

## ROBINSON HOUSE



*This report was written on June 27, 1991*

**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Robinson House is located at 8716 Steele Creek Road, Charlotte, in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

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

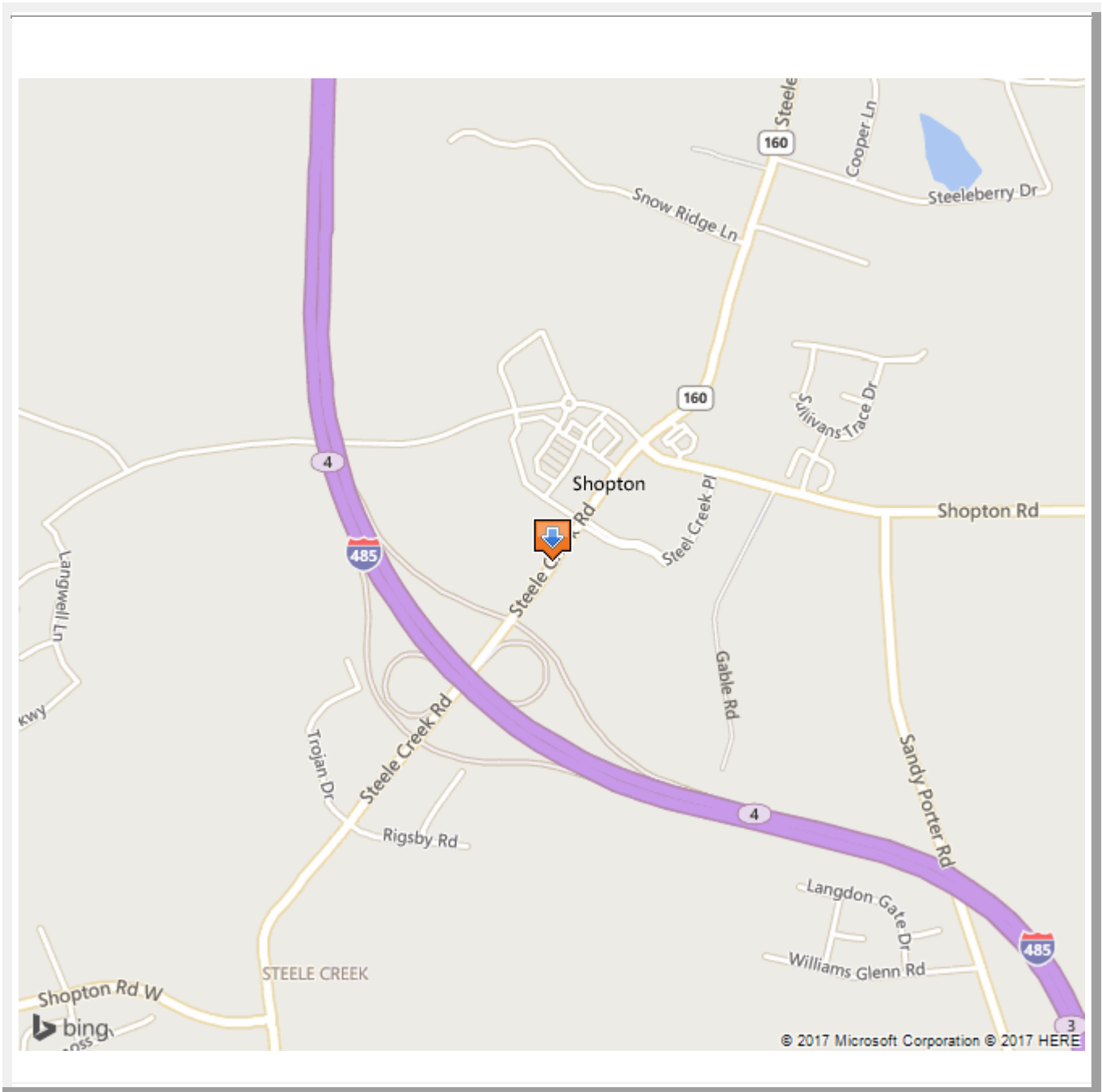
Mrs. Wilda Robinson  
8716 Steele Creek Road  
Charlotte, North Carolina 28273

Telephone: (704) 588 1139

Tax Parcel Numbers: 199-241-09

**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 maps which depict the location of the property.



**5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property:** The most recent deed to Tax Parcel Number 199-241-09 is listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1074 at page 273.

**6. A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Ms. Paula M. Stathakis.

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Ms. Nora M. Black.

