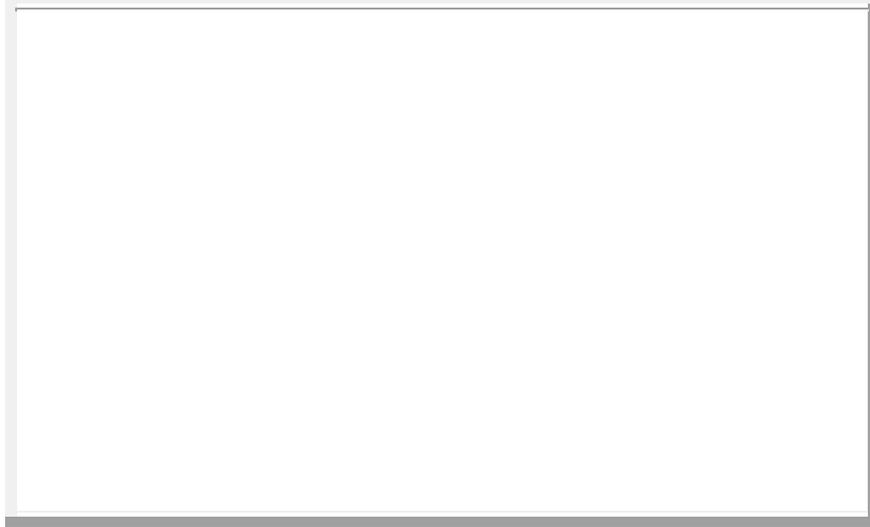


Route V: North Mecklenburg County

Route V is about 60 miles long and takes about two hours to drive. Allow extra time for stops at Latta Place, the Torrance Store, and Davidson. Since there are many opportunities to stop and explore on this tour you may want to divide it into two parts. Davidson provides a natural dividing point for this tour.

NOTE: The towns of Davidson, Cornelius, and Huntersville each have their own tour routes included on this site and can be incorporated with this regional tour.



Click on the map to browse

Apart from the incursions of Lake Norman and I-77, northern Mecklenburg has seen surprisingly little twentieth-century development, though the scene is fast changing. Perhaps its distance from Charlotte has ensured relative protection from the city's expansion. In any case, this part of the county boasts the greatest number of early plantation homes.

We have records of settlement in the area as early as the 1740s, a decade before Charlotte's first settlers stopped their wagons near what is now the center of the city. In 1744 Mecklenburg's first itinerant Presbyterian minister, John Thomson, was invited by the residents in the Hopewell area to preach at the home of Richard Barry.

The early history of the northern part of the county is characterized by flourishing plantations and a tight-knit plantation community; as we shall see, family histories in

the area are intricately intertwined. Davidson College added a new dimension to the area in 1837, providing the county with its only institution of higher education until Biddle Institute (now Johnson C. Smith University) was founded thirty years later. In the post-Civil War period, as the old plantations declined, the new railroad built through northern Mecklenburg caused Cornelius and Huntersville to grow as textile villages. For the same reason, Davidson also increased substantially during this period.

More recently, new communities have been drawn by the area's lake-side attractions. The rich bottom lands of the Catawba, once plum sites for pioneer farmers, now lie under the waters of Duke Power's Lake Norman, completed in 1963.

Route V begins at the McIntyre Farm historic site on Beatties Ford Rd.

- **From Charlotte, take W. Trade St., and follow the signs for I-77 northbound. Once on I-77 take the Sunset Rd. West exit (Exit 16B), and drive .7 miles to the traffic lights at Beatties Ford Rd. Turn right onto Beatties Ford Rd. Just over .5 miles from this intersection, look carefully for a left turn onto McIntyre Rd. After you have turned, the McIntyre historic site is immediately to your right. (If you get to Hornet's Nest Park at the next intersection, you have gone too far.) Park and take the short interpretive trail.**

1. When British General Charles Cornwallis departed from Charlotte in 1780 he is reported to have called the area a "hornets' nest" of resistance. Contrary to his expectations, the people of Mecklenburg County proved hostile and resourceful in their efforts to hinder his progress. Here at the [site of McIntyre's farm](#), in October, 1780, 300 foraging English redcoats were chased away by a dozen farmers and a hive of gum bees! You can read the story as you take the marked trail, which also describes methods of gold mining in the Piedmont area.



