

SURVEY AND RESEARCH REPORT

WITHERS-EFIRD HOUSE



**Withers-Efird House,
1926 Colonial Revival conversion**

1. Name and location of property: The property known as the Withers-Efird houses is located at 1937 Selwyn Ave., Charlotte, North Carolina, 28207 in the Myers Park neighborhood.

2. Name and address of present property owner:

Myers Park Baptist Church,

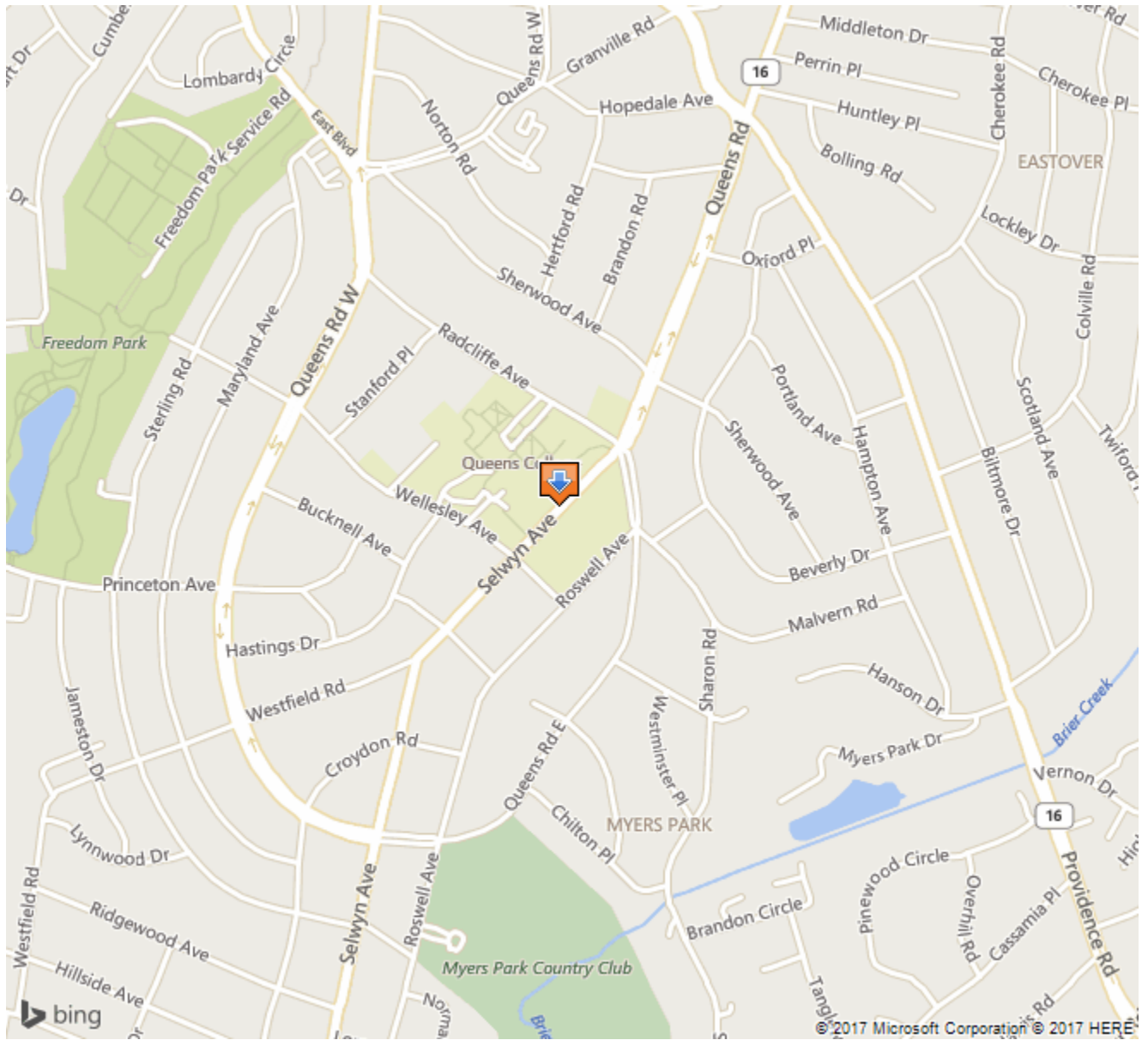
1900 Queens Road, Charlotte,

North Carolina, 28207,

Tel. (704) 334 7232.

3. Representative photographs of the property: This report contains representative photographs of the property.

4. Map depicting location of property: This report contains a map depicting the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference: The most recent deed for the property is listed in the Mecklenburg County Deed Book 6445, p. 0481-82. The tax parcel number for the property is 175-013-02.

6. Brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Christina A. Wright.

7. Brief Architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Christina A. Wright.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in NCGS 160A-400.5:

A. Special Significance in terms of history, architecture, and cultural importance:

The Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the property known as the Withers-Efird House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County based on the following considerations:

1. The Withers-Efird house is a tangible example of Charlotte's suburban growth during the early part of the twentieth century, and the history of its owners reflects the social implications of the movement of the city's elite and middle classes away from the city center. In particular, it is an example of the development of the Myers Park suburb during the 1920s and of the type of clients drawn to the suburbs in the early part of the twentieth century.
2. The house is one of the few homes remaining in this once residential street in Myers Park. Its exterior is a well preserved example of the Colonial Revival style; its interior combines Colonial Revival and Queen Anne features and illustrates the kind of social spaces occupied by Charlotte's elite.
3. The house was originally located on East Avenue (E. Trade St.) in uptown Charlotte and was moved to its present location and substantially remodeled in 1926.
4. The house was built for Benjamin Withers, a prominent building supply merchant in 1904 and he lived there until his death in 1928. Subsequently, the house was the home of Joseph Efird and his wife Elizabeth Withers Efird. Efird was a pioneer of department store retailing in the southeastern U.S., founding and running the Efird's Department Store chain for many years.
5. The house has plausible associations with two important Charlotte architects: J. M. McMichael and Louis Asbury.

B. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or associations.

The Historic Landmarks Commission contends that the architectural description included in this report demonstrates that the Withers-Efird House meets this criterion.

9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal: The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property that becomes a designated "historic landmark." The current appraised value of the improvements is \$ 396,310. The current appraised value of the .517 acre lot is \$ 237, 500 The total appraised value of the property is \$ 633,810. The property is zoned R3.

