



**Summary of the Historical Significance
of the
Baxter-Strock-Delhom House
2525 Portland Ave.
Charlotte, NC 28207**

The Baxter-Delhom House is historically significant and therefore deserving of historic designation for three reasons:

- 1) Its association with Herbert Hill Baxter (1894-1967) and his wife, Virginia Littlejohn Baxter (1895-1976), who had the house built. Herbert Baxter was a long-serving member of the Charlotte City Council, Mayor, and important civic leader who presided over the tremendous multi-faceted expansion of the city during the booming post-World War II era.
- 2) Its association with M. Mellanay Delhom (1908-2003), who lived in the house with a life estate while serving as a major collection donor, curator and lecturer at the Mint Museum, and for whom the Delhom Gallery at the Mint Museum is named.
- 3) Its unique Williamsburg-inspired architecture, a first of its kind in the city, and one-of-a-kind in the Myers Park area.

Herbert Baxter first came to Charlotte from Boston as an Army officer stationed at Camp Greene during World War I. While in the army, he married artist/designer Virginia Littlejohn of Spartanburg, SC. After his discharge, he went into the lumber business in Charleston, SC. In 1922, he moved to Charlotte, where he founded the Central Lumber Company in 1925. In subsequent years, he made an indelible mark on the city with his civic, professional and charitable contributions. He served 14 years on the City Council (1935-41, 1951-59) and six years as Mayor (1943-49).

It was during his post-war tenure as mayor that his skillful leadership in guiding the explosive growth of the time had a major and lasting impact on the city. He continued to advocate for many civic projects afterwards as a member of City Council and as an influential private citizen.

“As mayor, Baxter established a planning board [the first] and pressed for careful but progressive city growth. After World War II, he launched the sale of bonds to finance a \$12,000,000 ‘Program for Progress.’ During his administration, the city acquired Morris Field from the US Air Force for airport expansion; developed and adopted health, housing, and zoning ordinances; expanded city boundaries; liberalized Sunday blue laws; created ABC legislation; authorized construction of a cross-town highway; established a veteran’s center and a city employee retirement system; and created new city departments, including Traffic Engineering. Baxter promoted funding for an auditorium and coliseum, as well as consolidation of city and county governments.”¹

In addition to the above, he was involved in many local organizations, very often in leadership roles. He spearheaded the founding of the Charlotte City Club in 1947, and the incorporators (which included some of the leading business people in town), chose Baxter as their first president, in which capacity he served two terms from 1947-51, when he supervised its construction and early operations. He was also a member of the Myers Park

Country Club, and served as president ((1953-58). At different times, he was also the president of the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra; the commander of the Civil Air Patrol's North Carolina Wing; and worked with the Charlotte Mecklenburg Boy Scouts and the Charlotte Mecklenburg Merchant's Association.

In 1949, the Baxters decided to build a house more suitable for the two of them since their children were no longer at home, and Mrs. Baxter's need for a house with living space all on one level. They chose a majestic lot at the upper end of a new street, Portland Avenue. Virginia Baxter reportedly saw a Williamsburg-type design for a house in a magazine, and, being a talented artist and designer, drew the plans herself. Though Herbert Baxter had also built some houses, they chose their son-in-law, Alan W. Hayes to do the building. (Alan Hayes was the husband of Elizabeth (Betty) Baxter Hayes, who later founded Bissell-Hayes Realtors, now part of Cottingham-Chalk/Bissell-Hayes Realtors). The result was probably the most original and striking architecture of any house in the city up to that time. Since Herbert Baxter owned the Central Lumber Company, he was able to incorporate a number of elements rarely found in Charlotte houses: Very large, multi-light windows in the twin bays on either side of the house; very large, triple-hung, floor-to-ceiling, 12-light living-room windows, that, in theory, could be raised to walk out onto the spacious front porch that curves outward between the two bays. The combination of 10-foot ceilings and large windows in the spacious center living room and the two bays (encompassing a large dining room on the left, and large bedroom on the right) give the rooms a feeling of grand space filled with light. Built in something of a U-shape, the house wraps around a rear patio on three sides, which can be accessed from the kitchen wing on the left rear, the living room through two different nine-foot French doors, or from the bedroom wing on the right rear. Altogether, with other interesting elements, the house is a true original in Charlotte.