Marker at the McIntyre Farm

Continue north on Beatties Ford Rd.

2. The road follows the route of an ancient Indian trading path which crossed the Catawba some miles to the north of here at a point now flooded by the waters of Lake Norman. Pioneers and their descendants adopted the pathway as their own. As you drive along you will notice several old farmsteads facing the road.

After 2.6 miles you will cross the Mt. Holly Huntersville Rd. Less than half a mile after the intersection look out for the Long Creek School on your left.

3. The small, square shaped, two-story brick building (which is to the left of the more modern school) was the **Agricultural Building** of the original 1925 Long Creek Consolidated School. The consolidation of schools during the 1920s created the new problem of housing a concentration of teachers in such rural areas as this. Indeed, this building is reputed to have housed faculty members at one time. Other teachers rented rooms in nearby farm houses.



Long Creek Agricultural Education Building

Continue for 1.2 miles and look out for a distinctive stone wall on your right. Immediately turn right into the first entrance for the parking lot of the Hopewell Presbyterian Church.

4. Before the age of the motor car, local families thought nothing of traveling up to ten or twelve miles by foot or horseback to attend services here. It was customary for foot travelers to pause at Gar Creek where they washed their feet and put on shoes before arriving at church. The congregation would remain here the whole day, from 10 a.m. until sunset, with an hour's break between sermons to relax in the shade and share a picnic lunch.

As elsewhere in the county, [Hopewell Presbyterian Church](#) initially shared in the seemingly inexhaustible labors of Alexander Craighead, pastor of Sugaw Creek and Rocky River churches from 1758 to 1766 (See **Routes I and III**). As an exponent of "new side" evangelical Presbyterianism, Craighead had traveled south from Pennsylvania in search of like minded souls. He found them among his fellow Scots-Irish Presbyterians of Mecklenburg who enthusiastically listened to his passionate sermons damning sinners and extolling liberty and independence. Among this congregation at Hopewell were five of the twenty-seven signers of the alleged Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence.



The leaders of the community who worshipped here were all prominent cotton planters, including John McKnitt Alexander of Alexandriana, Major John Davidson of Rural Hill, James Latta of Latta Place, and Hugh Torance of Cedar Grove.

By the 1830s, when the core of this brick sanctuary was constructed, Hopewell was the richest of the seven original Presbyterian congregations in the area. The 1833 church was a plain and simple meeting house, made of local brick, laid in **Flemish bond** with glazed headers. In 1860 renovations were made, including the addition of a front facade and a gallery inside the church.

As you leave the church, notice the rustic walls which line the road at the church entrance. They were built by E.L. Baxter Davidson in 1928. You will be seeing many more of his stone structures along the route.

On leaving the church, turn right onto Beatties Ford Rd., and then take an immediate left onto Sample Rd., following the signs for Latta Plantation Park. Continue down Sample Rd. until it enters the park.

5. Latta Plantation Park is a 750-acre nature preserve with trails, picnic areas, and canoe access to Mountain Island Lake. Admission is free. Attractions include the Visitors Center and Gift Shop; the Carolina Raptor Center with eagles, hawks and other raptors on display; and the Latta Equestrian Center. (For further information phone (704) 875-2434.)

6. The centerpiece of the park is Latta Place, a restored eighteenth-century plantation house and farm. It is located inside the park, at the end of Sample Rd. on your right. James Latta first came to the area as a peddler traveling between Philadelphia and Charleston, and selling wares from his wagon to the farmers along the way. No doubt it was on such a trip that he met his wife, Jane Knox of Lincoln County. They decided to settle down here in 1799. For a farmer this would have been a valuable site, close to the rich bottom lands of the Catawba River, yet out of immediate danger of floods. Latta's success at business can be measured by the grandeur of the house, which, incidentally, follows the design of a Philadelphia town house. Notice that the entrance is on the narrow side of the house rather than at the center of the long front. Yet the chimneys are located in their traditional Mecklenburg position at each end of the house, competing with the entrance for space.