Date of preparation of this report: 30 June 2000

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Withers-Efird House

1937 Selwyn Avenue,

Charlotte, North Carolina

Summary Paragraph

The Withers-Efird house possesses local historical significance as a rich illustration of the growth of Charlottes new and fashionable suburbs during the early part of the twentieth century. In particular it is an excellent example of the enormous attraction which Myers Park had for Charlotte's prominent citizens who gradually abandoned the center city in favor of a suburban life style. Indeed in some sense, the history of the Withers-Efird house epitomizes the changing character of the center city and the attraction of the new suburbs, for in 1926, when he was forced to leave his prestigious East Avenue address to make way for the County Courthouse and Law Building, Benjamin Withers chose to move his house, piece by piece, to a vacant lot in the as yet under developed Selwyn Avenue section of Myers Park opposite Queens College.

The Withers-Efird house also possesses local historical significance because two significant Charlotte families—the Withers and the Efirds—are associated with the house. The original house was constructed for Benjamin Franklin Withers (1856-1928) and Bettie Devereaux Withers (1861-1952) in 1904. B. J. Withers was a successful building supply merchant and prominent Charlotte citizen. After B. J. Withers died in 1928, his daughter Elizabeth (1892-1982) and son-in-law Joseph Bivens Efird (1883-1966) made the house their home. J. B. Efird was the leading partner of Efird's Department Stores, a major regional department store which helped to shape retail and commercial development across the Southeast. Both Bettie Withers and her daughter, Elizabeth Withers Efird, were also prominent citizens in Charlotte, taking an active role in local civic affairs including the Charlotte Women's Club and the YWCA.

Finally, the Withers-Efird house is also significant for its fascinating architectural history. The original 1904 Queen Anne style house was probably designed by the regionally renowned architect J. M. McMichael (1870-1944) When it was moved in 1926, the exterior was extensively modified although the interior retained much of its original plan and detailing. Family members recall that Louis Asbury (1877-1975), another locally significant and prolific architect, undertook these modifications. Asbury's renovation of the house transformed it into a Colonial Revival edifice which fit in well with the Myers Park landscape and signified the pressures exerted by the overall unity of the Myers Park suburb and of changing architectural fashions.

Historical Background Statement: Setting and Individuals

A. The Development of Charlotte's New South Suburbs:

The Withers-Efird house stands as a rich reminder of the enormous social, demographic, and economic changes which Charlotte underwent during the first decades of the twentieth century. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Charlotte emerged as the region's leading commercial, banking, industrial, and distribution center. These changes and the associated population explosion had profound consequences for settlement patterns in the city. Until the 1890s it had been the trend for citizens of all classes to cluster close to the square at the center of town. The prestigious addresses were along the main thoroughfares of Trade and Tryon Streets, and many business people lived above their places of work. From the 1890s suburbs, served by streetcar lines, became a residential option for Charlotte's citizens, but it was only by the 1920s that the suburb emerged as the most desirable location for Charlotte's middling and elite families as the city center was increasingly given over to its commercial and civic functions. The Withers-Efird house is a perfect illustration

of this period in Charlotte's development. It was originally built in downtown Charlotte in 1904 for building supply merchant Benjamin Franklin Withers and his wife Bettie, but in 1926, it was moved to the fashionable suburb of Myers Park to make way for the Law Building.

Benjamin Withers had his house built on the fashionable East Avenue at number 710 (later changed to 712), on the corner of S. Myers Street. East Avenue was the section of East Trade street beyond Brevard, so named to set it apart from the commercial district close to the square. In 1904, East Avenue was in fact considered to be on the outskirts of town and had gained a reputation as a refined part of the city. Elizabeth College, a Lutheran school for women, was located just up the hill about a mile away, and many members of Charlotte's elite lived on the street or just off it. Benjamin Withers, however, could have chosen other locations for his new house. In particular, the new white-collar suburbs of Dilworth, Piedmont Park, and Elizabeth Heights had opened in the preceding decade, and they were attracting the interest of Withers' social peers. These suburbs had come into being as entrepreneurs sought to meet demand for housing sites outside of the bustling city center.

In 1904, however, the suburbs of Charlotte were still quite new, and Withers was a fairly conservative man. On East Avenue, he was located within walking distance of his business on S. College St., his church on N. Tryon St., and his children's school, Presbyterian College. The house he built, a beautiful three-story Queen Anne, reflects this conservatism, for it was not as up-to-date as the neo classical mansion being built down the street (the Hawley house, 1904). Yet it was undoubtedly elegant, spacious, and distinctive, and was reputedly designed by the locally famous architect J. M. McMichael.

Even as it was being built, the Withers' new house was being overtaken by the success of the city, for the same pressures which led the Withers to build on the 'edge of town' in 1904 continued to operate in Charlotte over the next two decades. As Charlotte's population mushroomed from 20,000 in 1900 to over 82,000 in 1930, its downtown business district expanded to accommodate new commercial and civic buildings and suburbs sprouted on the periphery. These suburbs were planned deliberately to serve the needs of particular sectors of the growing population of the city, for most were intentionally segregated through income and deed restrictions. Initially the new suburbs ringed the inner city, but as street cars and motor cars became more efficient, a second tier of suburban growth targeted at the wealthier of Charlotte's citizens began to be developed.

The decline in residential living downtown, however, was not immediate. East Avenue was one of the last well-to-do areas of downtown Charlotte to be affected, but by 1926 change was becoming unavoidable. In this year, the city purchased the lots on

East Avenue between S. Alexander and S. Myers Streets in order to make way for the County Court House and Law Building. Faced with the prospect of losing his beloved house, Benjamin Withers bought the structure back from the city, purchased a lot in Myers Park, and moved the house to it piece by piece. The move allowed the Withers family to keep their house and to move closer to their daughter Elizabeth and son-in-law Joseph Efird who already lived there on the corner of Queens and Selwyn. (Their grand house had burned to the ground in 1924, and they were living in a smaller brick house at the rear of their three and one half acre lot while planning to rebuild.)

The Withers' choice of Myers Park was a natural one for a couple of their social standing. Although all of these suburbs capitalized upon a growing desire to escape the city for the healthful 'country' lifestyle, Myers Park achieved something of a preeminence among the new suburbs in its ability to attract Charlotte's well-to-do citizens. Thus although they were moving close to family, the Withers were also moving into the suburb preferred by their social circle.

The suburb of Myers Park was developed by the highly successful real estate entrepreneur George Stephens, on a 1200 acre lot owned by his father in law, J. S. Myers. Stephens' vision was to create a fine country suburb out of the rolling farmland and the generous payment terms offered by Myers made it possible for the Stephens Company to spend an unusually large amount of capital to ensure the lots were provided with utilities, paved roads, and a fast and frequent street car service. Perhaps most importantly, however, Stephens had been able to employ the nationally known landscape architect John Nolen to lay out the neighborhood. Nolen's innovative curvilinear layout for Myers Parks roads matched the suburb's rolling contours, and the plan was followed closely into the early 1920s under the direction of his on-site representative, E. S. Draper. Nolen's plan made Myers Park stand apart from the other suburbs. It was remote but accessible; the lots were large and private but unified by design into a natural park land; and it was distinctly separated from other neighborhoods with its own entry gates. Just as important, its residents chose to build houses in the most fashionable styles of the day (Colonial Revival, rectilinear, bungalow, and Tudor revival) which gave the suburb additional character and cachet.

