



Town of Cornelius
Historic Preservation Commission
Historic Landmark Designation Staff Report

Date: June 5, 2007

Cornelius Case #: HLD 01-07

Property Name: The Fidler House

Location: 21112 Catawba Avenue
Cornelius, Mecklenburg County, NC

Acreage: Approximately .34 acres

Meck. Co. Tax ID: 005-201-02

Property Owner(s): Terri Mayhew and Vicki Hildebrand
15811 Jetton Road
Cornelius, NC 28031
(704) 650-2828

Date of Construction: ~ 1919

Zoning: *Neighborhood Mixed Use, Transit District Overlay,
Transitional Residential District Overlay*

Public Hearing & Consideration Dates: Historic Preservation Commission 3-15-07
Town Board of Commissioners 6-18-07

Exhibits

- **Exhibit A:** Application for Landmark Designation Consideration
- **Exhibit B:** Aerial Photo
- **Exhibit C:** Property Photographs
- **Exhibit D:** Real Estate Lookup with Assessed Tax Value
- **Exhibit E:** Comparisons to Original Design
- **Exhibit F:** Comparisons to Modified Design
- **Exhibit G:** NC State Historic Preservation Office Response
- **Exhibit H:** Interior Photos, Cornelius Today

Location, Boundaries, and Justification of Proposed Designation

The subject property located on the south side of Catawba Avenue, approximately one-quarter mile west of the Town Center of Cornelius. The entire property comprised of 0.34 acres, the primary structure (currently a residential house) and a detached garage. The entire property is included in the proposed designation.

Historic Background and Significance Assessment

The house was constructed in approximately 1919 by W.C. Fidler, a local farmer¹. The Fidler farm produced primarily cotton, but also other crops including several different orchards. Mr. Fidler used wood from the farm to build the house himself and as a wood craftsman, he also made coffins. He was a blacksmith, made shoes and worked for Puckett's Grocery on Catawba Avenue².

Margaret and W.C. Fidler had six children, three boys and three girls. According to Carl Fidler, son of W.C., a couple of the boys worked at Lance in Charlotte. Carl, a World War II veteran, and his brother Burke are graduates of Appalachian State University in Boone, NC. Carl has both a bachelor's and master's degree and went on to be a school principal in the Boone area for many years. Burke, known as Ikey, went on to be a National Football League referee where he once refereed a Super Bowl game³. Burke now lives in Washington State. Both boys were known to be good athletes.

Daughters Ruth and Margaret Fidler were both school teachers, with Margaret teaching in Cornelius and Ruth in Charlotte.

Willie Fidler married Keith Howard who was Mayor of the Town of Cornelius from 1951 to 1956 and was also the Town Postmaster for several years⁴. Until the death of Willie Fidler Howard in 2005, a Fidler had always lived in the home. Upon Willie's death, the house was sold to the current owners, Terri Mayhew and Vicki Hildebrand.

Physical Description

The following physical description is taken from the *2004 Cornelius Historic Survey Update*: *One and a half story side gable house with large cross gable dormer with front and side windows, shed roof porch with brick columns, interior chimney, wood siding.*

The one and one-half story craftsman-style bungalow was somewhat common in the area for that time period. However, both the exterior and interior of the Fidler House are in very good physical condition making it the most intact and best preserved house of its kind in the Town.

The house was built upon red brick pillars. The original footprint of the house remains sheathed in the original wood siding and the roof has the original asbestos shingles. The back side of the house contained a small back porch at one time, which has since been enclosed and sheathed in vinyl siding.

The original two-over-two windows on the front of the first story are all intact. The two sides and cross-gable windows are also the original windows; some are three-over-one design. The original two coal burning fireplaces and brick chimneys remain. The original front pine door has been replaced with a pine and glass door of appropriate style for the period.

The original wooden front porch (floor, railings, columns, and ceiling) has been replaced with brick columns and floor. Part of the original wood column/railing is visible in the current brick columns supporting the porch roof. Wrought iron railings connect the brick columns and line the steps from the front walk to the porch. The porch ceiling is tongue-in-groove one inch wood planks which are painted white.

The original four inch heart pine floors milled from the Fidler farm cover much of the interior of the house. The rooms are spacious by today's standards with eight inch plain white painted baseboards and four and one-half inch door casings and solid pine doors (also painted white).

The interior doors contain the original hardware, including the original glass door knobs. Simple crown molding surrounds the plaster ceilings. Closet space is lined with horizontal pine bead-board.

