



**Survey and Research Report  
On The  
The William and Nell Freeman House  
December 11, 2017**



1. **Name And Location Of The Property.** The William and Nell Freeman House is located at 201 South Ames Street in Matthews, N.C.
2. **Name And Address Of The Present Owner Of The Property.**  
  
 Matthews Presbyterian Church  
 P. O. Box 97  
 Matthews, N.C. 28106
3. **Representative Photographs Of The Property.** The report contains representative photographs of the property.
4. **Map Depicting The Location Of The Property.** This report contains a map depicting the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference To The Property. The current deed to the property is recorded in Deed Book 31007 at Page 744. The tax parcel number of the property is 23702445.

6. A Brief Historic Sketch Of The Property. The report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

7. A Brief Physical Description Of The Property. The report contains a brief physical description of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

8. Documentation Of Why And In What Ways The Property Meets The Criteria For Designation Set Forth In N.C.G.S. 160A-400.5.

a. Special Significance In Terms Of Its History, Architecture, And/Or Cultural Importance . The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the William and Nell Freeman House possesses special significance in terms of the Town of Matthews. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1) The William and Nell Freeman House is a superior example of Craftsman style architecture in Matthews, North Carolina.

2) The William and Nell Freeman House was constructed by a builder of homes and therefore illustrates William Henry Freeman's talents as a contractor.

3) The William and Nell Freeman House retains a high degree of physical integrity.

4) The ample size of the lot is suggestive of a farmyard, not a small urban lot. William and Nell Freeman did have farm animals on the property. It therefore demonstrates how rural habits and lifestyles mingled with urban culture in small towns in Mecklenburg County.

5) The William and Nell Freeman House contributes to public understanding of the evolution of the built environment of small Mecklenburg towns in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

6) The barn on the William and Nell Freeman House property is the only surviving barn in Matthews that was constructed contemporaneously with the house.

b. Integrity Of Design, Setting, Workmanship, Materials, Feeling, And/Or Association. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the physical description included in this report demonstrates that the William and Nell Freeman 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 William and Nell Freeman House is \$105,200. It is exempt from the payment of property taxes.

Date Of The Preparation Of This Report: December 11, 2017

Prepared By: Dr. Dan L. Morrill

## A Brief History Of The The William and Nell Freeman House

Dr. Dan L. Morrill  
December 11, 2017



William Henry Freeman (1869-1947) and his son, William Reid Freeman (1895-1974), built the distinctive Craftsman style William and Nell Freeman House in 1927.<sup>1</sup> The *Charlotte Observer* described William Henry Freeman as a “retired architect and contractor” at the time of his death in 1947.<sup>2</sup> That Freeman and his son chose to construct the latter’s residence on South Ames Street is not surprising. A native of Union County and longtime resident of Matthews, the elder Freeman was a member of Matthews Presbyterian Church, located next door.<sup>3</sup> There is no evidence that William Henry Freeman received a degree or was licensed as an architect. Most likely, as a home builder, he was familiar with house designs and employed that knowledge in the construction of the home on South Ames Street. Architectural magazines and mail-order catalogues that featured Craftsman style house plans were readily available in the 1920s. Freeman surely would have read them. According to one of his descendants, William Henry Freeman was a “gentleman farmer.” He owned land in Union County and acquired crops from his tenants for resale. According to his great grandson, Freeman was a “larger than life” person and “the life of the party.” He was also a skilled carpenter, as is evidenced by the results of his work at the Freeman House.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, June 11, 1974; Ancestry.com; interview of Mr. Mac Cisco by Dr. Dan L. Morrill, October 31, 2017.

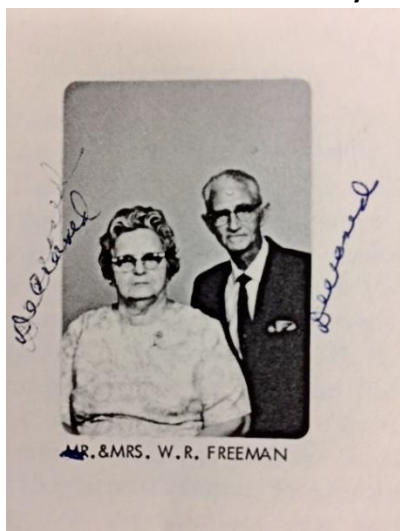
<sup>2</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, January 21, 1947.

<sup>3</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, December 11, 13, 1934, William Henry Freeman served on the building committee of the older sanctuary of Matthews Presbyterian Church.