In 1958, acquaintances of the Baxters, Howard E. Strock (1910-1980) and Margaret Gilliam Strock (1914-1993) bought the house. Margaret Strock was a Charlotte native who attended Queens College and graduated with an electrical engineering degree from Duke University. During her working career, she was the vice-president and manager of E. H. Gilliam Co., an electrical contracting firm, for which her husband also worked. The Strocks liked the house so much, they built a similar one on Sea Island, GA for their beach house.

Margaret Stock was an avid collector of ceramics, many of which were acquired through her extensive travels to Europe and elsewhere. As such, in addition to memberships in a number of other organizations, she was actively involved with the Mint Museum of Art. Among many other fine ceramics, she had a number of excellent pieces of Meissen china, which were later donated to the Museum.

In 1962, Daisy Bridges, who was the volunteer curator of decorative arts at the Mint, heard Mallanay Delhom speak at a Wedgwood International Seminar in Chicago, and noted to herself that she wanted to get to know Ms. Delhom; subsequently, a friendship later ensued. For a 1964 exhibit at the Mint, Ms. Delhom lent 90 pieces from her extensive collection for the show. Not long afterward, the Mint Museum board spoke to her about bringing her collection to Charlotte, and eventually a deal was struck for her to donate her collection to the museum and become its curator. The museum used the

opportunity to raise money for new gallery wing to house the collection, which came to Charlotte in 1967. In the spring of 1968, The Delhom Gallery and Institute for Research and Study in Historical Pottery and Porcelain opened in concert with a Wedgewood International Seminar being held in the city.

The Delhom collection started in 1925 with her first purchase of some Chinese figurines at the age of 17. By the time she came to Charlotte, she owned about 2,000 pieces, which spanned nine cultures and 4,000 years. Now the collection has more than doubled, and the museum's Delhom-Gambrell library, started primarily with Ms. Delhom's book collection, is now one of the country's excellent ceramics research libraries, and contains more than 6,000 works. In addition to her curator's duties, Mellanay Delhom was involved in numerous national and international ceramics organizations and lectured widely, here and abroad. She delighted in teaching seminars at the Mint, (which often included experts from around the globe) and took groups on study tours to pottery centers in China, Turkey, the Mideast and Europe, and was very supportive of North Carolina potters.

Ms. Delhom was also the recipient of many honors and awards, among which were: The Ruth Coltrane Cannon Cup for the State of North Carolina in 1972; the following year, the Illustrious Moderns Award from the Wedgewood Society of Chicago and an Award of Appreciation from the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce. In addition, she received the North Carolina Award in Fine Arts in 1997, and was conferred with honorary doctorate degrees from Davidson College and Queens University. Her impact on the cultural life of the state and this city was exceptional.

In 1972, the Delhom Delhom Service League was founded as an affiliate of the Mint Museum. The members volunteer as guides in the Delhom Gallery, arrange lectures by members or visiting scholars, plan various programs and activities, and conduct ongoing education in pottery.

One of the members was Margaret Strock, whose own collection and interest in ceramics would naturally draw her to this circle. She and Mellanay Delhom became good friends through the association at the Mint. Ms. Strock owned some dachshunds, which she adored, but hated to board them when she traveled, and thus would ask various people to care for them in the home while she was gone. Sometime after Howard Strock died in 1980, Mellany Delhom was invited to come live with Ms. Strock, which she gladly accepted. She could watch over the dogs and the ceramic pieces at the home, and, later, be Ms. Strock's driver and look out after her as well.

When Margaret Strock died in 1993, Mellanay Delhom was given a life estate in the house, and continued to carry on her work at the Mint and receive friends and guests there until her death in 2003, at the age of 94. Her ashes are buried in a circa 1775 Wedgewood and Bentley urn in the Delhom Gallery at the Mint Museum.

The house was purchased that year by Carol Hart Huffman, who grew up next door in a house built the same year as the Baxter's. Her mother and Mrs. Baxter were good friends, and her grandmother used to house-sit in the 1970s for the dachshunds. After extensive needed renovations and repairs, the house is once again one of the jewels of Portland Avenue.

Portland Avenue is not in any current or proposed historic district, and it is not included in the National Register of Historic Places for Myers Park, and therefore carries no protection of any kind against demolition. It is a street that has had many tear-downs of original houses that have been replaced by houses of much greater scale. The two houses to the immediate right of this house have been so redeveloped, as is the house two doors down on the left side. Of twenty-three houses on the street, ten are new, and one is presently threatened. All the older houses on Portland Avenue are at risk of being torn down, including this one.

1. H.H.Baxter Papers, 1917-1982. University of North Carolina Special Collections, UNCC Manuscript Collection 86.