The front door opens into a wide foyer, with one room on each side. The room on the right contains one of the coal burning fireplaces and was likely a formal living room. The fireplace has a plain mantle and simple molding. The room on the left was likely an informal gathering room.

The front foyer leads into what was the original kitchen, which also has one room on each side. The room on the right was the dining room, which also connected to the formal living room via a short hallway. The room to the left of the kitchen was a bedroom with a small bathroom.

The left rear of the house contained a "pig room", which is where meat was prepared. The interior of the "pig room" has exposed wood plank walls, floor and ceiling. Under the "pig room" was the pump room for the ice box. The pipes for the pump can still be seen through the glass and wood crawl space doors (see Exhibit C). It is not known if the glass and wood crawl space doors are original to the house, but they do appear to be in keeping with the time period.

When a more modern kitchen was added in the 1920's to the right rear of the house, the original kitchen became another gathering room. With the addition, the rear porch was enclosed and connected the new kitchen to the "pig room".

There is a narrow, steep staircase in the original kitchen space which leads to the half-story that was added in the 1930's⁵. The staircase has standard pine mill posts with simple pickets. The bottom of the stairway juts out into the doorway leading from the front foyer to the original kitchen. The half-story contains three small rooms with closets showing exposed rafters of the roof.

Integrity Evaluation

The house is located on Catawba Avenue, the main avenue into "Old Cornelius". Other houses on the street, for the most part, are also of historical design and architecture. Houses to the south and west of the subject property are primarily single-story mill houses, common in towns founded around the mill industry.

The original structure built about 1919 was a one story side gable structure with a front porch, built upon a brick crawl space. A new kitchen was added in the 1920's and in the 1930's a half-story was created, adding bedrooms and closets resulting in the cross gable dormers seen on both the front and back of the house.

Overall, the house retains most of its integrity and is the best preserved structure of its type and architectural style in the Town of Cornelius, for this time period. With the exception of the garage addition in 1988, which is where the original smokehouse was located, the property is not only the best preserved but also the least altered compared to others of the same time period in town.

Exhibit E contains a comparison of one-story side gable structures from the 1910's and 1920's. Exhibit F contains a comparison of one and one-half story side gable structures with cross-gables also from the 1910's and 1920's. All houses used for comparison are on the Cornelius Historic Survey and the exterior materials noted in the comments are from the Mecklenburg County Property Ownership and Land Records tax information.

Any projects proposed to take place following local Historic Landmark designation will require review and approval by the Town of Cornelius Historic Preservation Commission.

Assessed Value of Property

The Mecklenburg County Tax Assessor’s Office assessed the value of the entire property including approximately 0.34 acres of land and all structures and improvements at \$103,600 on January 17, 2003. The Town of Cornelius receives \$285.00 in ad valorem taxes for the structure and the land. If the entire property is historically designated, Cornelius would receive \$142.50 in ad valorem taxes. Mecklenburg County receives \$867 in ad valorem taxes for the property and would receive \$433.50 if the entire property were historically designated.

Documentation

Deeds and Maps:

Book 303, p. 271	10 April 1911. C. A. Howard to W. C. Fidler. Lot 5, ½ of Lot 6 and 3/8 of Lot 20 as shown on “Map of West View situated in Cornelius, NC” Map Book 230, p. 44.
Map Book 230, p. 44	Map of West View situated in Cornelius, NC.
Book 1444, p. 37	15 June 1950. W. C. Fidler and Margaret Goodrum Fidler (wife) to Keith R. Howard and Willie Fidler Howard (wife).
Book 1444, p. 41	20 June 1950. Keith R. Howard and Willie Fidler Howard (wife) to W. C. Fidler and Margaret Goodrum Fidler (wife).
Book 3420, p. 69-71	10 May 1972. Margaret Goodrum Fidler (widow) to Willie Fidler Howard (widow).
Book 21118, p. 509-512	27 September 2006. The Estate of Willie Fidler Howard to Terri J. Mayhew and Vicki M. Hildebrand, each owning a one-half undivided interest as tenant in common.

References

- ¹ Conversation between Becky Partin and son, Carl Fidler of Boone, NC.
- ² Conversation between Becky Partin and former neighbor, Janet Howard Knox (Mrs. Herbert Knox).
- ³ Conversation between Becky Partin and long time Cornelius resident, Miriam Whisnant.
- ⁴ *A Town by Any Other Name, A History of Cornelius North Carolina* by Leslie B. Rindoks.
- ⁵ Conversation between Becky Partin and son, Carl Fidler of Boone, NC.

Catawba Avenue



