

WILSON-SHELTON HOUSE

This report was written on December 4, 1985

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Wilson-Shelton House is located at 1400 Queens Road in Charlotte, North Carolina.

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

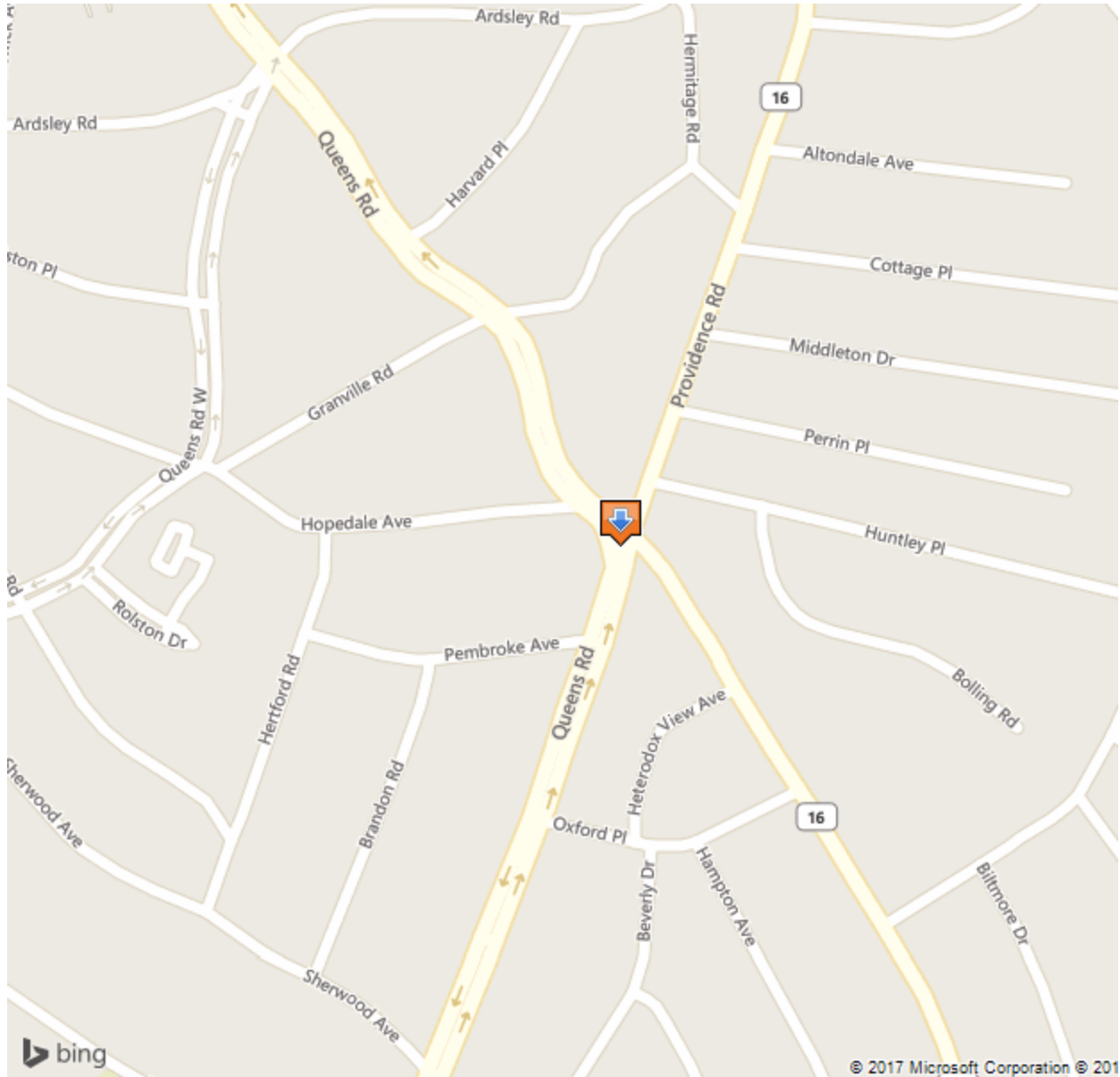
The present owner of the property is:

Robert H. Morrison
1333 Queens Rd.
Charlotte, NC, 28207

Telephone: (704) 333-9645

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 most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 4244, page 292. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 153-064-17.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Mrs. Barbara Mull.