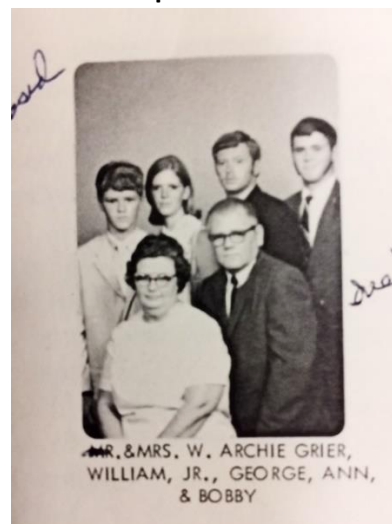
<sup>4</sup> Interview of Mr. Mac Crisco by Dr. Dan L. Morrill, November 9, 2017. Hereinafter cited as *Crisco*.

The house on South Ames Street was the home of William Reid Freeman and his wife, Nell Stroupe Freeman (1902-1981). Mac Crisco (1958-Present) grew up next door to the Freeman House and remembers his grandparents well. Like his father, William Reid Freeman was a devoted member of Matthews Presbyterian Church, where he served as a Deacon and Church Treasurer. Freeman was also a member of the Matthews Town Council. A veteran of World War One, W. R. Freeman was a long-time employee of the U. S. Postal Service.<sup>5</sup> “He drove a postal truck around Matthews and Charlotte,” says his grandson.

At home Freeman devoted a lot of time and energy to gardening. Mac Crisco says that his grandfather “always had a garden in the flat area beside the barn.” Freeman had “books on gardening” and “always grew a lot of vegetables.” He was also “into carpentry and was always fixing things.” Cisco’s grandmother, Nell Freeman, was a homemaker. She “would can vegetables and things” and “bake and sell cakes” for extra income. “They had chickens and a cow,” Mac Crisco says. Nell grew up in the Plaza Midwood neighborhood of Charlotte, but in Matthews Nell adapted to a more rural-like lifestyle. She would “milk the cow” and “ring the chickens’ necks.”<sup>6</sup> After Nell Freeman’s death in June 1981, her daughter, Katherine Freeman Grier, and her family moved into the house. Katherine continued to maintain a large garden beside the barn. She lived in the house until her death at age 91 in January 2014. Like her father and her grandfather, Katherine was a member of Matthews Presbyterian Church, where her funeral was conducted.<sup>7</sup> Matthews Presbyterian Church purchased the William and Nell Freeman House in July 2016.<sup>8</sup> According to Mac Crisco, the family believed that Matthews Presbyterian Church would restore the house.<sup>9</sup> The Church has decided instead to demolish the house unless it is moved off site.<sup>10</sup> Efforts are underway to determine if the house can be preserved.



**Nell and William Reid Freeman**



**Katherine Freeman Grier and Family**

<sup>5</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, June 11, 1974.

<sup>6</sup> *Cisco*. *Charlotte Observer*, June 12, 1981.

<sup>7</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, January 23, 2014. *Cisco*. Interview of Fey Grayson by Dr. Dan L. Morrill, November 6, 2017. Hereinafter cited as *Grayson*.

<sup>8</sup> Mecklenburg County Deed Book 31007, Page 744.

<sup>9</sup> *Cisco*.

<sup>10</sup> *Grayson*.

The special significance of the William and Nell Freeman House is best understood within the context of the developmental history of Matthews, N.C., and its place in the emergence of other small towns along railroad lines in Mecklenburg County in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Historian Richard Mattson describes how between the 1880s and the Great Depression of the 1930s a group of “sleepy stagecoach stops or crossroad hamlets” in Mecklenburg County morphed into “centers of local trade with bustling main streets.” Pineville, Huntersville, Cornelius, and Matthews, says Mattson, followed “common patterns of development that engendered a distinctive small-town landscape.” One and two-story corbeled brick commercial buildings formed the main streets of these communities, which invariably intersected or were located next to the town’s principal railroad tracks. Radiating out from the central business district of each of Mecklenburg’s small towns was a collection of fashionable residences, commonly on the major thoroughfares, that illustrated the desire of prominent townspeople to fulfill their “urban ambitions.”<sup>11</sup>

The largest concentration of stylish older homes in Matthews was located to the immediate west of the town’s commercial core, south of the railroad, and along West John Street. Such extant fashionable residences as the Nancy Reid House (1890) at 134 West John Street, the B. D. Funderburk House (1904) at 201 West Charles Street, and the McLaughlin Bost House (c. 1891) at 415 West John Street, attest to the range of designs made possible by sawn lumber and manufactured nails brought to Matthews by rail at the turn of the last century. Balloon framing made the construction of elaborately embellished Victorian and early Colonial Revival style homes easier and faster. Houses bedecked with manufactured filigree were commonly found in small towns like Matthews in the late 1800s and early 1900s.