If you have time, don't miss the chance to tour the inside of the house. Also, the grounds feature farm animals and agricultural outbuildings. The hours and touring arrangements may vary from season to season. Therefore, it would be wise to call before you plan to visit. (For information call (704) 875-2312)



Latta Place

Return to Beatties Ford Rd. Turn left, and in 1.6 miles turn left onto Neck Rd. After 2.1 miles (just past a waste water treatment plant) pull into the driveway on your right to view the ruins of Rural Hill.

7. Several porch columns are all that remain of the once fine brick plantation house at [Rural Hill](#). The house burned down two years short of its 100th birthday, in 1886, and the Davidson family converted the detached rear kitchen for their new home. (Detached kitchens were common in the South, and were intended to keep cooking heat away from the main house and decrease the danger of fire.) Behind the present day house are a smoke house, where hams were cured for market in Charleston, a well house, and an ash house, where lye was produced for making soap. When the house was built in 1788 Major John Davidson was already a prominent figure in the area. He came to Mecklenburg as a young blacksmith in 1760 and was fortunate enough to marry Violet Wilson, whose father, Samuel, owned a vast amount of land in the Hopewell area. The land here was a gift to the couple. Although he married into Mecklenburg's planter society, Davidson never completely gave up his industrial roots; he was among those who pioneered iron mining and manufacture across the Catawba River in Lincoln County.

John and his family were closely connected with the Revolutionary War--that is where his Major's rank came from. It was from the log house on this site that John's relative and fellow officer, General William Lee Davidson, left for the ill-fated battle of Cowan's Ford in 1781. General Davidson was killed at the battle, and his recovered body was buried secretly that night in the Hopewell Church graveyard. John was more fortunate than his kinsman. He retired in his eighty-eighth year, and moved to Beaver Dam to spend his last nine years with his daughter Betsy and her husband William Lee Davidson II. You can find his grave in the burial ground opposite Rural Hill.



Rural Hill plantation ruins

Just a bit farther on Neck Road, opposite Rural Hill, you will see the plantation graveyard.

8. You may recognize the style of the stone wall surrounding the Rural Hill Cemetery. It was built by E.L. Baxter Davidson in 1923, using stones from the Rural Hill ruin and the Catawba River. The stonemason he hired, a Scot named Brown, also did the masonry at Duke University. Look for E. L. Baxter Davidson's grave.

Just past the graveyard, look to your left and you will see a one-room, frame school house at the edge of the woods.



Rural Hill schoolhouse

9. This school house was built in 1890 and served the white children of the vicinity until 1911. All grades attended the Davidson School, named for the family who owned Rural Hill. The building originally stood close to the road but was moved to its present site when another larger one-room school house was erected to replace it. The school house became the home of a black tenant family which included 8 children. Thereafter, it became a hay barn. It was restored in 1992 by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Preservation Fund. A one-room school house for blacks stood on the opposite side of the road in the woods.

Turn left immediately past the school house onto the unpaved extension of Neck Rd. On your right, after .4 miles, you will see Holly Bend on your right.

10. **Holly Bend** was built in 1800 by Major Davidson's son Robert. In time Robert was to become the largest slave owner in the county, with over 100 slaves. The Federal style house probably originally faced the river, and what is now the front of the house was then the back.

A later owner of the house was John Lindsay Parks, who continued to raise cotton here. One of his sons built a house on Beatties Ford Rd., and another, John Lindsay Jr., decided to build his home farther down Neck Rd.

The Lyndsay Parks Jr. House and a public waterfowl observation blind are located at the end of Neck Rd. Although the house is worth seeing, be warned that it is a 3-mile round trip along an unpaved road.