7. A brief architectural sketch of the property: This report contains a brief architectural sketch prepared by Mr. Joseph Schuchman, edited and revised by Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

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 Wilson-Shelton House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Wilson-Shelton House, completed in December, 1925, was designed by William H. Peeps, an architect of regional and local importance; 2) George E. Wilson, Jr., the initial owner and occupant of the house, was a prominent businessman in the community and served as Mayor of Charlotte from 1929 until 1931; 3) Lida Caldwell Wilson was a daughter of a Queens College president and taught at Queens College before her marriage; 4) Thomas M. Shelton, Jr., who purchased the house in 1948 and established his residence there, was an important business leader in Charlotte; and 5) the Wilson-Shelton House, situated at the corner of Queens Road and Providence Road, is the only corner of that intersection which retains its original edifice and, therefore, occupies a place of great importance in terms of the Myers Park townscape. **b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association:** The Commission contends that the attached architectural description by Mr. Joseph Schuchman, edited and revised by Dr. Dan L. Morrill, demonstrates that the Wilson-Shelton 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 "historic property." The current appraised value of the 1.164 acres of land is \$101,430. The current appraised value of the improvement is \$89,720. The total current appraised value is \$191,150. The most recent annual property tax bill on this property was \$2,437.16. The property is zoned R6MF.

Date of Preparation of this Report: December 4, 1985

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Consulting Director
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
1225 S. Caldwell St.
Charlotte, N.C. 28203

Telephone: 704/376-9115

Historical Overview

Barbara M. Mull

The stately **Tudor** residence at 1400 Queens Road was designed for the George E. Wilson, Jr. family by prominent Charlotte architect William H. Peeps,¹ and by the time contractors Blythe and Isenhour completed construction of the house in December, 1925,² the place had already been affectionately named "Wilson's Hotel" by family and friends. In later years when Mrs. Wilson was asked to describe the spacious twelve room house with its numerous terraces and porches, she said, "there was nothing grand about it. It was plain and comfortable, and

everybody loved it." Four years after the Wilsons moved into the house, George E. Wilson, Jr. (1890-1957) became mayor of Charlotte. The name "Wilson" was not new in local and regional political circles. Joseph Harvey Wilson (1810-1884), George E. Wilson, Jr.'s grandfather, was a well-known Charlotte lawyer, a state senator, and long term solicitor for Union County.⁵ Although George E. Wilson, Jr.'s term as mayor of Charlotte (1929-1931) was made difficult by the Depression, he was able to get the managerial system of government approved by voters, marking a turning point in the city's development.⁶ Beginning in 1942, while World War II was in progress, and ending in 1957 at the time of his death, George E. Wilson, Jr. served as Charlotte's postmaster. He had been a popular mayor and remained well-liked as a public figure.⁷ A local florist recalls that Mr. Wilson arrived for work at the post office each day with a fresh carnation on his lapel. For George E. Wilson, Jr., his native Charlotte was a special place, one with a tremendous potential for growth. He was always optimistic about the city's progress and took personal pride in each phase of Charlotte's development.⁹

George E. Wilson, Jr. was a graduate of Davidson College and the University of North Carolina Law School, but his primary interests remained business and civic affairs, and those interests were many and varied. His father served as president of Charlotte's [Merchants and Farmers Bank](#), and he became the bank's vice president. Wilson Motor Company was organized by George E. Wilson, Jr., and he also served as president of both Wilson-Pettit Motor Company and Paramount Motor Company.¹⁰ Charlotte organizations which counted him on their membership rolls were the Kiwanis Club, Country Club, City Club, Executives Club, and Myers Park Presbyterian Church.¹¹ The October 15, 1915 wedding of George E. Wilson, Jr. and Lida Caldwell brought together two of Charlotte's pioneer families. A daughter of Queens College president and well-known Presbyterian minister Dr. John Livy Caldwell, Lida Caldwell Wilson (1892-1980) was a direct descendant of two men of importance to the history of Mecklenburg County and North Carolina, Dr. David Caldwell and Rev. Alexander Craighead.¹² Before her marriage, Lida Caldwell Wilson was on the faculty at Queens College, where she taught German and acted as secretary to the college president. Like her husband, she had a keen interest in civic and church affairs, and the Wilson home at 1400 Queens Road became a popular meeting place for church functions and civic organizations. Looking back on the years at 1400 Queens Road when they were rearing their family, Mrs. Wilson described the years as good ones for all of them. But there were sad times too, because only two of the Wilson's children survived infancy, Dr. John Caldwell Wilson and Rilma Sanders Wilson (Mrs. William Allen). On September 12, 1925, only days before his first birthday and a few months before the Wilsons moved into the new house, George E. Wilson, III died of pneumonia. Another baby, born prematurely, died the following year in July.¹³