**8. 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 history, architecture, and /or cultural importance:** The Commission judges that the property known as the Robinson House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

- 1) the original section of the Robinson House is believed to have been built before the Civil War;
- 2) William Wallis Robinson, the first owner, was employed as superintendent with the county school board;
- 3) the family of William Wallis Robinson sold an acre across from the Robinson House for the site of the Shopton School in 1896;
- 4) the Robinson House housed Lester Byrum of the Hayes-Byrum Store while his own house was under construction;
- 5) the Robinson House is architecturally significant for the vernacular interpretation of Greek Revival detailing by a fine craftsman; and
- 6) the Robinson House provides a timeless landmark to the people of the Shopton community.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association:** The Commission contends that the architectural description by Ms. Nora M. Black included in this report demonstrates that the Robinson 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 which becomes a designated historic landmark. The current appraised value of the improvements is \$61,810. The current appraised value

of Tax Parcel 199-241-09 (4.000 acres) is \$60,000. The total appraised value of the property is \$121,810. The property is zoned R15.

**Date of Preparation of this Report:** June 27, 1991

**Prepared by:** Dr. Dan L. Morris in conjunction with Ms. Nora M. Black  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission  
1225 South Caldwell Street, Box D  
Charlotte, North Carolina 28203

Telephone: (704) 376-9115

### *Historical Overview*

*Paula M. Stathakis*

The Robinson Family that built this house has resided in the Steele Creek community since the mid-eighteenth century. The family patriarch, Richard Robinson, came to the American Colonies from Scotland and, like so many of the early immigrants to Mecklenburg County, arrived in North Carolina via Pennsylvania. Richard Robinson settled in the Steele Creek area of southwestern Mecklenburg about 1765.<sup>1</sup> Richard married Martha McLeary (1770-1815) on June 14, 1790, by whom he had three sons, Michael, Alec, and Wallis. Martha Robinson died in 1815 at the age of 45; and soon thereafter Richard married his second wife, Jane Robinson, who died in 1826 at the age of 20. Richard Robinson, who survived his second wife by only four months, died in 1827 at the then advanced age of 69. As one would expect, Richard Robinson, his two wives, and many of his descendants are buried in the Steele Creek Presbyterian Church cemetery.<sup>2</sup> During the nineteenth century, Steele Creek continued to be a thriving agricultural community; but, like much of the North Carolina Piedmont, it was composed mostly of relatively small, diversified farms. The 1850 Census of Agriculture, for example, shows that Wallis Robinson (1804-1853), Richard's son, owned a 161-acre farm, on which he raised horses, cows, and hogs, as well as harvesting 27 bushels of wheat, 225 bushels of Indian corn, 40 bushels of oats, three 400-pound bales of cotton, 4 bushels of peas and beans, and 10 bushels of sweet potatoes. This enterprising farmer married Mary Brown on March 5, 1831.<sup>3</sup> Local tradition holds that the Robinson House was built by Captain William Wallis Robinson (1835-1894), son of Wallis and Mary Robinson and the grandson of Richard Robinson.

The Robinson family believes that the core or first section of the house was built in the mid-nineteenth century, shortly after Captain Robinson's marriage to Laura Cooper (1842-1903) and sometime before the Civil War. Unfortunately, there are no extant records of his marriage or of the construction of the house. Consequently, the known historical record does not provide an exact or approximate age of the dwelling.<sup>4</sup> William Wallis Robinson, the original owner of the house, was an important figure in the Steele Creek Community. Like so many young men of his generation, he joined the ranks of the Confederate army, rising to the rank of captain. Not surprisingly, Captain Robinson returned home at the end of this bitter conflict and resumed his career as a farmer. His most notable civic accomplishment, however, was serving as superintendent of the county school board. He and his wife, Laura Robinson, had three children -- a son, Edward Brice or "E.B.", who graduated from Davidson College and who served as a Presbyterian minister in Alabama, and two daughters, Feriba Blanche and Minnie.<sup>5</sup> Laura Robinson lived in the house until her death in 1903. No doubt she took great pride in the accomplishments of her son-in-law, Plato D. Price, the husband of Minnie Robinson. Plato Price was especially noteworthy for his resolute commitment to the improvement of public education for black people. At a time when racism was rampant in much of Mecklenburg County, Plato Price worked tirelessly to focus the community's attention upon the plight of African Americans. It was altogether fitting and proper that Plato D. Price School was named for him.<sup>6</sup>

