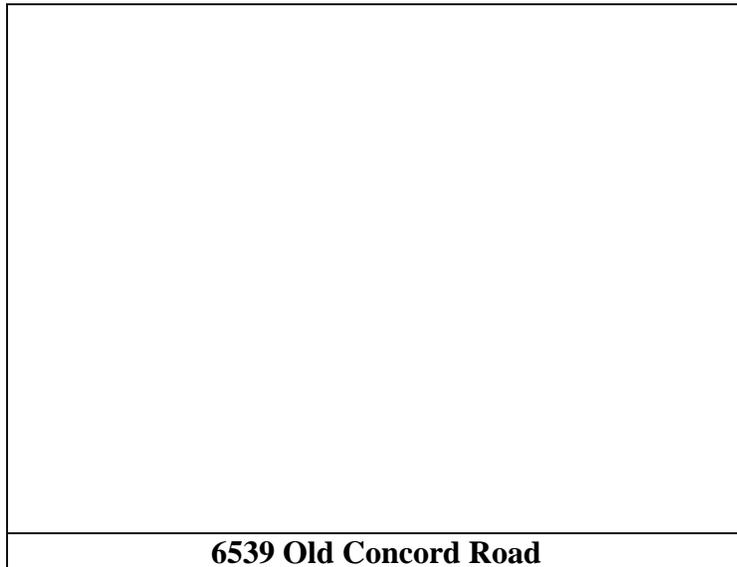
Most of the older homes in Newell are one or two-story frame dwellings. Most are essentially vernacular farm houses in terms of architectural design. The house at 8001 Old Concord Road, for example, is a typical I-House like those found with great frequency throughout rural Mecklenburg County.

 <p>04919130 001</p>	 <p>04927105 001</p>
<p>8001 Old Concord Road</p>	<p>8509 Old Concord Road</p>
 <p>04927120 001</p>	 <p>04915108 001</p>
<p>8501 Old Concord Road</p>	<p>7729 Old Concord Road</p>

The dwelling at 7729 Old Concord Road is also commonplace. It is a so-called "Triple A" I-House, a nomenclature derived from its having a large gable extending above the roof in the middle of the front facade. The simple, one-story dwelling at 8509 Old Concord Road also has many counterparts in rural Mecklenburg County.

There are several older houses in Newell, however, that are not typical of rural Mecklenburg County. They reflect the desires of the owners to live in "dressed up" domiciles. The house at 8501 Old Concord Road has hints of Victorian filigree remaining in its gables. The W. B.

Newell House, the most imposing brick home in Newell, is embellished with gable decorations. Particularly interesting in terms of the William and Rachel Newell Neill House



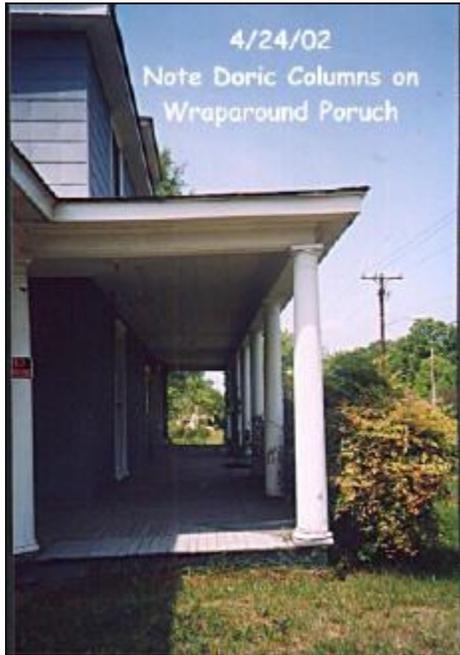
is the dwelling at 6539 Old Concord Road, on the southern edge of Newell. Most likely constructed between 1915 and 1925, this house demonstrates that the [Bungalow style](#) was becoming popular in the community.

The William and Rachel Newell Neill House is located in the Newell community of eastern Mecklenburg County. The two-story, cross-hipped I-House sits facing north on level ground, and is setback about thirty-five feet from the West Rocky River Road. It occupies a narrow but deep 2.8-acre lot, which is bordered to the east by the open grounds of the Newell Presbyterian Church and its graveyard. To the west, a strip of vacant and overgrown farmland borders the property. Late 20th century homes dot the roadside as the narrow two-lane road winds to the west. Very important features of the landscape are the tracks of the Southern Railroad, located about 250 yards due east of the house. The Newell Masonic Lodge, a low modern brick building, sits unobtrusively across the road from the Neill House on a lot that slopes down from the road. In its present situation, the house stands alone, with neighboring buildings at a respectful distance.