Although the reputation of Myers Park was well established by the time that the Withers were forced to move their house in 1926, the development of the suburb was by no means complete. The street onto which they moved, Selwyn Avenue, had been platted for development in 1914, the same year as Presbyterian College moved from College Street in the center of Charlotte, attracted by the Stephens Company to its new location. The road was then an old farm road which followed the ridge line of Briar Creek down towards Park Road and did not get its new name until 1916. Before 1920, there was very little development along Selwyn Avenue apart from Queens College and the Horner Military Academy. The academy was well respected, but it

closed its doors in 1918 after struggling through the war years. In 1920, the Stephens Company decided to convert the buildings of the Academy into apartments and a club house for the planned Myers Park Country Club. The intention was to entice more people to the suburb with the promise of a nine hole gold course and club house. In his President's report to the Stephens Company stockholders in 1920, George Stephens predicted that the new club and golf course (chartered in 1921) would "congregate people in a section of Myers Park which is at present sparsely developed," and that "patronage of the street car line will be increased." Indeed there was a flurry of building in the suburb during the 1920s; although the importance of the country club as a draw is debatable. (Mr. Withers, however, was a member.)

One of the families moving to the new section of the suburb were Joseph and Elizabeth Efird. The Efirds had lived in Myers Parks since shortly after their marriage, and in 1920, they purchased the existing house at 1200 Queens Avenue (the current site of the Myers Park Baptist Church). Six years later, Efird's father in law, Benjamin Withers bought the lot next but one to his daughter as the site for his transplanted house. In its new Myers Park manifestation, the Withers house was not to be the same. Family historian Benjamin Withers Jr. notes that the Withers hired the locally renowned architect Louis Asbury to redesign the house, transforming it from a Queen Anne mansion into a Colonial Revival edifice so that its re-modeled exterior would fit harmoniously with the dominant aesthetics of Myers Park. Charlotte's suburbs triumphed over even the aesthetics of the older urban development at the city's center.

Benjamin Withers did not long survive the move however. He seems to have transferred the ownership of the house to his daughter and son in law shortly before his death in 1928, for no deed records the transfer. The Efirds did not move in immediately, for they are not listed at that address in the city directory until 1933. After that date, they made the house at 1937 Selwyn Avenue their home until 1979 when Elizabeth Efird moved into a nursing home and the house was sold to Robert M. Shive (a psychiatrist) and his wife Janet. The Shives resided in the house until they sold it to Myers Park Baptist Church in 1991. The house has recently been purchased by Queens College and is to be moved three lots down Selwyn to the corner of Selwyn Ave and Wellesley Ave. It has been used by the College for a number of years as a site for conferences and social functions and plans are to have it continue in this capacity.

The Withers and the Efird Families

Both the Withers and the Efird families made significant contributions to the development of the City of Charlotte from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth centuries. The patriarchs of both families shared a similar rural background typical of Charlotte's citizens in this period and were attracted to the flourishing city of Charlotte

because of its enormous commercial potential. As merchants, both helped to shape local commercial development and both they and their families benefited from it, rising to positions of wealth and prominence in the city.

Benjamin Franklin Withers was born on 16 January 1856 in Steele Creek township in Mecklenburg County. His parents were Isaac Withers, a planter and slave owner, and Margaret Dinkins. Benjamin's father died in 1865 leaving Benjamin and his four younger brothers to take care of the family farm. A year later, at the age of 10, his education in the common school came to an end, and he spent the next seven years working on the family farm. At the age of 17, he began farming on his own account, and three years later, in 1876, he started his mercantile career by buying cotton. Two years after that, on 13 February 1878, he began working for W. W. Ward, a building materials and hardware merchant in Charlotte. By 1892, Benjamin Withers had opened his own independent business. Advertisements and listings in the city directories announce B. F. Withers "Building and Paint Supplies," 'sash, doors, blinds, lime, cement, building materials, hay, grain, etc." His business was at 200 S. College St., occupying a corner locally known as "Gaithers." Mr. Withers had the good fortune and good business sense to provide a much needed service in the booming city that Charlotte was becoming at the turn of the century and not surprisingly his business flourished.

In addition to his successful business career, Benjamin Withers was also actively involved in public affairs as one of the city's first aldermen, serving from 1901 to 1907, and as a member of the Greater Charlotte Club, a forerunner of the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce. He was enrolled as a Knight Templar, Mason, Shriner, and as a member of the Myers Park Club.

Mr. Withers was an ardent supporter of the First Baptist Church in Charlotte, serving as a deacon for many years and eventually taking on the office of chairman of the board of deacons. His loyal service to his church and his commitment to the community of Charlotte was remembered by his contemporaries as was his beautiful bass voice which must have made a significant contribution to the church's choir.

Perhaps it was his voice which impressed young Bettie Devereaux, for she also sang in the choir at First Baptist Church, and became his wife on 20 January 1885. Bettie Devereaux was born on 26 June 1861 in Forestville (now known as Wake Forest) to George Charles Devereaux and Laura Eddins Devereaux, and she moved to Charlotte with her family when she was eight years old. Her aunts Misses Columbia and Emma Eddins were active members of the First Baptist congregation, both playing the organ there for many years, and no doubt they introduced their niece to the church and Sunday school when she was a little girl. Bettie and Benjamin's wedding in January 1885 was the first to be conducted in the new First Baptist sanctuary after the church

moved from its small building at Brevard St and 7th to its current location on N. Tryon in 1884.

As Benjamin's wife and the female head of household, Bettie made the perfect hostess, but she did not limit her industry to the home. She took an active role in civic affairs, becoming a member of the Charlotte Women's Club in its formative years. Prior to the late 1890s, well to do females typically kept a low profile in public affairs, but by the end of the century, women's clubs had emerged across the nation, promoting a stance of public advocacy. The Woman's Club in Charlotte was started in 1899 by Mrs. Withers' contemporaries. The general tone of the group favored a proactive stance in civic affairs; they were responsible, for example, for organizing chapters of the YWCA, PTA and League of Women Voters in Charlotte, and were instrumental in creating the Mint Museum of Art. Meetings for the club were often held in members' homes since the club building was not constructed until 1923. One notable occasion was in November of 1912 when Bettie Withers entertained Dr. Delia Dixon Carroll, "one of the state's foremost women physicians." Sharing honors with Dr. Carroll was Mrs. J. E. Reilley, secretary of the General Federation of the Woman's Club, the highest club official in the state. (Dr. Carroll addressed the Charlotte chapter of the club that evening in the auditorium of Elizabeth college.) The guest list is a 'Who's Who' of Charlotte society at the time and included Mrs. Stonewall Jackson and Mrs. W.G. Rogers, president of the Woman's Club. Bettie Withers was an active member of the club for many years and represented it at the convention of the General Federation of the Woman's Club which met in San Francisco in the late 1910s.