In 1896, Feriba Blanche, who married William Alexander McGinn, Minnie Robinson Price, and E. B. Robinson gave further testimony to the family's dedication to the educational improvement of the people by selling one acre of land across the road from the Robinson House for \$50.00, so that the local school commissioners could establish the Shopton High School. This school served the area until 1921, when it was consolidated with Dixie High School. Thereafter, the building was used by the Steele Creek Home Demonstration Club until it burned in 1924.<sup>7</sup> The Robinson House passed out of the Robinson family's hands in 1909.<sup>8</sup> Six years earlier E. B. Robinson had purchased his sisters' interest in the property, and he now sold it to Robert I. Griffith.<sup>9</sup> Griffith lived there until 1911, when he conveyed the house and approximately 27 acres of surrounding land to A. M. "Mel" Taylor and his wife, E. A. J. "Addle" Taylor. Taylor, a native of Illinois who came to North Carolina from Minnesota, is still remembered by his Mecklenburg neighbors for his "exotic" Yankee accent. Mel Taylor, who died in 1925, sold all but four acres of his property in 1919 to William Lester Byrum, a community farmer and storekeeper, who also occupied the Robinson House as a tenant from 1925 until 1927. This transaction in 1919 reduced the property to its current size.<sup>10</sup> Addie Taylor sold the Robinson House to James R. Erwin for \$1,000 in 1927.<sup>11</sup> Erwin resided there until his death in about 1933, when ownership passed to his widow, Neely Porter Erwin, who expired in 1940.<sup>12</sup> In 1942,

the Robinson House was purchased by J. Y. Robinson and his wife, Wilda, then a young couple with small children.<sup>13</sup> Mrs. Robinson retains ownership of the house.<sup>14</sup>

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NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> From the Robinson Family History, access kindly provided by Mr. Mack Brown.

<sup>2</sup> Steele Creek Presbyterian Church was the social and religious center of the surrounding community. For an inventory of the church cemetery, contact the church office.

<sup>3</sup> Book of Marriage Bonds. Register of Deeds, Mecklenburg County Court House.

<sup>4</sup> The current owner of the house, Mrs. J. Y. "Wilda" Robinson, no relation to the Richard Robinson line, relates that her son, who is an architect, has examined underneath the house and can tell where the original section and the additions fit together.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mr. Mack Brown and Miss Laura McGinn, December 6, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> *The History of the Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 3rd edition, Historical Committee of 1976. (Charlotte, N.C.: Craftsman Printing House, 1978), pp. 172, 174; Deed 112-493, October 13, 1896. L. C. Robinson, E. B. Robinson, P. D. Price, W. A. McGinn, and R. A. Coffey, Comrs. of School District no. 21 for the construction of a school for whites. The deed also stipulated that if the premises were abandoned and not used as a white school, the title, but not the building, would revert to the grantees.

<sup>8</sup> Deed 248-152, July 6, 1909. Register of Deeds, Mecklenburg County Court House.

<sup>9</sup> Deed 185-258, October 26, 1903. Register of Deeds, Mecklenburg County Court House.

<sup>10</sup> Deed 276-442, October 2, 1911. Register of Deeds, Mecklenburg County Court House; Deed 438-152, December 5, 1919. Register of Deeds, Mecklenburg County Court House. Death Certificate Book 24, page 45. A. M. Taylor died on February 17, 1925. The certificate of death records his birthplace as Illinois, his occupation as farming, and the cause of his death as cancer of the face.

<sup>11</sup> Deed 644-219, January 4, 1927. Register of Deeds, Mecklenburg County Court House.

<sup>12</sup> Will Book W, page 410. Office of the Clerk of Estates, Mecklenburg County Court House.

<sup>13</sup> Deed 1074-273, May 14, 1942; Interview with Mr. J.Y. Robinson, December 1, 1990.

<sup>14</sup> Mrs. Robinson has routinely complied to requests from people whose families formerly occupied the house and wished to see the room where a relation died or was born. The setting of the house was severely altered in September 1989, when Hurricane Hugo destroyed several trees near the house.

### *Architectural Description*

*Nora M. Black*

The Robinson House is located on the west side of Steele Creek Road in the Shopton community. It is south of the intersection of Steele Creek Road with Dixie River Road and north of the intersection with Trojan Drive. The front or east facade of the house faces Steele Creek Road; the rear or west facade overlooks a field and wooded area. The Robinson House encompasses 2,312 square feet according to the Mecklenburg County tax records. It appears that the house was constructed in three sections. The plan of the original four-room section of the house is organized around two interior chimneys. Each chimney served two fireplaces, located back to-back in two rooms. Each block of two rooms was separated by a long hallway running from the front door to the back door of the house. Large fieldstones turned on end served as piers in this section. The rafters in the attic over the first section are pegged together. The second section of the Robinson House added a bedroom the kitchen, the back porch, the bay of the dining room and extended the hallway; all of this addition occurred on the back or west side of the house.

It was supported on brick piers; cut nails are visible in the attic. The last section to be added was a large rectangular room on the southwest corner which served as a bathroom; it has since been remodeled into two smaller bathrooms.<sup>1</sup> When the Robinson family was making repairs to the exterior of the third section, they found a board stamped with the date 1912. That finding led them to believe the last section was added during or shortly after that year.<sup>2</sup> The one story front elevation is

dominated by the steeply-pitched roof. At first glance, the Robinson House appears to be a compound plan gable-front-and-wing house. Actually, it has a simple plan with irregularities formed by projections from the principal mass of the house that are less than room sized. A flat-roofed, one story porch spans the width of the front of the house. The three sections of the house are believed to have been built over a period of fifty years. As with many houses that grew with the size of the family and the fortune, details copied from earlier eras have been used to enliven plain, utilitarian facades. The interpretations and finish of the details used depended on the skill of the builder and the preferences of the owner.

