

## TEACHER'S HOUSE AT JOHNSON C. SMITH UNIVERSITY

*This report was written on July 2, 1980*

**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Teacher's House at Johnson C. Smith University is located on the Campus of Johnson C. Smith University at 100 Beatties Ford Rd. in Charlotte NC.

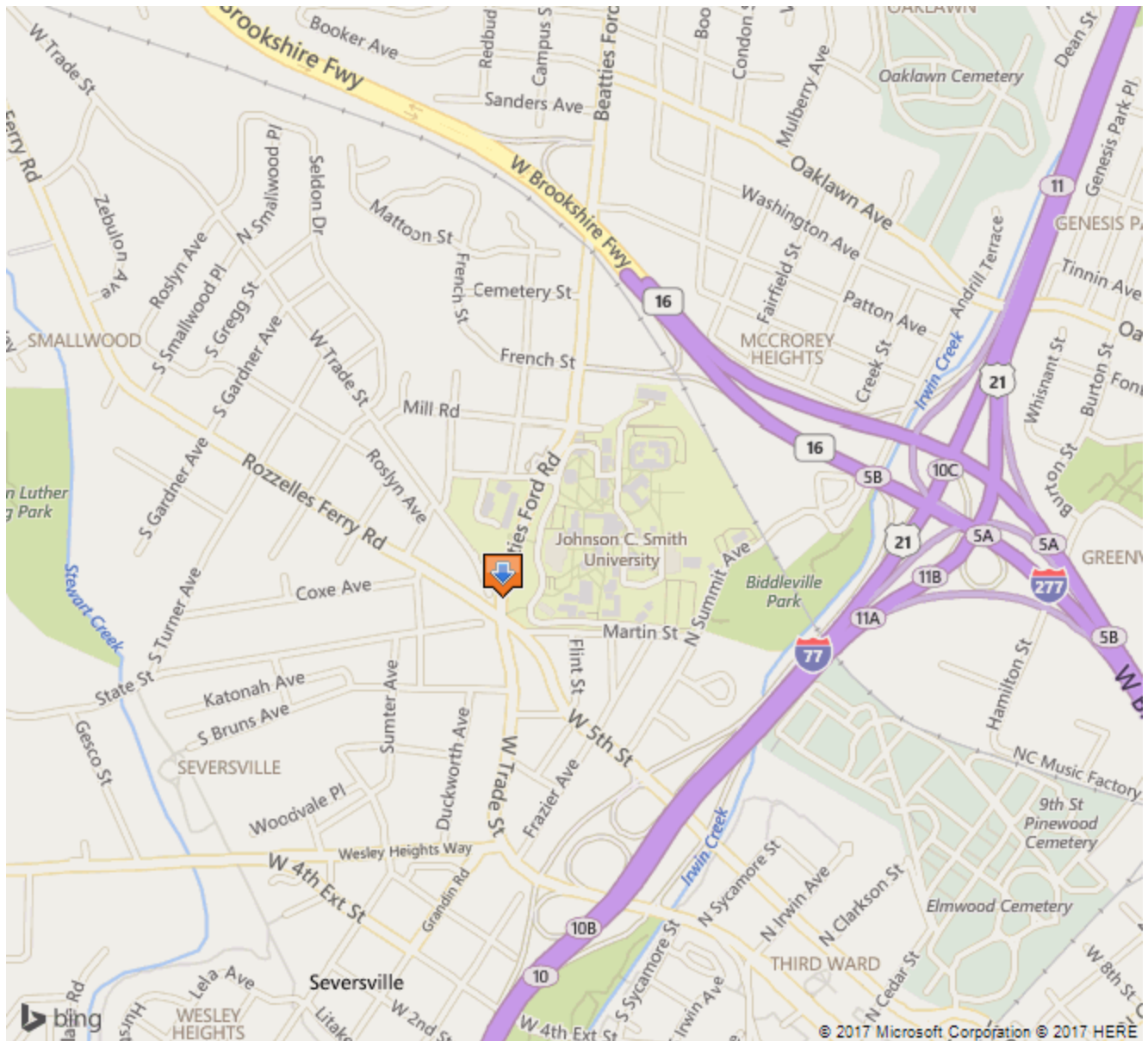
**2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner and occupant of the property:** The present owner and occupant of the property is:

Johnson C. Smith University, Inc.  
100 Beatties Ford Rd.  
Charlotte, NC, 28216

Telephone: 372-2370

**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 which depicts the location of the property.



**5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property:** The original 24-acre campus of the Biddle Memorial Institute, now Johnson C. Smith University, is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 9, Page 323. The Tax Parcel Number is 078-201-06.

**6. A brief historical sketch of the property:**

In the nineteenth century, it was customary for colleges and universities to provide housing for the members of the faculty and their families. <sup>1</sup> The building which now serves as the University Health Center was originally used as a teacher's home. Architecturally, the house belongs to the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

However, it was moved to its present location sometime between 1911 and 1925, probably before 1921. <sup>2</sup> It is reasonable to infer that the house was moved from its initial site to make way for another University building.

Johnson C. Smith University had its beginnings in the mid-1860's, when the black population of the South found itself unprepared to participate in the mainstream of American life. Samuel Carothers Alexander, a native of Pennsylvania and minister of [Steele Creek Presbyterian Church](#) during the Civil War, joined with Rev. Willis L. Miller, member of the Concord Presbytery, in attempting to keep the blacks within the fold of the Presbyterian church rather than having to join the A. M. E. Zion churches, which emerged as a separate black domination in the South in the 1860's. Unable to maintain their connection with the Southern Presbyterian Church, Alexander and his two associates secured their commissions as missionaries of the Northern Presbyterian Church. <sup>3</sup>

Convinced that blacks would no longer remain in Southern Presbyterian Churches which they had attended as slaves, Alexander, Miller, and Murkland recruited members for the Northern Presbyterian which they had established, such as Seventh Street Presbyterian Church or the [First United Presbyterian Church](#) in Charlotte, NC <sup>4</sup>

One can imagine the courage and the fortitude which men such as Alexander, Miller, and Murkland had to possess. In the opinion of many of their former colleagues, these white men were turncoats and renegades. Indicative of the feelings of the Southern Presbyterian ministers was a letter which appeared in the *Western Democrat*, a Charlotte newspaper, on October 22, 1867. "Oh, how unpleasant is it to have our pastorates invaded and certain classes of the flock weaned off to other pastures," the writer exclaimed. <sup>5</sup>

On October 8, 1867, the *Western Democrat* announced that the Rev. Alexander and his associates had obtained a charter to establish "Biddle Memorial Institute," an institution for "preparing Teachers, Catechists, and Ministers for the education of the colored race." <sup>6</sup> Named for Major Henry Jonathan Biddle (1817-1862), whose widow provided funds for the school, the institution acquired its first president in 1870. He was Rev. Stephen Mattoon (1816-1889), who had just returned to the United States from Siam, where he had served as a missionary for several years. Mattoon was a person of great administrative talent. During his presidency, (1870-1884) and (1885-1886), the school prospered. <sup>7</sup> In October 1873, it paid \$1600 for land approximately one mile west of Charlotte. <sup>8</sup> By 1875, the institute had established its campus on this site. The faculty consisted of four individuals, J.H. Shedd, R.W. Hall, W.E. Meese, and W.H. Hartzell. All teacher's houses were probably erected during these years.

In 1883, the name of the school was changed to "Biddle University."<sup>10</sup> That year also witnessed the completion of [Biddle Hall](#), which cost forty-thousand dollars to construct.<sup>11</sup> Stephan Mattoon died on August 15, 1889.<sup>12</sup> His funeral took place in the University chapel, and Mattoon and his wife are buried in Charlotte. "The Doctor was a man of fine personal presence and more than ordinary strength of character," *The Charlotte Chronicle* observed.<sup>13</sup> It is obvious that Mattoon had transformed Biddle University into an institution which enjoyed the respect of the west majority of Charlotteans, both black and white.