**Nancy Reid House**



**B. D. Funderburk House**



**McLaughlin Bost House**

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.cmhpf.org/kids/neighborhoods/small-intro.html>. Hereinafter cited as *Mattson*. For a general history of Matthews, see Lester, Paula Hartill. 1999. *Discover Matthews From Cotton to Corporate*, Charlotte: Herff Jones Publishing Company for The Town of Matthews Tourism Council. Hereinafter cited as *Lester*. The Town of Matthews emerged as one of many satellite communities that were established in the vicinity of Charlotte after the city developed as an important cotton distribution center and railroad hub in the 1850s. What would become Matthews began to take shape on July 12, 1825, when postal department records show that John Miles Fullwood was appointed postmaster in an area known as Stumptown. The new post office was established outside Fullwood’s home. Stumptown soon became known by the locals as Fullwood. After the Civil War, a collection of general stores and other businesses emerged around the Fullwood post office. By 1870 the stagecoach stop of Fullwood had started to take shape as a town. Building lots were surveyed and streets were mapped out. In 1874 a section of the Central Carolina Railroad was completed through the town. The first train rolled into the town on December 15, 1874. The railway officials named the Fullwood stop “Matthews Station” in honor of Watson Matthews, a director of the Central Carolina Railway Company. A charter was granted on March 8, 1879, for Matthews to operate as a municipal corporation. The 1880 census listed 191 town residents. In 1909 Matthews had four general stores, a drug store, a bank, a grist mill, a blacksmith shop, a livery stable, and a hotel. By the 1920s, five passenger trains and eight freight trains passed through Matthews daily. (see *Lester*).

The predilections regarding home styles of many of the people who settled in Matthews in the late nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century tended in a different direction. They were demonstrably rural. These folks, says Mattson, preferred “traditional farmhouses” and lots large enough for “flourishing kitchen gardens, smokehouses, and other assorted outbuildings.”<sup>12</sup> It was not unusual for these town dwellers to have cows, chickens, and pigs. The Grier Furr House (c. 1878) at 500 West John Street exhibits the same form and massing as that found on many late nineteenth century and early twentieth century farmhouses in Mecklenburg County. Residences of this type were less pretentious and were devoid of elaborate ornamentation. “Uptown houses,” Mattson writes, “blended the traditional with the up-to-date.”<sup>13</sup>



In the early 1900s, aspiring residents of Matthews increasingly came to prefer the Craftsman style over the ornate Victorian themes of the late nineteenth century. Craftsman style architecture was part of a larger Arts and Crafts movement that sought to resurrect craftsmanship from what many regarded as the toxic impact of the industrial age. According to one art historian, It arose from an “emotional unwillingness to accept and face the reality of our industrial world.”<sup>14</sup> The emphasis in Craftsman style bungalows was upon “humble materials,” and there was “an overwhelming sense of the handmade.” Ornamentation was restrained, and “construction joints were proudly displayed.”<sup>15</sup> Well suited for warm climates, bungalows had large front porches, usually supported by wooden posts resting on brick or stone piers, broad eaves, and clusters of windows to facilitate cross ventilation. Many designers looked upon the Craftsman bungalow as a cost-effective means to provide adequate housing for the working class. Matthews has several Craftsman bungalows of typical proportions and appointments. Examples include the houses at 509 West John Street and 500 Matthews Mint Hill Road.



509 West John Street



500 Matthews Mint Hill Road

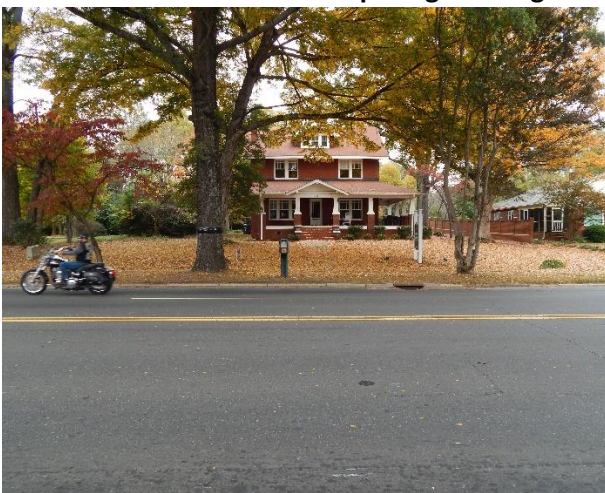
<sup>12</sup> Mattson.

