



Jane W. Gilbert
816 Harvard Place
Charlotte, North Carolina 28207

9 June 2014

Dear Commission Members.

Our house at 816 Harvard Place, Charlotte, North Carolina, turns one hundred years old this year. For the majority of its life it was inhabited by its original owner, Norman A. Cocke, his wife Mary, and their four children—all of whom were born in the house. Norman and Mary lived out there lives there. Following an eleven year interval with two other successive owners, we, Jane and Pressly Gilbert, have lived in the house for thirty years. Throughout that time we have sought, with continual care and considerable expense, to maintain the property just as it came to us, having had few and minor alterations. We wish to propose designation of the house as a Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmark.

When he built our home, Norman A. Cocke was counsel to James Buchanan Duke. Subsequently he was counsel to Southern Power Company and Duke Power Company, predecessors of Duke Energy, when they were formed. In time he became the president of Duke Power Company. Fifty years ago Lake Norman, named in Mr. Cocke's honor, was created when waters of the Catawba River were impounded at Cowan's Ford Dam. Last September we were honored to attend Duke Energy's celebration of that event, at the invitation of Mr. Cocke's grandson, Vann. We have been told that the papers creating the Duke Endowment were drawn up in our living room, though they are said to have been signed in the Duke Mansion. Our former neighbor John Hicks, long a lobbyist for Duke Power in the North Carolina legislature, told us

that he, Mr. Cocke, Mr. Duke and others, motored home together to Harvard Place and Ardsley Road, for lunch.

We have always hoped the house could be designated as an Historic Landmark. We feel that this, the year of the house's centennial, and of Duke Energy's emergence as the nation's largest energy company, is the perfect time. Ours is a fine old house whose character and charm captures many friends and guests. Longtime and new visitors say it simply feels good to be here. We long to extend the house's welcoming face beyond our tenure. It has multiple associations with important Mecklenburg County history. In light of our efforts to maintain its historical integrity, we fervently wish it may maintain its present character when we can no longer inhabit it. We have lived in our neighborhood long enough to see many properties renovated virtually beyond recognition, inside and out.

Both Vann Cocke, who has visited us and recounted many experiences in the house when the Cockes were in their prime, and our renovation architect, John Bivens, have expressed their desire to speak to the Commission on behalf of our request, should that opportunity arise.

Enclosed is an explanation of five ways in which we feel the property has been preserved in a manner consistent with historical designation, under the headings (1) Original Footprint (2) Modernized Kitchen (3) Original Millwork, Fixtures and Working Radiators (4) Outbuilding Consistent with Main House and (5) Grounds Echoing Landscape Design by Myers Park Developers.

We earnestly and hopefully seek your consideration of the designation of 816 Harvard Place as an Historic Landmark.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jane Gilbert". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Jane Gilbert

ASPECTS OF PRESERVATION

NORMAN. A COCKE HOME, CHARLOTTE, N.C.

(1) ORIGINAL FOOTPRINT

There have been no wings or rooms added to the house since the Cockes left it. We have purposely maintained the location and use of all original rooms including a butler's pantry; the living and dining rooms; the bedrooms (one presently serving as a study for empty nesters); and the small drawing room—our library and television room—tucked in among the main public rooms, as is often seen in the older homes of our neighborhood. A covered porch on the front and to one side of the house remains as it was, enclosed with original hand placed granite facing first specified by Mr. Cocke and his wife to evoke the feeling of her mountain origins.

We learned from the Cockes' grandson Vann, that an enclosed large porch on the rear of the house with access to the living room, was the center of most of the Cocke family's socializing and entertaining. When we purchased the house that room's large floor-to-ceiling windows had long been painted shut, making it unbearably hot most afternoons, as it is south facing. In our basement we found screens fitting the old windows, which we assume had been alternated with the glazed panels, seasonally. We chose to replace the fixed original windows with workable new casements arranged in exact proportion to the old ones. Cocktails are most often served here, as they were "in the day".