An important and symbolic turning point in the history of Biddle University occurred in 1891, when the school acquired its first black president, Dr. Daniel J. Sanders.<sup>14</sup> Thereafter, the institution has flourished under a succession of black leaders. In 1895, a generous gift from Miss Mary A. Carter of Geneva, NY, enabled the University to construct an elegant dormitory, appropriately, named "[Carter Hall](#)."<sup>15</sup> The presidency of Rev. H. L. McCrorey (1907-1947) witnessed two events of momentous significance in the history of the school. In 1923, the name of the institution was changed to Johnson C. Smith University in honor of Johnson C. Smith, a druggist from Pittsburgh, PA., who had made a fortune in the tin plating business. Between 1921 and 1929, his widow contributed \$400,000 for buildings and equipment.<sup>16</sup> In 1924, the financial stability of the University was strengthened even more by a bequest from the Duke Endowment, the philanthropic foundation established by James Buchanan Duke.<sup>17</sup> Johnson C. Smith University has continued to prosper in the intervening years and has become one of the leading black institutions of higher learning in the South. Clearly, the hopes and aspirations of men such as SC Alexander, W.L. Miller, and S.S. Murkland have been more than fulfilled.

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#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> One can see this phenomenon at work in the early history of Davidson College.

<sup>2</sup> A photograph in the historical archives of Johnson C. Smith University, dated 1925, shows the house at its present location. Another photograph, undated but probably taken before 1921, also shows the house at its present location. The 1911 Sanborn Insurance Map of Charlotte reveals that the house was not at its present site in 1911 (see 1911 Sanborn Insurance Map, p. 87). However, the 1929 Sanborn Insurance Map shows the house at its present location (see Sanborn Insurance for 1929, Vol. II., p. 347).

<sup>3</sup> Inez Moore Parker, Helen Vassy Callison, ed., *The Biddle-Johnson C. Smith Story* (The Observer Craftsman Company, Charlotte, NC, 1975) pp. 3-4. Hereafter cited as Parker.

<sup>4</sup> Parker, p. 4. *The Western Democrat* (October 22, 1867), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *The Western Democrat* (October 22, 1867), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> *The Western Democrat* (October 8, 1867), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Parker, pp. 6-8. For a photograph of Rev. and Mrs. Mattoon, see Parker, p. 6. Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1933) Vol. 12, pp. 424-425. Hereafter cited as Malone.

<sup>8</sup> Mecklenburg County Deed Book 9, p. 323.

<sup>9</sup> Charlotte City Directory for 1875-76, p. 125.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Lawrence McCrorey, Sr., "A Brief History of Johnson C. Smith University," in *Johnson C. Smith University Bulletin* (May 1935) pp. 5-23.

<sup>11</sup> Parker, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Malone, pp. 424-425.

<sup>13</sup> *Charlotte Chronicle* (August 16, 1889), p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Parker, pp. 11-12. For a photograph of D. J. Sanders, see Parker, p. 93.

<sup>15</sup> Parker, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Parker, pp. 19-20. For a photograph of H.L. McCrorey, see Parker, p. 93.

<sup>17</sup> Parker, pp. 19-20.

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Jack O. Boyte, A.I.A.

**8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-399.4:**

**a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance:** The Commission judges that the property known as the Teacher's House at Johnson C. Smith University (now University Health Center) does possess special historic significance in terms of Charlotte- Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its

judgments on the following considerations: 1) it is among the oldest structures on the campus of Johnson C. Smith University; and 2) architecturally, the exterior of the house represents a rare example of a local Victorian Motif.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:** The Commission judges that the architectural description included in this report demonstrates that the majority or original portions of the exterior of the structure meet this criterion.

**9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal:** The commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply annually for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem on all or any portion of the property which becomes "historic property." The current Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal of the Teacher's House (now University Health Center) at Johnson C. Smith University is \$27,320. The property is currently exempt from the payment of Ad Valorem taxes.

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#### Bibliography

*Charlotte Chronicle.*

Charlotte City Directory for 1875-76.

Henry Lawrence McCrorey Sr., "A Brief History of Johnson C. Smith University," in *Johnson C. Smith University Bulletin* (May 1935) pp. 5-23.

Dumas, Malone ed., *Dictionary of American Biography* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1933) Vol. 12, pp. 424-425.

Inez Moore Parker, Helen Callison, ed., *The Biddle-Johnson C. Smith Story* (The Observer Craftsman Company, Charlotte, N.C., 1975)

Records of the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office.

Sanborn Insurance Map of Charlotte, N.C., for 1911.

Sanborn Insurance Map of Charlotte, N.C., for 1929, Vol. II.

*The Western Democrat.*

University Archives of Johnson C. Smith University.