The second owners of the Withers-Efird house were of course intimately connected with it before they took ownership. Elizabeth Withers was 12 years old when her parents built the house, so it was the home of her teenage and young adult years until here marriage to Joseph Bivens Efird in 1917. J. B. Efird shared much in common with Elizabeth's father. He too came from a rural background, being born on 13 May 1883 on the family farm in Anson County between Wadesboro and Albemarle. His parents were John Emery Efird and Anna Maria (Turner) Efird. He was from a large family, with six brothers and six sisters, all of whom would have been busily occupied on the large tract of land on Rocky River where their father operated his own grist mill, flour mill, cotton gin, and saw mill, as well as farming the land. The elder Mr. Efird was apparently an advocate of making everything that was needed by the family at home. Education was also a priority. Joseph initially attended school in Ansonville, but later Mrs. Efird rented a house in Palmerville 30 miles from the Efird's home place. There she lived with her children between October and April of each year so they could get a better education. Joseph is reported as saying: "Every Saturday father would come with a load of wood and provisions, enough to last a

week—then on Monday he would return to the farm to keep us going." After two years, a school opened at Wadesboro, somewhat closer, but still 17 miles from home, and Mrs. Efird took the children there every year.



Joseph Efird as a young man

Young Joseph had an early fascination with general stores. In an interview with Mrs. J. A. Yarborough in 1936 he recalled trips with his father into town where he enjoyed observing people buying.

It completely fascinated me. When I was 15, I got a job clerking in a general store on Saturdays. That little store with its conglomeration of salt pork, gingham, tobacco, ribbon, sugar, cheese, and plows was to me the finest emporium, and I was perfectly happy working there.

Between 1900 and 1902, Joseph was a student at Wingate College, and during these years he also taught at a local school. His future career as a pioneer of department store in Charlotte might not have materialized had it not been for his older brother, Hugh Martin Efird, who acted as a mentor and guide to his younger siblings. When the price of cotton dropped to between four and five cents a pound in 1901, and farming became less profitable, Hugh Martin opened a small dry goods store on the corner of E. Trade St. and N. College St. with the co-operation of Charles A. Williams of the Williams and Shelton Company. The store, which operated as both a wholesale and retail concern, was initially called the Racket Store, but it quickly became known as The Bee Hive and was formally known as the Charlotte Mercantile Company. When Joseph was 19 years old, his brother summoned him to Charlotte. Hugh was by now manager of the store and paid Joseph \$15 per month to clerk for him. Joseph sent most of that money home to pay for a boy to plow his father's farm in his place. By 1907, Hugh, Joseph, and a third brother, Edmund Lilly, bought a controlling interest in the Bee Hive, changing its name in that year to the Efird Department Store and opening a second store in Concord.

Thus began the first link in a chain which was to grow into over 50 stores across the Carolinas and Virginia, all directed from Charlotte. In the first two years, Joseph and Edmund ran the Concord store while Hugh remained in Charlotte. In 1909, however, Hugh died tragically from peritonitis. At this point, Joseph took charge of the Charlotte Store and three other brothers joined the business, which quickly expanded to become one of the largest in the United States during the early decades of the twentieth century. Eventually there were 53 or 58 stores (the exact figure is disputed) each of which was a separate corporation, but all owned by the Efird family under the

umbrella of the Charlotte Mercantile Company acting as the wholesale supplier for the entire chain. Joseph Bivens Efirm was president of the chain of stores and the Charlotte Mercantile Company for many years starting in 1911 and then served as chairman of the board until his retirement in 1956. After Hugh Martin's death, Joseph was clearly the dominant influence in the whole enterprise but was acutely aware of the teamwork of the Efirm family: "I am only partly responsible for the development of the Efirm business," he once said. "There are five of us and we all pull together; we always have—we were taught that at the farm."

The post World War I years saw a boom in retail across the U.S. and department store chains benefited from the presence of a large pool of eager men returning from the war and looking for work. In 1922 plans went ahead for a brand new half million dollar department store on the much sought after first block of N. Tryon St. The site gave Efirm's an advantage over their main rival, Belk Department Stores, and fulfilled a goal set years earlier by Hugh Martin. On the front of the building, a bronze tablet was placed in memory of Hugh, and the old Efirm's store on E. Trade St. became the Martin Department Store. The new flagship store was designed by locally renowned architect Louis Asbury and was built on the site of the old Charlotte Hotel next to City Hall. The site was purchased before 1920 for around \$220,000. It was a state of the art store, five stories high with over 100,000 square feet of floor space including a bargain basement and a spacious dining room on the top floor. Perhaps the most impressive feature of the building for its time, however, were the escalators which made Efirm's the only store south of Philadelphia which could boast of such a convenience, and gave this Charlotte department store temporary bragging rights over even the renowned Macy's of New York.

The rapid growth of the Efirm's business was fueled by the growing trend towards department store shopping across the nation. Although in rural areas, the general store still held sway, by the turn of the century, retail shopping in the country's towns and cities was becoming more complex. On one hand, the growth of an urban elite in this period allowed the development of specialized stores offering refined products to a discriminating clientele, but the expansion of urban areas also swelled the ranks of the lower and middling classes who patronized the many dry goods stores of which the Bee Hive was an example. Some of these merchants sought to expand their enterprises by offering cut-price bargains to attract customers, and newspaper advertisements from this period reveal intense competition between stores. In Charlotte, the Efirm's new concern trumpeted that theirs was the 'Lowest Price Store in Charlotte' while their chief competitors, the Belks, claimed to be the 'Cheapest Store on Earth.' Both of these businesses claimed to have pioneered the practice of selling to the customer at wholesale prices, effectively cutting out the middle man. (Another dry goods store in the city, Ivey's was already by this decade aiming at a slightly higher clientele.) As

the urban population grew, so did the business of these stores, and they increased their retail space and range of products proportionally. Another feature of retail development in this period was the development of branch stores. The Belk brothers got started earlier than the Efirds, for they already had four stores by 1895, but the rapid expansion of the Efird's chain after 1909 allowed them to catch up and at times surpass their rivals.