<sup>13</sup> Mattson.

<sup>14</sup> Herwin Schaefer, “The Metamorphosis of the Craftsman,” *College Art Journal* 17, no. 3 (Spring 1958): 266.

<sup>15</sup> William Morgan, *The Abrams Guide to American Styles* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc., 2004), 258-259.

Matthews has a pair of 2-story brick bungalows. The Renfrow Lemmond House at 344 West John Street is a locally designated historic landmark. The second, at 110 West Matthews Street, houses an adaptive reuse.<sup>16</sup> These are the most imposing and largest Craftsman style residences in Matthews.



Renfrow Lemmond House 344 W. John Street



110 West Matthews Street

The “Pete” Phillips House, a local historic landmark at 301 West Charles Street, also has special historic significance. In addition to containing a well-crafted Craftsman style bungalow, the property contains a barn that belonged to the Morris family, who were earlier residents of the site. There is also a dilapidated agricultural outbuilding behind the Bost McLaughlin House at 415 West John Street. These structures are noteworthy cultural artifacts, because they illustrate that some townspeople in Matthews at the turn of the last century, like William and Nell Freeman, incorporated their rural habits and lifestyles into their daily urban routines. The dividing line between town life and farm life was supple and malleable at the turn of the last century.

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<sup>16</sup> A reconnaissance survey of the built environment of Matthews conducted by this writer identified 16 Craftsman style bungalows in Matthews. Main Street has three – at 201 Main Street, 341 Main Street, and 525 Main Street. Three are extant on South Trade Street – at 224 South Trade Street, 300 South Trade Street, and 308 South Trade Street. Five Craftsman style residences are on West John Street – 226 West John Street, 344 West John Street, 408 West John Street, 509 West John Street, and 510 West John Street. There is a Craftsman style residence at 500 Matthews-Mint Hill Road and another at 110 West Matthews Street. A Craftsman style bungalow survives at 301 West Charles Street and at 304 Covenant Church Lane. The William Henry Freeman House is at 201 South Ames Street.



**Morris Barn Behind Phillips House**



**Agricultural Outbuilding at Bost McLaughlin**

Contributing to the special significance of the William Reid and Nell Stroupe Freeman House is the fact that it too has an extant agricultural outbuilding. The Freeman Barn is the only surviving barn in Matthews that was constructed contemporaneously with the house on the property. In this writer's judgment, that fact alone makes the Freeman site an important element in the built environment of Matthews. The destruction of the William and Nell Freeman House, its outbuilding, and its setting would eliminate an iconic connection between Matthews and its historic rural environs.



**Freeman Barn West Facade**



**Freeman Barn Frame Interior**



**Barn Rear On South**



**Barn Door**

**Physical Description  
Of The  
William and Nell Freeman House  
December 11, 2017**



The William and Nell Freeman House is located on a partially-treed, grassed lot on the eastern side of South Ames Street, a paved roadway that has no sidewalks or curbs. The lot is essentially level. South Ames Street extends southward from West John Street, the principal east-west thoroughfare in Matthews, N.C. The neighborhood has a diverse built environment, which is exclusively residential



except for the campus of Matthews Presbyterian Church, which sits at the southeastern quadrant of the intersection of Ames Street and West John Street, and a small commercial strip on the southwestern quadrant of the intersection. The Matthews Presbyterian Church is contiguous to the William and Nell Freeman House on the north.

The setbacks of the dwellings on South Ames Street vary. The neighborhood has a mature tree cover. The overall character of South Ames Street demonstrates that the neighborhood has evolved. It has

never been a planned development. The streetscape is illustrative of the fact that many residents of Matthews, like those in other historically small towns in Mecklenburg County, lived in areas that transitioned from rural to urban. A wooden barn clad in wide siding and surmounted by a standing seam metal roof with a one-story shed-roof extension on the north is located at the southern edge of the lot. Behind the barn a grass embankment slopes to a treeless area that was historically used for gardening

and, most likely, a pasture. A gravel driveway with two narrow lanes extends along the southern edge of the lot and terminates at the barn, and a mostly-obscured brick and concrete sidewalk runs from the street perpendicularly to the front steps of the house.