Mrs. Wilson was described by her friends as being a person who believed you had to take life as it came, and just go on with it. They saw her as a woman who was sensitive to the needs of other people and enjoyed doing kindnesses when she found opportunities. The Wilson's son, Dr. John Caldwell Wilson, said that his parents were a team, and that it was his mother who was the strength behind his father.¹⁴ In 1948, the Wilsons sold the house to Thomas McKendree Shelton, Jr.¹⁵ Mrs. Wilson remarked at the time that their moving out of the house signaled the end of an era in their lives. In 1948 when he purchased the house at 1400 Queens Road from George E. Wilson, Jr., Thomas M. Shelton, Jr. (1911-1974) was well on his way to recouping the financial losses his father had suffered during the Depression, including controlling interest

in the Ed Mellon Company, extensive property holdings, numerous investments, and ownership of the Bank of Charlotte. Actually, Mr. Shelton had gone far beyond his father's financial record with his own accumulated wealth.¹⁶

Struggling under the weight of financial reverses and failing health, Thomas McKendree Shelton, Jr.'s father had been forced to call for his son to come home from the University of North Carolina in his third year so that he could take a position as a bookkeeper at the American Trust Company. By the mid-1930s young Thomas Shelton had given up on returning to the university to complete his education. He had married and was about to become a father when he found that he did not even have enough money to get his wife and baby out of the hospital. He made an application to borrow \$150 from the bank his father had founded, but was refused. The man who turned down Thomas M. Shelton, Jr.'s application knew him well, and his refusal was so unexpected that it had a devastating effect on young Shelton. As he walked out of the bank in humiliation that day, Thomas McKendree Shelton, Jr. vowed that "his time would come." It took him fifteen years to keep that promise to himself, but in 1947 he bought the bank and became the employer of the man who had refused him a loan when he was down on his luck. That particular part of Thomas M. Shelton, Jr. was at peace with himself; he had made it back up the ladder-of success.¹⁷ The year after Thomas M. and Louise Tate Shelton moved into 1400 Queens Road with their three children, Lois Holt (1935), Thomas McKendree, III (1939), and Catherine Norell (1944), they brought a new son home from the hospital, Alan Craig (1949).¹⁸ Mrs. Shelton had grown up in the Myers Park area, and she felt at home in familiar surroundings. The family was quite comfortable in the house.¹⁹ Neighbors soon grew accustomed to the sight of Thomas M. Shelton, Jr. out jogging each morning around 5:30 a.m., barefooted year 'round. The house was a hub of activity, with four growing children, and a steady stream of friends and family who were entertained by the Sheltons. But somewhere along the way, the Shelton's marriage began to break apart, and Mrs. Shelton moved to another residence, taking the children with her.²⁰

In a few years the Sheltons went through a divorce, and 1400 Queens Road took on a different character. Thomas McKendree Shelton, Jr., the man who had once given a party that cost \$15,000, no longer entertained his friends, nor did he make it a practice to accept the invitations extended to him.²¹ He experienced another devastating loss when he ran for political office twice and was defeated both times. Gradually, he became more and more of a loner, dividing his time between his business interests, his house at 1400 Queens Road, and his \$300,000 castle at Blowing Rock, North Carolina.²² Some of Thomas M. Shelton, Jr.'s life-long dreams had been fulfilled, but others of no small importance eluded him. He knew where he wanted to be, but he could never quite reach that place to his own satisfaction. Possessed by a driving ambition and rugged individualism, Thomas M. Shelton, Jr. was often dismissed as eccentric by other people, as something of a leader without a following.²³

Thomas M. Shelton, Jr. was quick to point out the person who had the most influence on his life and who was the person he most respected, his father. Coming to Charlotte in 1888 from a Catawba County farm, the elder Shelton became one of the city's most respected businessmen, noted for his kindness and dependability.²⁵ A statement Thomas M. Shelton, Jr. made about his own purpose in life reflects his admiration for his father: "My life's desire is to die a natural death, be thought well of and leave my son what my father left me, an honorable heritage."²⁶ After the death of Thomas M. Shelton, Jr. in 1974, 1400 Queens Road was no