Vertical Files of the Carolina Room of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library.

**Date of the Preparation of this Report:** July 2, 1980.

**Prepared by:** Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission  
3500 Shamrock Dr.  
Charlotte, N.C. 28215

Telephone: (704) 332-2726

### *Architectural Description*

On the tree lined back entrance to the campus of Johnson C. Smith University is a typical late Victorian frame building whose origins match those of the nineteenth century, the ornamented house was originally a faculty residence. In recent years, however, it has served a variety of university needs and it is presently a health service facility.

The two story structure is a rare local example of the **Italianate** style popular during the late 1800's. And, typically, there are suggestions of other modes employed in the exterior detailing. One may note Eastlake brackets and especially expressive carpentry in the stick style gable frames, for example. The rectangular mass of the house is a balanced composition accentuated by pronounced moldings and details.

An early addition, probably at the turn of the century, consists of twin appendages at the rear. These two story wings have finishing details similar to those in the original house. Windows in the addition vary noticeably from the originals, however. The later **sash** have a single vertical center **muntin**, whereas the earlier units are one large undivided light.

The house rests on a low brick foundation wall which originally consisted of brick corner piers with intermediate pillars under the outside sills. These original pier spaces now have solid red brick infill. Just over the brick foundation is a wide board still band, above which is a narrow sloped drip mold. Above this base band the exterior walls are sheathed with ship lap siding and rise two floors to a plain wide frieze under a bracketed overhang of the typical beaded boards.

Corners are all cased with beaded corner bands which rise from the foundation to the frieze. The solid curved overhang brackets are paired and widely spaced under a soffit which follows the [roof](#) line on the building perimeter, except at the gable walls. The roof edge is a wide molded fascia designed to conceal built-in gutters. Here and there round tin spouts drop through the soffit and reach to the ground.

The front facade, which faces south, is three bays wide. Each bay is defined by high, narrow, twin windows balanced in the front wall. As noted above, the original sash have one large undivided light, and in several windows irregular glass typical of the late nineteenth century is preserved. Window openings are framed above with a molded hood, and below are thick sills supported on corbeled brackets. Spanning the width of the front is a canopy. Slender wood corner columns support the canopy and have scroll sawn "gingerbread" brackets at the top. In the canopy gable, an ornamented carved pendant drops to a cross gable ornament, also scroll sawn.

The front porch is now enclosed, but the original roof remains, and details of the center canopy columns and brackets illustrate the likely nature of the original.

The front facade is highlighted by an extraordinary center gable at the roof. Rising high to a truncated front ridge, the gable has steep rake boards connected by heavy molded cross brackets. In the gable wall under these brackets is a small hooded garret window.

Roof surfaces are covered with square edged slate. Centered in each slope are several rows of "[fish scale](#)" [shingles](#). The roof has a long ridge running parallel to the front interrupted only by the center gable. At each side the roof ends with an elaborate gable where cross brackets similar to those at the front join the steep rakes.

On the west side, there is a three sided one story bay with a low tin roof. Twin windows in the center and single windows angled at each side flood the original parlor with natural light. Below the tall windows there are recessed molded wood panels.

A covered side entrance porch occurs to the rear beside the bay window. The porch cover is also a low tin roof, with a molded fascia much like that over the window bay. The roof rests on slender corner columns, and at the ceiling there are small curved brackets which lack the exuberance of those at the front. An original four panel kitchen door opens from this porch. With molded edges, the recessed panels display typical skilled planning mill work of the period. A divided light [transom window](#) completes the entrance frame.



Windows at the second floor are centered above the window bay and above the kitchen porch. Both are twin double hung units with single lights in each sash. Hood molding and heavy sills match those at the front.

The east side demonstrates the balance of the original facade. Two rooms on each on each floor have centered twin windows which form a symmetrical two bay elevation.

The two story wings depart from the original window pattern. On each side and at the rear there are single room additions which are lighted by single windows, rather than by paired units. Also, the later windows have divided lights with one center muntin, as mentioned above.

This pleasant survivor from the time when the school was known as Biddle University is an important architectural remnant from the early campus composition. Built at a time when designers were seeking escape from rigid traditional motifs, the faculty house was meticulously detailed to embody some of the best of exciting new styles of the time. It is a significant building in the history of the university.