As our children grew and we needed more space, we very deliberately obtained it by adding an outbuilding which will be described below, in order to maintain the house's original shape, appearance and "feel".

(2) THE MODERNIZED KITCHEN

The Cocke family employed a full-time cook, who used a narrow galley type kitchen, at the end of which was a small space for a table which we are told was most frequently occupied by Mr. Cocke's driver. The owners previous to us had fashioned a banquette with wall benches and chairs, to use as an informal eat-in for their family. One side of the long galley space had only 18' counter; one light bulb overhead served the entire space.

We widened the kitchen, moving the outside wall 3' to create a bay, solely to provide adequate space for a modern family. We chose to divide the small eat-in area, using half for a powder room and half for a hall lined with cabinets, leading to the butler's pantry. Formerly the Cockes had eliminated a large pantry space in order to install an elevator to help out as they grew older. The elevator still operates and is occasionally a godsend as we age. Our modest changes added pantry space back, in the form of the cabinets leading to the butler's pantry. We also extended the kitchen 6' toward the rear of the house, so that we could connect it directly to that big back sunroom, which we use as our breakfast room and for

entertaining—an “addition” of just 57 square feet. Formerly one had had to exit the kitchen onto a tiny back porch and then go back in the house to the sunroom.

(3) ORIGINAL MILLWORK, FIXTURES AND WORKING RADIATORS

All woodwork in the house is original save what was used in our renovation. The latter was custom milled to match. We added three interior doors, all of which were originals we found stored in our basement. All brass doorknobs and escutcheons are original; again, extras were found in the basement, black from years stored near a coal burning furnace. These we had professionally cleaned. The original and unusual “wrap around” front door lock and knob were repaired and restored by a group of retired Yale locksmiths in New England: a real coup, for we had been told the front door might have to be replaced because there were no new fixtures which it would accommodate. Oak floors are original. In the remodeled kitchen and back sunroom we matched them. Though there have been many modifications to the hot water radiator system, it still nicely heats the oldest part of our home. Most window panes and all window casements have been preserved, with storm windows used to avoid replacing them.

(4.) NEW OUTBUILDING CONSISTENT WITH MAIN HOUSE

At the time we planned our kitchen renovation we intended to improve the Cokes’ original garage, built small enough to accommodate only a 1920’s vehicle, for use as a studio. However our architect and builder both advised that the structure was too decayed for use and in fact was rotten at its foundations.

As we needed the studio, another bedroom, and some storage space—the original house has neither attic nor basement storage—we decided to build a new outbuilding which would provide all those things and most importantly, prevent the need to significantly alter the original house. The studio was designed by the fine architect John Bivens, responsible for some of Dilworth and Myers Park’s loveliest renovations. Mr. Bivens did a masterful job of tying the studio’s design to the house’s cedar shake bungalow style. Again, care was taken to use shingles, windows and roofing materials matching the original dwelling. The structure was placed exactly where the old garage had been and only extended a few feet further toward our back property line.

(5) GROUNDS ECHOING LANDSCAPE DESIGN BY MYERS PARK DEVELOPERS

A landscape “sketch” provided to Mr. Cocks by Myers Park developers, is printed in the 1986 book *Legacy: The Myers Park Story* by Mary Norton Kratt and Thomas W. Hanchett. Around the time of our renovation we consulted a landscape designer, who studied that original plan and attempted to create an echo of the original plan in our garden. Features such as a formal garden on the right facing side of

the house and a flower and shrub border along that side's property line, succeeded. Roses and irises occupy nearly the same spaces originally specified. In addition we have always grown quantities of daffodils, which were a favorite of Mary Cocke's though she grew them at her lake house. Replacing a crumbling and treacherous front slate sidewalk, we chose stone tied to the porch's facing. Likewise we used the same granite as appears on the house to create garden borders three years ago. Though we do not have the "drying" and "poultry" areas seen on the old sketch between the house and outbuilding, our modern equivalent of those utility areas is a small car park in the same location.