By the 1910s and 1920s, these chains, now typically referred to as 'department stores' began to change their image. Although they never abandoned their claim to be a bargain store, they increasingly emphasized the quality of their goods and the refinement of their establishments and services. These changes were reflected in an extensive building boom among such stores. Belk's built a new store in 1910, Ivey's secured a property on N. Tryon street for a store in 1924, and of course the Efird's built their grand edifice on N. Tryon St. in 1923. By the 1950s, competition from national chains and the emergence of suburban malls threatened the smaller, family owned, regional chains like the Efird's, and many attempted to remake their image yet again by emphasizing their local origins and family ownership. In the Efird's case, however, this competition, combined with the lack of an interest in the business on the part of the next generation, contributed to their decision to sell out to the Belk family in 1956. Although Charlotte's department store owners were following national trends, entrepreneurs like Joseph Efird and his competitors the Belks and Iveys were establishing themselves as the dominant retailers in the Carolinas and in so doing they helped to shape the development of cities and the surrounding countryside across the region.

Besides his business, Joseph Efird devoted a great deal of attention to his church. He was an active and well beloved member of the First Baptist Church, serving as deacon, chairman of the board of deacons, and treasurer for 30 years. In 1943, the family gave their three and one half acre home site on Selwyn avenue for the building of what became Myers Park Baptist Church. Naturally, Joseph Efird served as a member of the general board of the State Baptist Convention and was on the board of the Baptist Hospital.

The extensive range of other activities in which Joseph Efird was involved place him in the highest ranks of Charlotte society of his day. In the business world, he served on the board of directors of the Merchant and Farmers Bank (for 20 years), the American Trust Company, and the American Efird Mills. As a philanthropist, he supported his wife's endeavors by serving as a trustee for the YWCA and for several years gave female employees at his stores free memberships in the organization. He was an advocate of employee welfare, promoting hospitalization, health, accident and life insurance and establishing pension plans through profit sharing arrangements. He also used his wealth to further the educational goals which had been so important to

his family. He and his brothers formed the Efird Foundation, and as its director, he arranged a bequest of \$100,000 to a building fund at Wake Forest University as well as contributing to his own alma mater, Wingate college. Finally, Mr. Efird was a member of the United Appeal, the Red Cross, and the Community Chest. He also served on the boards of the YMCA, the Florence Crittenden Home, and the building committees for the Charlotte Memorial Hospital and the Colored YMCA. His public activities also involved him in neighborhood and civic organizations. Joseph Efird was a charter member of the Myers Park Country Club and the Charlotte Kiwanis. He was a member of the Charlotte Country Club, the New York Athletic Club, and the Newcomen Society of North America.

It is in fact surprising that Mr. Efird had time to court and marry his wife Elizabeth Withers. He did not wait until he was in his 50s as did his competitor William Henry Belk, but married Elizabeth on 8 May 1917 when he was just about to celebrate his 34th birthday. Elizabeth was 11 years his junior, and their marriage was described by the Charlotte News as the 'social event of the week. The ceremony was conducted at the Withers' elegant house which was festooned with potted palms and cascades of roses and Easter lilies (no doubt the work of Mrs. Withers who enjoyed a local reputation as an artist with flowers).

The bride, Elizabeth Withers had been born on 16 October 1892 and educated at Presbyterian College in Charlotte and at Chevy Chase near Washington D.C. However, given the reputation of her mother as a gracious hostess, it would appear that her training in the qualities of hospitality and gentility was already well underway. Elizabeth was indeed active in the social world of Charlotte's elite even before her marriage and had gained the attributes befitting her husband's stature in the business world and public community. Elizabeth Raby, her daughter, remembers that the Efird home on Selwyn Avenue was often filled with guests, and that her mother loved to entertain. (Entertainment at the family home, however, only included people from their social and community groups; business entertainment was kept strictly separated from home life.) Elizabeth Efird, of course, had the help of servants. Even if she had not entertained on the scale that she did, it was typical of Myers Park homes to employ help. The Efird house did have accommodation for servants above the garage at the rear of the house, but these rooms were never used by live-in servants. Rather the Efird's maids, nurse, cook, and chauffeur all took the trolley to work from their homes elsewhere in the city, an illustration of how public transport in this period helped to make the racial and class segregation of the city possible.

Besides running a large house and raising three children (Elizabeth, Joseph Bivens Jr. and Hugh Martin) Mrs. Efird followed her mother's footsteps in her involvement in civic organizations of many sorts. Of particular note is her long history of active involvement with the YWCA highlighted by her work as the local chairwoman of the

Round the World Reconstruction Fund which sought to rebuild YWCA programs and leadership after the Second World War. Mrs. Efird was also hailed as one of the outstanding female leaders of the Charlotte Memorial Hospital's campaign during the Second World War. In March of 1940, 650 supporters met at Efird's for a dinner to launch a \$215,000 campaign for the completion of the much needed medical center. With her husband, Elizabeth was a loyal supporter of the First Baptist Church and founding member of the Myers Park Baptist Church. She seems to have played a leading role in arranging the gift of the large lot at the intersection of Queens Road, Selwyn, and Roswell to the Church in 1943, for she personally delivered the deed to Dr. Marvin Scuggs. Although the gift was officially dedicated in memory of Mr. Efird's parents on behalf of their four sons, the poem Mrs. Efird read at the dedication service suggests that she had her own two sons firmly in mind. Referring to what had been her children's playground and her cherished garden, the poem uses the symbolism of the flowers in the fields of Flanders to call to mind the service of many young men—including her sons—in another world war.

Historical Background Statement: Architecture

Architecturally, the Withers-Efird house forms a fascinating study of the changing fashions in residential design and their relationship to the new suburbs. The house is also significant because of its associations with two locally and regionally famous architects, J. M. McMichael (1870-1944) and Louis Asbury (1877-1975). It is one of a handful of houses which were rescued from the downtown section of Charlotte and transplanted in the suburbs during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Although no documentation can be found to support this claim, a family member and amateur historian B. F. Withers jr. remembers that James Mackson McMichael designed the 1904 Withers house built on East Avenue. This supposition has been verbally confirmed by David S. McMichael of Arlington Virginia (the architect's son). It seems plausible that the design would have been McMichael's. He was a fellow member of the First Baptist Church who would have been well known to Mr. Withers. His architectural business was started in Charlotte in 1901, following an apprenticeship and six years practice in Philadelphia. At the beginning of 1904 his firm was cited in the Charlotte News as having plans to design several new residences in the city. The celebrated Carnegie Library designed by firm of McMichael and Hunter had just been completed, and McMichael was establishing his reputation in competition with the rival firms in the city at the time including Hook and Sawyers, F. P. Milburn, L. E. Schwerd, and Wheeler and Runge.