According to family history the Neill House was converted from a cotton gin building in c. 1925. We do not now have images or plans of the cotton gin building, but other examples from around 1900 show a tall and wide, but shallow frame buildings, similar to the principal, or front section of the Neill House. Changes in the flooring may indicate that the easternmost half of the front section of the house incorporates what was the gin building.

The Neill House, with the exception of two late 20th century additions, is supported on noticeably worn and weathered brick piers. The exterior walls of the house are now complexly covered by blue-gray asbestos tiles, and if the house had been embellished with any details such as a water table, a belt course, or a freeze board, they are now covered. The principal section of the Neill House is three bays wide, and one room deep, a very typical configuration for an I-House. The floor plan of this section consists of two rooms separated by a large center hall on

both floors. On the first floor the front door, a modern replacement door, is roughly centered between six-over-six double-hung windows, with single six-over-six double-hung windows also piercing the east and west elevations. Disturbing the general symmetry of this fenestration is the difference in the sizes of the windows. The first floor windows to the east of the front door, are very tall, nearly floor to ceiling in height, while the six-over-six windows to the west of the front door are much shorter, with the windowsills at a standard height of about two feet.



One of the most prominent features of the house is a one-story hipped porch that wraps around the east side. The porch is supported by seven unfluted Doric columns across the front of the house, with two additional columns supporting the eastern wraparound section. The columns have simply moulded capitols and bases, and would have been readily available to Mecklenburg County builders throughout the early 20th century, being common elements of the popular Colonial Revival and Neoclassical Styles. The columns support a boxed beam subtly decorated with moulded boards and quarter-round trim. Half-column pilasters support the beams where they attach to the house. Centered over the front door is a small porch-roof gable, a curious element on an otherwise all hipped roofed house. A late 20th century carport-overhang is attached to the porch's eastern side.

In the principal section of the Neill House, windows on the second floor line up with the first floor fenestration. On the second floor the window opening sizes are uniform, with the openings starting at the porch roof and ending just below the eaves. The original second floor windows have been replaced with modern one-over-one windows.

The Neill House's moderately overhanging eaves are boxed-in. Centered above the center bay sits a wide and prominent hipped dormer. The front of the dormer is flush with the house's

front wall, separated by the continuous boxed overhanging eave. The dormer's short ridgeline intersects the main ridgeline, and its two twelve-light sash illuminate the attic.



Another notable feature of the house is the tall, narrow, and now tilting exterior chimney attached to the rear, or south elevation of the principal section. In contrast to the brick piers, the chimney bricks themselves are sharp and square with little sign of wear or weathering. The chimney served fireplaces on both floors of the house. The chimney is symmetrical and features stepped shoulders and a corbelled flare toward the top. Other decorative brickwork is apparent at the top of this chimney, however in addition to the chimney's tilt some of the bricks have fallen and it is difficult to judge the original design. To the west of the Chimney a first story window has been removed. The opening is now filled with framing and glass panels. Above this opening is a small decorative casement window with a diamond shaped light centered in a small sash. Both of these windows provided light for the house's only staircase. To the west of the windows on this south elevation are doorways that connect the central hall of the principal section of the house to the rear wing. The first floor door has strikingly narrow horizontal panels beneath a large light that has been broken out. On the second floor a large traditional four-panel door is used.

A second chimney, an interior chimney, rises out of the roof just to the east of the ridgeline of the Neill House's rear wing. This chimney served four fireplaces, two in the upper and lower eastern rooms of the principal section, and one also on each floor of the rear addition. Because it carried four flues, it is more massive than the house's other chimney, however it too has been damaged. Loose and irregularly dislodged bricks form the top of the chimney, and its low height, which is perhaps level with the ridgelines, indicate that the chimney may have at one time been considerably taller. What remains of the chimney has been coated with stucco.

The rear wing of the house is a full two-stories with the ridgeline of the wing's hipped roof intersecting the ridgeline of the principal section. The wing is set back only slightly from the

west elevation of the principal section, and lines up roughly with the two western rooms of that front section. Like the rest of the house, the wing rests on brick piers. Originally the wing was only one room wide and two bays deep, with a two-story engaged porch on the east side occupying much of the area under the hipped roof. The lower section of the engaged porch is still unenclosed, and the same Doric columns found on the front porch support the upper porch, which is now enclosed. The southernmost ends of the porches may have been enclosed, providing places for toilets or closets. A recent porch addition has been built out from the east elevation, and is supported on small Doric columns that were perhaps originally installed elsewhere on the house.