11. A local builder, John Ellis McAuley (see **Route VI**) designed and built this house for John Lindsay Parks Jr. in 1905. The house is a typical Mecklenburg farm house; it has side gables and is one room deep with external end chimneys--the back additions are of a later date. During the unprecedented flood of July, 1916, the Parks house escaped damage by the flood waters, but many other houses closer to the river were swept away, and eighty people lost their lives.

Return to the paved part of Neck Rd. Just before reaching it, notice the house on your right close to the old school house.

12. This is yet another house belonging to the Parks family. William Gluyas Parks, the grandson of John Lindsay, Sr., built this traditional style farm house in 1913.

Return to Beatties Ford Rd. Turn right, and then take the next left onto Hambright Rd. At the junction with McCoy Rd. turn left. About a mile up the road, you will see an imposing house on your left, set on a hill near a new subdivision.

13. This is **Oak Lawn**, the house of Benjamin Davidson and his wife **Betsy**. The couple are a good illustration of the connections among planter families common in this part of the county: he was the son of Major John Davidson of Rural Hill, and she the daughter of James Latta of Latta Place. The house was built in 1818-20, but Benjamin only lived here for a few years before his death in 1829. Betsy had a passion for gardening and planted a quarter mile long avenue of oaks in front of the house which gave way to a further three quarter miles of cedars beyond. In her garden

she blended herbs and flowers for their aroma. She left the house in 1835 when she married her sister's widower, Rufus Reid, and moved to Mount Mourne.

Continue on McCoy Rd., and turn left onto Gilead Rd. at the stop sign. As you round a bend in the road after 1.2 miles, pull into the drive of the first house on your right.

14. The story of this site goes back to 1779, when Hugh Torance, a peddler from nearby Salisbury, bought a piece of land here and built a log cabin. The Revolutionary War prevented him from moving into the cabin right away. The delay, however, was not without its advantages, for when he finally did move in, Hugh had a family. In the interim, Hugh married Isabella Falls, a war widow, and their only son, James, was born in Salisbury in 1784. Shortly after, Hugh settled into the [log structure](#) now incorporated into this building and began farming. He soon prospered and was able to add on to his house. The original log building faced south (towards the road) and had an exterior stone chimney on its west side. The chimney has now been restored, and it is on the same side of the building as the front door. This unusual arrangement came about because the Torance family built a two-story addition to the south side of the log cabin in about 1796 which changed the orientation of the house. By 1800 Hugh had a fine brick house built for himself and his wife on the site of Cedar Grove next door.

Hugh's son James spent much of his youth in Salisbury, where he attended an academy and stayed with his uncle Albert. His uncle's career as a merchant obviously appealed to James, since he began to run his own operation in 1805 at the age of 21 in his father's old house. A one-story addition was made to the east side of the log house, and this became the Torance Store. James' account books give us a fascinating glimpse of the life in Mecklenburg County during the early nineteenth century. Debts at the store were often settled in the fall with cotton, and some customers paid by freighting cotton and farm produce from the store to Camden and Charleston. But Mecklenburg was still the frontier; settlers were still trading in fur and indigo, and buying powder and flints, as late as the 1820s. The store carried a wide range of goods including farm implements, looms and spinning wheels, clothing, medicine, staples, and little luxuries like coffee, tea, and spices.

James Torance inherited his parents' fortune in 1816 when both Hugh and Isabella died, and he almost tripled it over the next thirty years. James had three wives, two of whom were daughters of local planters: Nancy Davidson of Mount Mourne and Mary Latta of Latta Place. His last wife was Margaret Allison, and it was with her that James built [Cedar Grove](#), the grand mansion opposite, between 1831 and 1833. This impressive Greek Revival house was probably designed by a professional rather than a local builder. Materials for its construction came from near and far; the bricks were manufactured on the site; tin, copper, sash cord, wood screws, and locks came from New York; pipe came from Philadelphia; and the fine door knocker was purchased by James himself in Charleston. For its time and place, the house was impressively large. There are 5,000 feet of floor space, the first-floor ceilings are thirteen feet high, and the cellar walls are twenty-two inches thick. Notice the characteristics of the Greek Revival in the impressive porch with its Doric capitals. The high stepped brick parapets above the gables were intended to echo the fine buildings in New York.