During his long and highly successful career, McMichael designed approximately 900 churches, including three within walking distances of the Withers' East Avenue home (Old First Baptist Church, 1903-09, Little Rock AME Zion, 1908-11, East Avenue

Tabernacle, 1912-14). Although none of these buildings is currently used as a church, they have all become vibrant and celebrated cultural centers in Charlotte today, a testament to their architectural appeal over the long term. McMichael's other achievements are too numerous to list for they include perhaps as many as 1000 designs for buildings across 10 states ranging from school and college buildings to a street car barn and a child's play house. In Charlotte he is particularly remembered for the North Carolina Medical College (1907), Myers Park Presbyterian Church, and the First ARP church as well as the First Ward churches already noted.

The 1904 Withers house was an extremely fine example of the Queen Anne style which continued to be popular in Charlotte well beyond the time it had ceased to be fashionable in other parts of the country. One such house, built in 1903 for John Price Carr, still stands on McDowell St. The Withers house was not overly ornate or whimsical, but it did possess the classic hallmarks of the Queen Anne: a prominent turret with conical roof, a generous wrap around porch, shingle siding, complex asymmetrical massing, a hip roof, and classical ornamentation. The internal detail—reputedly that which exists in the house today—is also in the Queen Anne style. These include the doors, windows, surrounds, decorative leaded lights, dentil molding, built-in cabinets, mantels, door hardware, stair rail, newel post and spindles, and hall wainscoting.

It is somewhat extraordinary that this house should have been moved in 1926 to Myers Park, all the more so because the move involved the reconfiguration of the house's exterior to embody the principles of the Colonial Revival style popular at this time. As in the case of the original building a famous architect's name is associated with this transformation but the attribution cannot be confirmed. Family members report that Louis Asbury was responsible for the new design, a contention that has also been corroborated by David McMichael.

If the Withers did use Asbury, their choice is not as curious as it might seem. By 1926, McMichael had established himself as a specialist in church rather than domestic architecture. Asbury, in contrast, was a very popular choice among Myers Park's prospective residents. It may also have been that Asbury designed the house as a favor for his client Joseph Efird, the Withers' son in law (a possibility since there is no formal record of his work on the house among his papers at UNC Charlotte). Asbury had designed the grand Efird's store which opened on N. Tryon Street in 1922 and was in the process of designing an Efird's store for the town of Lenoir in 1926. Asbury continued to work for the family both on stores and on the houses of two of members of the Efird family in Albemarle.

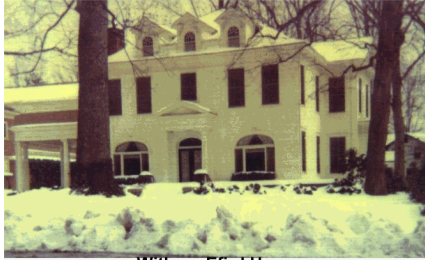
Asbury's was originally from Charlotte and worked in his father's construction business during the 1890s before studying at Duke University, Trinity College Dublin,

and completing his professional training at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He established his practice in Charlotte in 1908 and had the distinction of being a founding member of the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects. By 1926, his reputation in the city and region was very well established as indicated by his work that year on an Efir's store, the Withers' house, and the Law Building and County Court House whose construction had forced Withers to move in the first place. Asbury continued in practice until 1956, and his architecture has made a distinguished contribution to the built environment of the city.

The task which Asbury apparently took on was not unique in the story of Charlotte, but it was not common either. The Withers-Efir house is one of a handful of residences moved from their original location downtown to the new suburbs. Other examples include the 1890s Queen Anne style house called 'Victoria' which was moved from N. Tryon to the Chatham Estates (Plaza) around 1915. A second house, the Victorian home of merchant Jacob Rintels on W. Trade St., was moved to Queens Road and is now known as the McManaway house, and a third, the W. R. Myers house was moved from 415 E. Trade Street to Myers Park in 1913 but burned down five years later.

None of these houses, however, were redesigned to the same extent as the Withers-Efir house, perhaps because the change in architectural taste, though already apparent by the 1910s, had advanced sufficiently by 1926 to force even the elderly and conservative Benjamin and Bettie Withers to give their beloved house a Colonial Revival makeover so it would fit in to its new setting. The couple were however, clearly attached to their elegant Victorian home and its memories and fine interior, so the bulk of the changes were to the exterior

A close examination of the photographs of the two houses reveals how the modifications were made. The major change was to the front elevation which was recreated as a perfectly symmetrical facade. The turret was abandoned, to be replaced by matching windows on all levels. The lovely arched window which can be seen under the porch to the right of the front entrance in the original house was echoed by a replica on the left in the new facade. In between these windows, the front door may have been moved intact, but a classically inspired Colonial Revival porch on the new house is the only echo that remains of the gabled decoration and Ionic columns on the original wrap around porch. The roof was also modified to create symmetry, but otherwise retained its overall shape as a cross gabled hip roof. There is no livable space on the third floor as there was in the original house, for by 1926, the Withers were elderly and did not need to house a growing family. The footprint of the house as indicated by a 1905 Sanborn map shows that the outline of the kitchen and back porch were considerably changed, although it appears that other rooms at the back of the house—the central back stairwell and hallway, the



Withers-Efird House,
1926 Colonial Revival conversion

breakfast room, and den—remained unaffected.

Despite the extensive changes to the front of the house, its interior plan remained similar with the reception rooms to right and left, a central hall with stairs rising up to the second floor, and the dining room and library off the hall to the right and left respectively. In the old house, the parlor or drawing room to the right of the entry hall was entered through folding doors and another set of folding doors linked the drawing room with the dining room to its rear. In the Colonial Revival version of the house, the already substantial entertaining space was increased. The grand front stairwell disappeared, and the two front reception rooms were opened up to create a spacious span sweeping from one side of the house to the other. In addition, the two other large rooms on the ground floor, the library and dining room, were linked to both the front reception area and the large central hallway they flanked, by large pocket doors which, when drawn back, created an open space of four large rooms and the hallway. These modifications by Asbury and possibly McMichael to what was already a remarkable house when McMichael designed it give this house special architectural significance in the history of Charlotte.

Site Location and Architectural Description

The Withers-Efird house is sited on a rectangular lot of 0.517 acres on the east side of Selwyn Avenue opposite Queens College in the historic Myers Park neighborhood of Charlotte. The house faces west and is flanked by an empty lot to the south and an office building of the Myers Park Baptist Church to the north. When the house was moved here and reconstructed in 1926 from its original location on East Avenue in downtown Charlotte, this was a newly developed section of Myers Park. By 1929 there were five houses on the block with five more houses behind facing onto Roswell Avenue. The house is one of only three of these original ten which has survived as a reminder of the residential nature of the block.