**South Ames Street Streetscape**



**Freeman House Front**



**South Elevation Of House**



**North Elevation Of House**

The William and Nell Freeman House is a west-facing, three-bay wide and four-bay deep, one-and-one-half-story, front-gabled, Craftsman style house with a prominent one-bay wide front projecting bay that is topped by a gable. The gable of the projecting bay contains a louvered wooden vent. The house has a two-bay wide wraparound asphalt-shingled shed-roofed porch on the front with exposed rafter tails. The porch roof transitions into an asphalt-shingled gable roof on the north. The ceiling of the porch is tongue-and-groove beaded board. A rectangular metal light fixture is attached



**Porch Ceiling**



**Front Door**

to the ceiling. A six-light front door with three horizontal panels and a screen door with metal lattice in the lower half provides access to the interior. The principal gable on the front of the house is sheathed with siding and features a pair of single-light windows.

The house rests upon a brick pier foundation filled with brick curtain walls. The rear porch of the house has been enclosed with clapboard siding and jalousie windows with metal surrounds. The rear portion of the asphalt-shingled roof of the house is hipped. An interior brick chimney with a corbeled cap penetrates the southwestern quadrant of the main roof. A partially exterior single-shouldered brick chimney is located near the rear of the wraparound porch, and a brick flue is near the northeastern corner of the house. Both have corbeled caps and metal covers. The principal cladding material of the house is drop siding. The predominant window type is 4/1 double sash. Wooden brackets support the gables' eaves, and rafter tails are exposed on each elevation.



**House From Rear**



**Brick Foundation**

At some point in the house's history the wooden front porch floor on the north side of the house was removed to create a covered patio with a masonry floor. Another major alteration has occurred on the southern façade. A projecting gabled bay that probably originally contained ganged windows was converted into an entrance with sidelights. The new entrance is sheltered by a gabled porch supported by metal posts and features a masonry floor and steps.



**Side Patio**



**Side Entrance**

The William and Nell Freeman House has notable exterior details. These include the exposed tongue-and-groove roof decking beneath the eaves, arches in the bases of the front porch posts to facilitate ventilation, wooden shingles with various reveals in the gable ends at the front and north side, and concrete caps on the brick foundation walls beneath the front wraparound porch. The front porch posts feature a decorative moulded band near the top of the posts.



**Exposed Tongue-and-Groove Roof Decking**



**Ventilation Arches In Moulded Post Base**



**Shingles In Gable End**



**Post With Moulded Decorative Band**

The interior arrangement of rooms in the William and Nell Freeman House is customary for a Craftsman style residence. The house is essentially divided into a public section on the north and a private section on the south. The northern half has three rooms. First is the living room, followed by the dining room, and finally the kitchen in the rear. In the southern half are three bedrooms and the only bathroom. A hallway connects the middle bedroom with the back bedroom. The bathroom is off the hallway. The kitchen and the bathroom retain no original features. The middle bedroom has been converted into a den or sitting room with a doorway to the outside.

One goes directly into the living room when entering the house. There is no entry hall. The room has a Craftsman style mantel around a brick firebox. The mantel features posts supporting a thick shelf. Trim at the bases of the posts match the room's tall baseboards topped with beveled trim. The mantel

continues above the shelf to a cap composed of simple trim. The fireplace also features a brick hearth flush with the floor.



**Living Room**



**Living Room Mantel**

The living room's crown moulding is narrow. An original stamped metal light fixture is in the ceiling. The room has narrow pine flooring, as do the dining room and the bedrooms. A pair of fifteen-light doors lead from the living room into the dining room, which has the same trim and floor features as the living room except for a narrow chair rail with moulded trim. A solid door with six horizontal panels leads from the dining room into the hallway connecting the middle bedroom and the rear bedroom. The bathroom is opposite.



**Solid Door Leading To Hallway And Bathroom**



**Dining Room With Hallway To Right And Kitchen To Rear**

The millwork and the trim in the bedrooms are the same as that found in the living room. The middle bedroom originally had a narrow staircase leading up to a fourth bedroom, which is now used for storage. The upper room is now accessible by a pulldown stairway. The middle bedroom contains a fireplace with a brick hearth and a simple Craftsman-style mantel with a shelf supported by sawn brackets.



**Craftsman Mantel In Middle Bedroom**



**Craftsman Mantel In Middle Bedroom**

The property contains a side-gabled barn with a shed addition on the north elevation that was built flush with the façade and rear elevation. The façade is two bays wide and is pierced by a wide opening and a plank door adjacent to the south elevation. The west elevation of the shed addition features a wide plank door. There is a single wooden door in the middle of the barn's eastern façade. Barn framing is exposed in the interior. The roof is standing seam metal. The gables have no overhang, and feature skip-siding for ventilation.



**Exposed Inside Framing**



**Barn Eastern Elevation**



**The William and Nell Freeman House (1927) 201 South Ames Street, Matthews, N.C.**

- This writer acknowledges and appreciates Stewart Gray's assistance in composing the physical description.