The [Torance Store](#) is open to the public at certain times. (For information call (704) 596-1499 or (704) 892-5600.)



Cedar Grove



Torance Store

Drive a farther mile on Gilead Rd., and take the left turn onto Bud Henderson Rd. After .9 miles, you will see the house called Ingleside to your right.

15. The planter Samuel Wilson owned the land here, and his descendent Dr. William Davidson (grandson of Major John Davidson) built this elegant house at the time of the Civil War. The name he chose, **Ingleside**, is Scottish for fireside and reflects his family's Scots-Irish background. However, this traditionalism is not reflected in the style of the house, which is quite rare in this area. Today the house is one of the county's finest examples of Italianate architecture. Notice the bracketed eaves, the tall narrow windows, and the low pitch of the roof.



Ingleside

Continue on Bud Henderson Rd. to the junction with Beatties Ford Rd. Turn right. After about 1 mile, look out for the J. M. Alexander house on your left.

16. Look for the decorative wood trim which adorns this lovely vernacular farm **house**. John Milton Alexander, who built the house in 1873 to 1874, was a "jack-of-all-trades." Besides running a cotton farm and gin, he operated a blacksmith's shop and sawmill, and had a local reputation as the man to break-in feisty horses. His daughters Minnie and Janet both became missionaries to Pakistan. They recounted life here at the house in a family album. On rainy days, their father would put them on the saddle of their horse "Simon" to ride to school. Once at school, "big boys" would help them off of the horse, tie the reins to the saddle, and turn "Simon" around. Then "Joe," the big collie dog, who always followed them to school, would ensure that "Simon" went home.

A little farther down Beatties Ford Rd. on your left you will see the church that the families in this area attended.

17. The Gilead Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church is the oldest A.R.P. congregation in the county; it was organized in 1787. The congregation first met in a log fort, built for protection against Indian attack. The present church building dates from 1880 to 1882. A vestibule was added to the front in the 1960s.

Shortly after the church you will come to Hicks Cross Roads. Go straight ahead at the intersection, and notice the monument on your left.

18. The monument has hands pointing to Cowan's Ford, where General William Davidson was killed on February 1, 1781, and to Davidson College, named in his honor. Can you guess from the style who erected it in the 1920s?

At the junction with Hwy. 73 you may wish to take the short detour to the left. There are three attractions: the General William Lee Davidson Memorial and the Duke Power Energy Explorium (open Monday to Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday 12 p.m. to 5 p.m.) are both 1.5 miles from here. (For information about the Explorium call (704) 875-1385.) A mile farther is the Cowan's Ford Dam which created Lake Norman on the Catawba River in 1963. At the dam there is an overlook with historical information; tours are available during the summer from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Saturday and from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Sunday. (For information call (704) 827-6691); If you don't want to detour, turn right onto Hwy. 73. After .7 miles, you will see the former Caldwell Rosenwald School on your left.

19. The Caldwell Rosenwald School was erected in 1925 using a Rosenwald grant and matching local funds. These were schools erected to help educate the rural black population. (See **Routes III, IV, and VI** for more information on the [Rosenwald schools](#).)

Continue on Hwy. 73. The route is dominated by twentieth-century developments along the lake side, but there are a few older houses. After 4 miles, turn left on Bethel Church Rd. Bethel Presbyterian Church is on your right, just after the turn.

20. The Bethel Presbyterian Church we see today was built in 1896, and has had several modern additions. Notice the Gothic arched windows in the older part of the

sanctuary. The man who donated the land for Davidson College, Major William Lee Davidson II, attended church here after it was founded in 1828.

Return to Hwy. 73, turn left, and continue straight ahead across I-77 and into downtown Cornelius.