The fenestration on the west side of the wing is muddled; with a narrow late 20th century shed roofed kitchen addition attached to the first floor. Above the addition the fenestration of the second floor on the west side is minimal and regular, with two two-over-two double-hung windows. These windows have rather wide muntins common in some early 20th century windows.

The south elevation of the rear wing is two bays wide, although it is difficult to determine if some reconfiguration of the porches may have altered this façade. Fenestration is limited to single double-hung windows with what appear to be replacement sash, on each floor. Another small decorative casement with a diamond light, located to the east of the second floor double-hung may have provided illumination to a bathroom or closet.

The east side of the hipped roof of the rear wing features another hipped dormer. This dormer is smaller than the front dormer, and contains a row of small four-light sash.



The interior of the house features an abundance of trim, which is fairly consistent throughout both the principal section of the house and the rear wing. Baseboards are tall with a deep moulded cap. The casing around the interior doors rises from decoratively milled starter blocks. There is extensive use of beaded board for wainscoting, which is capped by a triple-beaded chair rail. In the hall, the stairway turns at a landing. Newel posts have been removed from the landing, and from the foot of the stairs. At the top of the stairs the original post remains. It is a tall square post decorated with simple moulded trim and cap. A very high degree of

craftsmanship is exhibited in the connection of this post to the notably asymmetrically shaped handrails. Simple square balusters connect to the handrails. Most of the mantles in the house have been removed. One that does remain features decorative classical columns. Such mantles were typically associated with the Queen Anne Style, which was influenced by and borrowed from the Neoclassical Revival.

The many interior doors are predominantly traditional four-panel doors, which were extremely popular around 1900. The sizes of the doors, and details of their trim varies from room to room. The original plaster walls are in good shape, however ceilings in some of the rooms have been covered with some type of acoustical tile.

¹ Dr. Lawrence S. Barden, Dr. James W. Clay, Dr. Owen J. Furuseth, Dr. Dan L. Morrill and Dr. Nelson S. Nunnally, "Socio-Economic Overview Of The Uwharrie National Forest And Environs." (An Environmental Impact Statement prepared for the United States Forest Service, n.d.), p. 21. Hereinafter cited as Study.

² Western Democrat (February 5, 1856). The first railroad to come to Charlotte was the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad, which reached Charlotte from Columbia, S.C. in October 1852.

³ Study, p. 21.

⁴ Western Democrat (February 5, 1856).

⁵ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 40, p. 63.

⁶ Charlotte Observer (March 3, 1937, April 23, 1939).

⁷ [Stewart Gray, Paula M. Stathakis, Dan L. Morrill, "Survey and Research Report on the Sidney and Ethel Grier House."](#)(Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, April 2002. The [Cole Manufacturing Company](#) in Charlotte was a major manufacturer of agricultural implements, including guano fertilizer spreaders.

⁸ [Sherry J. Joines and Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Historic Rural Resources in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina](#) (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, n.d.) p.8.

⁹ Charlotte Observer (March 4, 1937).

¹⁰ Charlotte Observer (March 3, 1937).

¹¹ For an obituary article on Dora Taylor Newell, see Charlotte Observer (January 8, 1951). Mrs. Newell is called "Glendora Newell" in this article.

¹² Interview of Rachel Neill Dunlap by Dr. Dan L. Morrill (April 19, 2002). Hereinafter cited as Interview One.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Catherine W. Bishir and others, *Architects and Builders in North Carolina. A History of the Practice of Building* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 290.

¹⁵. [Dr. Dan L. Morrill, "Survey and Research Report on the W. B. Newell House,"](#) (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, June 2, 1982. Rachel Newell Neill Dunlap has a photograph of the John A. Newell House. It was an imposing, two-story, Neo Classical style structure. A gasoline station and convenience store now occupy the site.

¹⁶. Interview One.

¹⁷. For obituary articles on William E. Neill and Rachel Newell Neill, see [Charlotte Observer](#) (January 31, 1963; March 4, 1968).

¹⁸. Interview of Rachel Neill Dunlap and Emma Elizabeth Neill Harper by Dr. Dan L. Morrill (April 24, 2002). Hereinafter cited as Interview Two. The cotton gin equipment had been on the second floor of the house. Rachel and Emma remember oil seeping through the floor of the room at the eastern end of the second floor of the house.

¹⁹. Interview Two.

²⁰. Interview Two.

²¹. Mecklenburg County Deed Book 2545, p. 325.

²². Interview of Ann W. Greer (April 2002).