longer a family residence. Executor of the Shelton Estate, Francis H. Fairley, sold the property to stockbroker Robert H. Morrison in 1979. Zoned "multi-family" and often empty or partially empty, the house and grounds have endured neglect. For a brief time during 1980, September 21 to October 12, the house enjoyed a return to something of its former elegance as the Charlotte Symphony's A.S.I.D. Designer House. Mrs. George E. Wilson, Jr. was living across the street from "1400," at Providence Place, and she watched the house come alive again as designers filled it with tapestries and antiques for the show. When Mr. Morrison took the eighty-eight year old Mrs. Wilson over for a private tour, she recalled much of the house's earlier history. After looking about, in a moment of reflection, she said, "We were happy to have had all those years, but the end of a period has come."²⁹ At the present time the value of the acreage on which the house is located continues to increase, and the future of the house at 1400 Queens Road becomes more and more uncertain.

NOTES

¹ William H. Peeps, A.I.A., Architect, Charlotte, NC, 1928. Edited by George W. Hamilton. The Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library, 720.9756 (NCR). The Peeps Papers, Special Collections at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

² Telephone interview with W. L. Isenhour, Jr., on July 9, 1985. Per Blythe and Isenhour, Inc. records, the George E. Wilson House was under construction from March 21, 1925 through December, 1925 and cost approximately \$40,000.00.

³ *The Charlotte Observer*, October 14, 1980, pp. 1-B; 2-B, Col. 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Obituary of Joseph Harvey Wilson, *The Charlotte Observer*, September 14, 1884.

⁶ Obituary of George E. Wilson, Jr., *The Charlotte Observer*, August 6, 1957.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *The Charlotte Observer*, May 31, 1985, "Blooming Business Closing Up Shop," p. 6-B.

⁹ *The Charlotte Observer*, August 7, 1957, p. 2-B, Column 1.

¹⁰ Charlotte City Directory, 1929.

¹¹ Obituary of George E. Wilson, Jr., *The Charlotte Observer*, August 6, 1957.

- ¹² Obituary of Lida Caldwell Wilson, *The Charlotte Observer*, October 13, 1980, p. 10-B, Column 4.
- ¹³ Mecklenburg County Death Certificates, September 12, 1925, Book 23, Page 240, George E. Wilson, III. Mecklenburg County Death Certificates, July 27, 1926, Book 29, page 70, Premature Infant.
- ¹⁴ Obituary of Lida Caldwell Wilson, *The Charlotte Observer*, October 14, 1980, pp. 1-B; 2-B.
- ¹⁵ Deed Book 1331, p. 324, August 25, 1948.
- ¹⁶ *The Charlotte Observer*, Editorial Page, Jack Claiborne, August, 1974.
- ¹⁷ *The Charlotte Observer*, "Tom Shelton: Profile," by Rolfe Neill, April 10, 1960, pp. 2-C; 4-C.
- ¹⁸ Thomas M. Shelton, Jr. Will, Filed August 19, 1974, Charlotte, N. C.
- ¹⁹ Telephone Interview with Alan Craig Shelton, Charlotte, NC, July 9, 1985.
- ²⁰ *The Charlotte Observer*, "Tom Shelton: Profile," Part II, by Rolfe Neill, April 17, 1960.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² *The Charlotte Observer*, Editorial Page, Jack Claiborne, August, 1974.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ *The Charlotte Observer*, Rolfe Neill, April 10, 1960.
- ²⁵ *The Charlotte Observer*, Article in file under "Shelton" in the Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library, Charlotte, N. This is an early 1900's article about Thomas McKendree Shelton, Sr.
- ²⁶ *The Charlotte Observer*, Rolfe Neill, April 10, 1960.
- ²⁷ Obituary of Thomas McKendree Shelton, Jr., *The Charlotte News*, August 9, 1974, p. 7-D.
- ²⁸ Deed Book 4244, p. 291, October 18, 1979.
- ²⁹ Obituary of Lida Caldwell Wilson, *The Charlotte Observer*, October 14, 1980, pp. 1-B; 2-B.