## **Exterior**

The exterior was covered with asbestos shingles installed in 1963; both siding and trim are painted white. The ordinal siding is still beneath the shingles; it consists of lapped horizontal boards approximately six inches wider. The gray slate roof has a steep pitch; the [shingle slate pattern](#) consists of five rows of plain slates, four rows of fishscale slates, and four rows of plain slates. Metal finials at the ridge line decorate the ends of the [gables](#). The gables have a wide overhang; the wide eave overhang is boxed with an interior gutter system. The main roof is a series of cross gables with an interesting variation on the front of the house. A gable end is presented on the north end of the front. On the south end, the roof rises from the edge of the porch pediment in the same manner as a [hip roof](#). However, on the extreme south end, the roof is finished with a gable that is visible when viewing the south side of the house. It is an unusual gesture from the builder that tricks the eye when seen from the road. The front porch, the back porch and the bay portion of the dining room have nearly flat roofs. Many of the [windows](#) contain the original glass in double hung sash. The bathroom has a small [double hung sash](#); the pantry has one small square window. The center window of the dining room bay has a top section of patterned clear glass panes set with lead comes. The back porch has been enclosed for energy efficiency.

The window surrounds are narrow and not elaborate. The brick foundation piers of the house were infilled with modern brick in 1963; the entire underpinning is painted gray. The house is four units deep by three units wide. It has two interior masonry chimneys that exit at the center of the ridge. Each gable end has a louvered vent. The east or front elevation has a single window to either side of the door. One unit of the width was originally devoted entirely to a hallway; an early renovation terminated the hall at the west wall of the living room. Then the wall that had separated the living room and the hall was removed to provide more space in the living roomy. The south elevation is divided into four units having single windows. The main entrance, located on the east or front elevation appears to have changed little over the years. It consists of a simple Greek Revival wooden enframing surrounding the door. The white enframing has a fluted pilaster to either side of the door and a decorative crown of



simple moldings. Corner blocks with bullseye decoration form the base for the pilasters. A wide strip of molding runs along the floor for the entire length of the porch. The door has a large glass panel in the top half; the bottom of the door consists of four vertical panels in a row with a single panel above and below. The flat-roofed one-story porch on the front elevation has wooden flooring that is painted gray. The ceiling is equal-width flat boards painted white. The fluted square wooden columns are a vernacular type based on the Greek Revival style; they exhibit a simple capital, a shaft, and a base. A simple balustrade runs between the porch columns. A broad, low-pitched gable indicates entry at the center of the porch. The porch was screened in 1965; no historic fabric was removed at that time.

### **Interior**

The interior has not been gutted although some updating of fixtures has occurred. Most rooms have original woodwork and six panel doors. Floors throughout the house are generally of hardwood; some have been covered with vinyl flooring. Most walls are plaster; gypsum wallboard was used for bathroom renovations. The fireplaces are not used for heating the house; two have been closed. The original fireplace surround in the southeast room has elaborate Greek Revival details. The sides of the surround, left in place, have been used as the side decoration for a built-in curio cabinet. An oil furnace makes the Robinson House comfortable for its current owner. The wide center hallway serves as a den. The north side of the house contains the service rooms; the south side of the house contains sleeping quarters and the two baths. The dining room is the most elaborate room. The fireplace on the east wall of the dining room has a handsome Greek Revival surround. Half-round columns support the mantel and mirrored overmantel; the egg-and-dart design decorates the capitals. The wainscot has a wide, heavy top molding. The room is ringed by a decorative plate rail with brackets. The three-sided bay has a wide window seat. Most of the hardwood floor is visible. The east wall of the dining room has one door leading to a short passageway to the living room; built-in cabinets and bookcases line the passageway. The west wall has one door opening to a passageway to the kitchen; the entrance to the pantry and a built-in cupboard are in the short passage. On the south wall, a door leads to the hallway. The Robinson House has served as a residence for several families since its construction in the late 19th century. Renovations have been, for the most part, sensitive to the original fabric of the house. It serves as an example of the home of a public servant in Mecklenburg County during the late 19th century.

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<sup>1</sup> Telephone interview with Mr. James Robinson, Jr., an architect in Hilton Head, South Carolina, on July 26, 1991. Mr. Robinson is the oldest son of Mrs. Golda Robinson, current owner of the house. His observations span the many years he lived in the house and helped with repairs.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Mrs. Golda Robinson, current owner of the house, on June 15, 1991.