The 1904/1926 Withers-Efird house was originally designed in the free classic Queen Anne style, but was remodeled when it was moved and is now an elegant and well preserved Colonial Revival style mansion. The house is a two story hip-roofed block with projecting pedimented bays on the side and rear elevations. The slate roof is punctured by two brick chimneys with decorated paneled stacks, both on the north side of the house. The roof has a moderate overhang with a dentil cornice. Aluminum siding makes it difficult to determine the exact style of any trim on the remainder of the exterior. Three prominent gable-roofed dormers pierce the roof over the facade in

a symmetrical pattern. Each has heavily molded cornice returns, panel pilasters, and round arched windows with a key block and multiple panes. The projecting side and rear bay gables have similar windows with the same molding and key blocks and are faced in stucco, the original surface facing of the remainder of the house under the aluminum siding. Throughout the house, double hung, one over one, wooden sash windows predominate. Their size varies with the use of the room, with smaller windows in the bathroom and kitchens to the rear of the house. Other more ornate windows adorn the facade and south bay.

The front facade is five bays wide on the second story and three bays wide on the first story. In the central bay of the first floor the front door is sheltered by a one story portico supported by Roman fluted columns and pilasters. (According to family member Mrs. Elizabeth Raby, the capitals of these columns and other exterior columns were originally Ionic and were replaced after 1979.) These columns support a heavy entablature and pediment, the latter of which has decorative dentil molding matching that under the roof eaves. The door surround has a handsomely carved sunburst motif, key block and corner blocks. An elliptical fan light with stylized floral design set in a sunburst motif compliments the double-leaf beveled glass door it caps. On either side of the entrance are distinctive triple panel windows with elliptical fan lights in a simple surround with fluted key blocks and leaded lights echoing the design on the door.

A terra cotta deck extends across the front of the building and a portion of the north and south elevations. On the north elevation a simple stream-lined porte cochere shelters a small side porch and driveway. It is supported by six fluted Roman columns, two rising from the porch floor and four in pairs resting on brick piers at the extreme corners of the structure. The cornice does not match the rest of the house as it is not adorned with dentil molding. The side porch gives a second entry to the house through a single leaf door which leads into the library. The horizontal paneled door has a glazed upper half. The elaborate surround has a round arch enclosing a heraldic carved medallion depicting a shield with the letter 'W' on it (presumably for Withers) and distinctive corner blocks. The porch also shields the exposed face of the chimneys.

On the south facing elevation, a square bay window projects slightly from the center of the bay and is protected by a narrow flat roof. The eaves of this roof echo the main roof and dentil molding decorates the cornice. The bay window is divided into four large lower lights with four smaller decorative lights above. The upper lights have plain leaded glass depicting a simple but elegant sunburst motif.

At the rear of the house, the window arrangement is more informal. A small flat roofed enclosed porch projecting from the back kitchen bay and extending across the

center of the house gives access to the rear of the house through a horizontally paneled door with a six pane light over. The porch is well lit by eight tall ten pane casement windows arranged on its north and east elevations. To the left of the door is a small rectangular stained glass window in a downstairs half bathroom. To the right of the porch a low door sheltered by a shed roof gives access to the basement. On the second story, a French door with tall twelve paned side lights echoing the arrangement of the door itself opens on the roof of the porch. To the right of this is a small square closet window.

The stuccoed frame garage behind the house has a classically inspired tripartite configuration, with a central auto garage flanked by matching storage wings. The building has gable returns, six over six windows, and horizontal-paneled wood doors. The two roll-up garage doors are modern replacements.

It is difficult to determine what elements of the exterior of the house survived from its earlier 1904 configuration. Verbal, written, and photographic evidence suggests that many if not all of the windows were re-used in the 1926 house (a partner for the magnificent front window would have had to have been made to match for there was only one in the original building). Doors, their trim, molding, and surrounds were also probably installed intact.

In contrast, the interior of the house appears to have maintained more of its 1904 elements including much of the finely crafted trim and woodwork. The first floor of the house is divided into two halves, with four open plan formal rooms arranged around a central hall to the front of the house. To the rear of the house are two informal rooms—a breakfast room and den—the kitchen, a full and half bathroom, and the porch. The second story has seven bedrooms and three full baths arranged around a central hall. Crown and baseboard molding, door and window surrounds, hardwood floors, and fine brass hardware is of consistently high quality throughout the house.

The central front entrance opens onto an impressive reception area comprising two large formal rooms to the left and right and an open central hallway. Four handsome fluted pilasters with Ionic capitals and scrolled corbels embellished with leafy designs support heavy beams and define the hall area. Two of these pilasters flank the entrance door and two flank a transverse arch which visually separates this front section of the hall from the enclosed hallway beyond. This arch echoes the arch of the front door and is embellished with a key block; it is supported by two separate pilasters shorter than those supporting the ceiling beam but with the same Ionic capitals. The reception area to the left of the door features an impressive and well preserved Queen Anne mantel of birdseye maple decorated with swags and a central medallion. Curving pilasters and scrolled corbels support a finely carved mantel shelf.

The fire surround itself is black marble. This and the other fireplaces and mantels in the house are reputedly from the 1904 house and all but this one have a surviving decorative metal cover for the fire opening. (This mantel is featured in a photograph taken of the old house.) Both reception rooms have matching chandeliers hanging close to the ceiling. These were in the house as early as the 1930s.

Beyond the reception rooms, handsome double pocket doors with horizontal panels effectively extend the formal area of the house into the library on the left and the dining room on the right and each of these rooms also has pocket doors which open up into the central hallway. When the doors are open the four rooms are essentially joined into one large space designed for entertaining, and this unity is emphasized by the distinctive heavy dentil crown molding in all four rooms. The molding is reputedly of wood, each dentil being installed separately.

In the dining room, a chair rail defines the lower portion of the wall. Above, hand painted wall paper was installed before 1951 but after 1933. Two fine round corner cabinets with an interior shell motif and a molded surround with key block and corner blocks flank either side of the wide doorway which opens onto the hall. The lower portion of the cabinet has doors and the upper two thirds is open shelving. (A photograph from the 1903s shows that there were once glass doors above.) The shallow bay window is surrounded by very fine trim including wooden paneling below the window pilasters to either side and a deep architrave which extends to the ceiling molding. The chandelier was probably installed in 1926 as it can be seen in a 1930s photograph; in the older house there were two gas lit chandeliers in the dining room. A swing doorway to the rear of this dining room leads into the breakfast room.