21. Cornelius is mainly a product of the railway which bisects the town. However, local legend says that the town owes its beginnings to a debate between two Davidson merchant firms over the weighing of cotton. The Sloan brothers wished to appoint an official town weigher, while R.J. Stough preferred to weigh his own cotton. The matter was brought to a vote and Stough lost. He subsequently set up his scales here, outside the jurisdiction of the town of Davidson. In the end the move worked in his favor, since farmers preferred to sell here rather than face the often impassable muddy hill between here and Davidson. Stough's clerk, C. W. Johnston, happened to be a "right smart boy," and later became the director of the [Highland Park Cotton Mill](#) in Charlotte. (**See Route IV.**) Johnston inspired Stough to encourage a wealthy Davidsonian to build a cotton mill here to take advantage of the plentiful cotton supply. That man was Joe Cornelius, and he gave his name to the new town. Most of the houses that you pass were built between the 1890s and 1920s by local merchants.



Two views of Catawba Ave., the main street, in Cornelius

See the Cornelius tour route...

At the intersection of Hwy. 73 and Hwy. 115 (Statesville Rd.), turn left, and drive the .8 miles into Davidson.

22. Davidson owes its growth to two forces, the college and the railway. Before 1837, this whole area was farmland belonging to Major William Lee Davidson II, the son of

General Davidson who died at Cowan's Ford. When the committee of the Concord Presbytery were selecting a site for a manual labor school, one of the members, William Davidson, offered to sell 469 acres of his plantation to the committee for a nominal sum; the school was named Davidson College in honor of his father. It is thought that in the end, Davidson decided to donate the land. He continued to support the new college financially. Just after it opened, he gave \$2,000 for an endowed professorship, and he left the college a generous legacy on his death in 1862.

The manual labor system did not prove to be popular: as one student wrote, "We came here to dig Greek roots, not sassafras." In 1841 the college became a classical school, and slowly grew to its present size. Among the early buildings which have survived are the impressive Greek Revival-style [Philanthropic Hall](#) and [Eumenean Hall](#), and two row-house dormitories, [Elm Row](#) and [Oak Row](#).

The Civil War harshly interrupted the development of the college, for the entire endowment was lost in Confederate securities. Recovery did not fully occur until 1925, when James B. Duke gave the college a handsome endowment.



Philanthropic Hall



Eumenean Hall



Elm Row



Oak Row

The college's impact on the village can be seen in a number of places. One example is across Main St. from the campus. This fascinating building with its two-story porch served the college as the [Helper Hotel](#) for many years. Most of the houses in the vicinity of the college were built as faculty homes during the late nineteenth century, and represent a variety of styles popular between 1880 and 1910.

The commercial center of Davidson grew in response to the Atlantic Tennessee and Ohio Railroad which reached here in 1860, though its full impact was delayed until after the Civil War. By 1891 Davidson had its first cotton mill, and a second mill was

founded in 1903. Thanks to the mills, Davidson's central business district flourished. Most of the brick stores along Main Street were built after the original wood-frame buildings were demolished in two serious fires in 1901 and 1906.

See the Davidson tour route...

It is best to see Davidson by foot. Park your car and explore the town and college. The local visitor's center is located in the Copeland house at 305 N. Main St. It is open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday to Friday.

*When you are ready, leave Davidson on Concord Rd. which heads east out of town at the traffic lights alongside the college. Ensure that you take the right fork when the road divides in about two miles. After a farther .6 miles, look for the house called **Beaver Dam** on your left.*

23. This was the home of William Davidson II, and the meetings that led to the foundation of the college were held here. Major Davidson bought the land in 1808 and built a large log house which was replaced by a still larger log home in 1829. As you can see, it is built in the traditional Mecklenburg "I" pattern. Major Davidson's wife was Betsy Davidson (the daughter of Major John Davidson of Rural Hill). Although they had no children, Betsy loved to entertain her many nieces and nephews here. For many years this was the home of Dr. Chalmers Davidson, a beloved professor at Davidson College who died in 1994.



Beaver Dam

Continue east on the Concord-Davidson Rd. for approximately 1.6 miles. At the stop sign, turn left onto Hwy. 73. After .4 miles, take the first right turn onto Ramah Church Rd, and after 1 mile, pull into the parking lot of Ramah Church.

24. People were worshipping at [Ramah Presbyterian Church](#) as early as 1783. Their first log sanctuary was destroyed in 1820 by "sacrilegious revelers," all of whom died shortly afterwards, supposedly in a fitting display of divine retribution. The frame church that was built in the 1820s was replaced by this sanctuary in 1881, built on the same foundation. The architecture is very simple and Spartan, much like earlier meeting houses in the area. (The log hut behind the church, incidentally, was built in 1927.)



Ramah Presbyterian Church

Before leaving, notice the graveyard opposite. The graves date from around 1800. The large boulders are outcroppings of granite common in this area.

Continue on Ramah Church Rd. After 2 miles, look out for an old farm house on your right, set well back from the road.

25. This was another house built by John McAuley during the 1880s. This one was built on a contract from William Eldridge Osborne, whose grandfather had moved to Mecklenburg and settled on this land.

Continue on Ramah Church Rd. for .7 mile. Just on the outskirts of Huntersville, take a left turn onto Glendale Rd. Be careful not to miss the turn. From Glendale Rd. turn right down 4th St. This will take you through the mill village of Huntersville's Anchor Mills. Turn left just after the railroad tracks onto Main St.

See the Huntersville tour route...

26. Main Street was the first major street of Huntersville. Like Cornelius, the town grew up along the tracks of the Atlanta Tennessee and Ohio Railway, which first laid its tracks through the area in 1860, and was later renovated in 1874 to repair damage caused by the Civil War. An earlier settlement here was known as Craighead for Alexander Craighead, and it had been a local gathering place to hear open-air sermons.

27. To your left you will see the buildings of Anchor Mills which began production here in the 1890s.

Turn right down Bigham St.

28. On the corner of Bigham and Main Streets you will see the Huntersville A.R.P. Church. The church was founded in 1874, although the Gothic-style building we see today dates from 1901. As you drive down Bigham St. you will notice that this 1901 church faced Main St., but that a later addition created a new sanctuary facing Hwy. 115, the new "Main Street" of Huntersville.

After 1878, Huntersville became locally famous for its two academies, which made Huntersville a popular place to reside. Dr. Orr's Huntersville High School was associated with the A.R.P Church. A catalog for the school praised its location, "situated on a high ridge of country, no place can boast purer or fresher air and consequently no place is healthier than Huntersville." When it opened in 1878, board and lodging were \$8 per month; tuition was \$1.15; and washing was an extra dollar.

Turn left onto Hwy. 115 (Old Statesville Rd.) and then right at the traffic light onto Gilead Rd. Stop in front of the third house on the right, 108 Gilead Rd.

29. Huntersville's second academy was the Grey Academy located on what was then Academy St. (now Gilead Rd.). Most of the houses on the street are associated with the academy, and date from around 1910. Many were owned by prosperous farmers who chose to lease out their farms and to build houses here in order to provide a better education for their children. Professor Hugh Grey, the principal of the academy, built

this house in the 1890s. At that time there was little here except farmland and the academy. Professor Grey was later Mecklenburg's superintendent of schools.

Turn around in the school parking lot next door to Professor Grey's house.

30. The [Huntersville Agricultural Building](#) here was part of a later school built in the 1920s. If it reminds you of the Long Creek School building, it should, for this too was an agricultural building.



The Huntersville Agricultural Building

Turn left onto Gilead Rd. and go straight ahead at the traffic lights, across Hwy. 115. When you reach Main St. (just before the train tracks) turn right.

31. As you drive down Main St., you will pass the old commercial district to your right. A bit farther down, notice the fine Victorian house across the train tracks with the two-story porch and fine sawn woodwork. This was the old Presbyterian parsonage built in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Think about all the small towns you have visited on this tour. Except for Mint Hill, they all grew up along the railroad tracks. That's true of Pineville, Matthews, Cornelius, Davidson, and Huntersville. The tour takes you to them all.

Follow Main St. as it curves to the right, and at the junction turn left onto Hwy. 115 (Old Statesville Rd.) Drive 3.5 miles to Eastfield Rd. which is on your left.

(On the route, look out for an early gas station built in the 1920s at the junction with Alexandriana Rd.) Just past Eastfield Rd., on your right, turn into Alexandriana Park.

32. The park commemorates the site of the home of John McKnitt Alexander, secretary and custodian for the original copy of the alleged Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. The story is that this declaration was written on May 20, 1775, predating the national declaration by more than a year. Unfortunately, John McKnitt's home and allegedly the original document burned in 1800, but many Mecklenburgers have no doubt about its authenticity. The park has a picnic area but no toilet facilities.

Turn around and drive back to the intersection with Eastfield Rd. Turn right onto Eastfield Rd. After 1 mile, you will see the Edgewood farmhouse on your right. (On the way you will pass an 1880s farm, also on your right.)

33. Once again, the names associated with [Edgewood](#) will be familiar. It was built in about 1840 by Robert Davidson Alexander, whose grandfathers were John McKnitt Alexander and Major John Davidson. His wife, Abigail Bain Caldwell, was the great granddaughter of Alexander Craighead. The log house which they built as newlyweds in 1830 is still behind the house. Robert was locally known as "squire" since he was a justice of the peace and a member of the county court. He also had a reputation as a lover of books and discussion, which fit in with his role as a trustee for Davidson College. The house is significant because it was one of the first in the county to have interior chimneys.



Edgewood

Immediately past the Edgewood farmhouse turn right onto Browne Rd. After almost a mile, you will pass Hucks Place, a typical late-nineteenth century Mecklenburg farmhouse on your left. Notice its classic position facing south. After another mile, turn right onto Hucks Rd. Drive a farther 1.8 miles to the junction with Hwy. 115. (Old Statesville Rd.) Turn left, and after .2 miles, turn left again onto Bob Beaty Rd.

34. The little community of [Croft](#) that flanks the train tracks here is an excellent example of the kinds of small communities that grew up along the railway line during the late nineteenth century. Here a school, store, and cotton gin acted as the focal point for local farmers. The second house on your left dates from 1914 and belonged to Robert Beaty, a blind farmer who still managed to grow corn and cotton on his twenty-seven acre parcel.

Next door to Beaty's farm was the Croft School House.



Croft School House

Easy to see in the winter, it is almost completely hidden by foliage in the summer, but you can get a closer look if you peer through the branches. The original two-room, two-story school house is to the left and was constructed around 1890. During the 1900s, an addition was added to the right, creating four classrooms and making it the largest remaining pre-1920 school house in the county. It was used until 1941. One teacher recalled that she had to pause in her lesson when the gin whistle blew from across the train tracks. It was a small community. The house next door to the school belonged to Silas Winslow Davis who opened a [store](#) here in 1908 with his brother Charles. You will come to the store a short distance past the house, just before the road turns right to recross the train tracks. Still operating today, this country store retains much of the atmosphere of the early part of the century, selling everything from overalls to stoneware crocks. Until the 1920s, all the goods here were delivered on the railway. Saturday was usually the busiest day. Farmers brought in their cotton to be put through the gin and then shipped out. A boxcar full of huge bags of sugar, flour, fertilizer, and other such items would be waiting on the siding in front of the store, and families would load their wagons directly before being tempted into the store to examine the wide array of goods inside. Silas's brother Charles lived across the train tracks from the store in the 1890s farmhouse that you can still see today. To round out this portrait of the community, it is worth noting that Charles's wife, Nena, was a school teacher at the Croft School.

This concludes the North Mecklenburg tour. To return to I-77, continue across Hwy. 115 onto Reams Rd. Turn right on to Harris Blvd., and follow the signs for I-77. To return to Charlotte, follow the above directions for I-77, and go south. Exit at Trade St. for uptown Charlotte.