Architectural Description

George E. Wilson, Jr., a prominent Charlotte businessman and civic leader, had this substantial house constructed in 1925. The rambling two and a half story residence, a fine example of the English Tudor Revival, was designed by noted Charlotte architect William H. Peeps. The structure occupies a four and a half acre lot in Myers Park, an elegant residential suburb of the early twentieth century. Peeps was an English born and trained architect who arrived in Charlotte in 1911 and eventually became one of the city's most respected designers. He fashioned many homes in Charlotte's suburbs, such as Myers Park and Dilworth, proving adept in both the English Tudor and the Colonial Revival styles. Although the Peeps name is commonly associated with residential construction, he was also responsible for several commercial structures, including South Tryon Street's [Latta Arcade](#) and [Ratcliffe Florist Shop](#), and the J. B. Ivey's Store and the former Hovis Brothers Mortuary on North Tryon Street. Peeps was undoubtedly pleased with his commission for the Wilson-Shelton House. Indicative of this truth is the fact that photographs of the house are prominently displayed in a bound copy of the architect's work, which appeared in 1928.¹ The Wilson-Shelton House is Tudor Revival style, a motif which enjoyed great popularity in Charlotte in the 1920's. A variety of sheathing materials and asymmetrical massing are characteristic of the style. Typical features include an essentially horizontal wall surface with finely crafted, restrained detailing and a combination of overscaled and underscaled openings.²

The exterior of the Wilson-Shelton House is asymmetrically massed. Gabled two and a half story wings radiate from a two and a half story entrance pavilion. The first story is sheathed in brick veneer; varying shades of red-colored brick are arranged in a stretcher bond pattern. A single row of brick headers serves as the water table. A half timber end stucco wall treatment highlights the second story and roofline dormers and also provides a decorative gable and finish. Simply detailed wooden brackets with drop pendants ornament the gable ends. Rectangular slate blocks cover the [gabled roof](#) which features exposed rafters. Fenestration is randomly arranged. Numerous openings punctuate the elevations and contain a variety of glazing materials. On the first story, [casement windows](#), containing primarily diamond-pane lights, are surmounted by diamond-pane [transoms](#). A [soldier course](#) serves as the lintel, and the projecting sill is of cut and dressed limestone. [Double hung sash](#) dominate the second story. 12/1 sash are the primary glazing material, although several 9/1 sash are also present. The sills of the second story openings join with the half-timbering to form a continuous belt course across the elevations. Casement windows are set in attic gable and dormer openings. The front elevation displays Peeps's mastery of English Tudor Revival motifs. While the elevation is asymmetrically massed, it presents a dignified appearance aesthetically in character with the surrounding upper middle class neighborhood. A limestone balustrade, which frames the entrance pavilion, continues westward and encloses the front and side of the open side porch. The main entrance is recessed and is set within a limestone surround which displays alternating projecting and recessed blocks and rises to a segmental arch. Narrow casement windows surmounted by label molding flank either side. Tiled wainscoting and cinderblock cover the entrance walls.

An off-center chimney is located to the west of the entrance and is set between window openings. The brick is arranged in stretcher bond. The asymmetrically arranged shoulders are faced in limestone and support a decorative stack which is highlighted by a continuous series of

diamond-shaped vertical bands. A porch shelters the west elevation's first story. Brick piers rise to limestone urns, an allusion to classical motifs. An enclosed porch, one bay in width, projects from the east side. Brick piers frame the porch and support classical urns. A straight run chimney rises from the rear of the east elevation, cuts through the eaves line, and terminates in a decorative stack. The chimney's purpose appears to be solely decorative; floor plans indicate no internal fireplace opening at this location on either the first or second floor. In contrast to the front and side elevations, the rear is noticeably more randomly arranged. Here, unencumbered by the need for a dignified street appearance, Peeps presents a variety of rectilinear and angled projections. Apparent from the rear is the existence of a gabled ell, which appears as part of the west wing from the front and side. A one story solarium is centrally placed on the elevation. A rear entrance is set beneath a recessed porch; the brick piers display wooden brackets. A stair hall window, located above the solarium, is composed of decoratively arranged diamond pane casements. Shed dormers project from the roofline. The main entrance leads into a wide center hall which runs the length of the house. An open string half-turn stair gracefully rises from the rear of the hall. Several first-story chambers, including the dining room and the living room, are arranged off the center hall. The main staircase leads to a second floor hall which runs widthwise and off which the upper story rooms radiate. Interior access was not obtained for purposes of writing this description. To the rear of the house stands a substantial outbuilding which houses a three car garage and servants' quarters. The one and a half story building is faced in brick arranged in stretcher bond. Gable ends are bracketed and covered in slate blocks and display exposed rafters. Further removed from the main house is a gabled shed. The weatherboarded structure is simply fashioned and also features exposed rafters.

NOTES:

¹ William H. Peeps AIA, *Architect* (Charlotte, 1928). No page listings.

² Carole Rifkind, *A Field Guide to American Architecture* (New York, New American Library, 1980), p. 109.