Large pocket doors lead out of the dining room into the central hall and beyond another pair of pocket doors opens from the hall into the library. The library has a handsome painted mantel with fluted columns and corbels and is flanked by an arched glass fronted cabinet to the right and an arched door way to the left. These echo the china cabinets in the dining room, having the same trim. A photograph from the 1920s indicates that the original mantel was adapted rather than being installed in 1926. It was more highly decorated and had an elaborate overmantel which was removed, and paneling between the mantel and arches was painted. A half glazed horizontal panel door connects the library with the side porch and porte cochere.

The rear of the house is entered from the hallway between the dining room and library. A wall at the back of this hall separates the formal areas from the work-a-day world of the rest of the house. The asymmetrical layout of the wall—a door and window capped by a transom—and its modest character highlights this transition, for it stands in sharp contrast to the strict symmetry and grand scale of the formal areas. The single leaf door on the right has horizontal panels with a glazed upper half with a

leaded fleur de lis and diamond motif set into vertical bars. This design is matched in the window to the left and the transom above. The door opens onto a long wide hall which extends to the back of the house and the back door via a second less ornate half glazed door which connects to the small enclosed back porch. The back hall has a strong Victorian association with its consistent tongue and groove wainscot which lines all the walls of the hall and stairwell up to the hall landing above. At some time the area under the stairs was changed, for the wainscot is interrupted where it originally turned under the stair. A false wall has been installed, perhaps to give cover to the basement stairs which descend directly underneath the main stair.

The staircase is handsome, but not grand. Although it is now the only stairway, it was only the 'back' stairs in the 1904 original, for an elegant front stairwell (whose location cannot be determined) descended into the front hallway. It has a square fluted newel with finely turned open string balustrades and Federal style wave brackets at the tread ends.

To the right of the rear hall is a door leading into the breakfast room. This room has a molded chair rail and a fine built-in hutch with cut glass upper doors and cupboard doors and drawers beneath; a mirror backs the open shelf. According to Elizabeth Raby this is where the family ate most of their meals. The dining room was reserved for Sundays and special occasions. An elegant chandelier hangs from the middle of the room and probably dates from 1926.

To the left of the rear hall, and also accessible through an arched doorway and vestibule out of the library is the den. This room has an elegant wooden mantel with finely turned fluted colonettes with Corinthian capitals supporting an architrave decorated with swags and a simple molded shelf; a pair of urns in bas relief decorate each of the upper corners. According to Mrs. Raby, this room was where the family usually sat together in the evening, and it was always over crowded at family gatherings. Mrs. Eford did not believe in T. V. (she found it visually ugly), but when she eventually bought a set, it was located here. The den could have originally been intended as a bedroom since it has a built-in closet and used to have access to the bathroom beyond. Now a door gives access to the back hall.

Accessible from the rear hall, the downstairs bath, like those upstairs, retains some original fixtures including the bath and its faucets. It has chair rail and a built-in corner cupboard. The kitchen is accessible only from the porch and a swing door into the breakfast room, keeping it distinct from even the back hall. For obvious reasons, the kitchen is now modern, but it used to have a butler's pantry, an early refrigerator, and one of the first dishwashing machines made. Mrs. Raby remembers that her mother thought it important to keep the pantry locked when it was not in use. The back porch served as a small storage area. Also off the back porch is a small bathroom

with a distinctive single stained glass window. The stained wood window surround has stylized rose blocks in each corner suggesting that it was in the Queen Anne version of the house.

Upstairs, seven bedrooms open off a long hall, three arranged along the north side and four along the south. Three bathrooms serve these bedrooms, two being only accessible through the rooms themselves. To the east end of the hall, narrow French doors open onto the porch roof below.

In the southeast corner of the upstairs is a small bedroom which Mrs. Raby remembers as a 'baby room,' although her younger brother was nine years old when they moved into the house. Unlike the other rooms, this room has no ceiling molding and has only a partial chair rail. The larger bedroom next to it on the south side of the house was reputedly the room where Mrs. Withers slept after the Efirds moved in in 1933. It has a built-in cupboard and access to a shared bath. This bathroom has the original tile and sink and bath fixtures and a large built-in cabinet across the wall with a glass upper section and closed cabinets beneath. Also adjoining this bathroom is the third bedroom which extends into the bay on the south side of the house. This bedroom also has a built-in closet. This was reputedly a guest room until Elizabeth's two brothers were old enough for their own rooms, whereupon it became her room. It used to connect to the bedroom in the southwest corner of the house through a doorway which is now blocked. This last room on the south wall was originally Elizabeth's room and shared a bathroom with the other bedroom on the front facade. This bathroom is in the center of the front facade and like the others it has many original features including the tile, sink, bath, faucets, toilet tank, wall heater, and a very fine built-in closet extending to the ceiling with mirrored doors and drawers beneath.

The bedroom in the northwest corner of the house has a fireplace with a tiger oak mantel and turned columns with Corinthian capitals supporting a mantel shelf with a decorated cornice. A swag design adorns the architrave, and tile surrounds the fire opening which can be closed off by a metal cover. During the Efird's time in the house, this room was used by Joseph junior and later by Joseph jr. and his brother Hugh. The bedroom next door in the north bay of the house has a mantel on the (interior) east wall almost identical to that next door, although the tile surround is of a different pattern and there is no extra embellishment on the architrave. To the right of the mantel is a substantial closet with a mirrored front and drawers below. Inside and hanging on the door is an interesting organizing unit with drawers and shoe racks. This central room on the north side of the house was used by Elizabeth Efird. The doorway to the left of the mantel opened into Joseph Efird's room through a curious vestibule like the one downstairs between the library and den. This last bedroom also has a fireplace, in this case on its west wall. Although painted, it closely resembles the

other two with columns and a dentil cornice. A doorway on the opposite wall leads into the third bathroom located in the northeast corner of the house which can also be accessed from the main upstairs hall through a small vestibule flanked by large linen closets.

Although the house originally had a third story, in the conversion to a symmetrical Colonial Revival mansion, this was converted into an attic which is only used for storage.

Having been moved once, the Withers-Efird house is already something of a rarity, for most houses never leave the lots they were built on. But this home, which has seen two families to maturity, is facing yet another journey. Plans are to move the building—this time entire—down the block to the corner of Selwyn and Wellesley to make way for a recreation center for the Myers Park Baptist Church, which has thrived on the corner lot donated by the Efird family over 50 years ago. In its third location, however, the house will not be converted into a new style. Rather, plans are to restore it as a reminder of a formative era in Charlotte's history. The church is planning to donate the house to Queens College which will use it as a conference and reception center as it has done for the past several years. It seems entirely appropriate that this elegant house, witness to a long tradition of Southern hospitality and gentility, will continue to delight guests and visitors with its graceful design into its second century.

Maps

1. Plat Map showing property on Selwyn Avenue with Queens College campus opposite:



2. Locator Map showing property in larger suburban context:

