

The Thad A. Adams House



This report was written on July 6, 1987.

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Thad A. Adams House is located at 604 Clement Avenue in Charlotte, North Carolina.

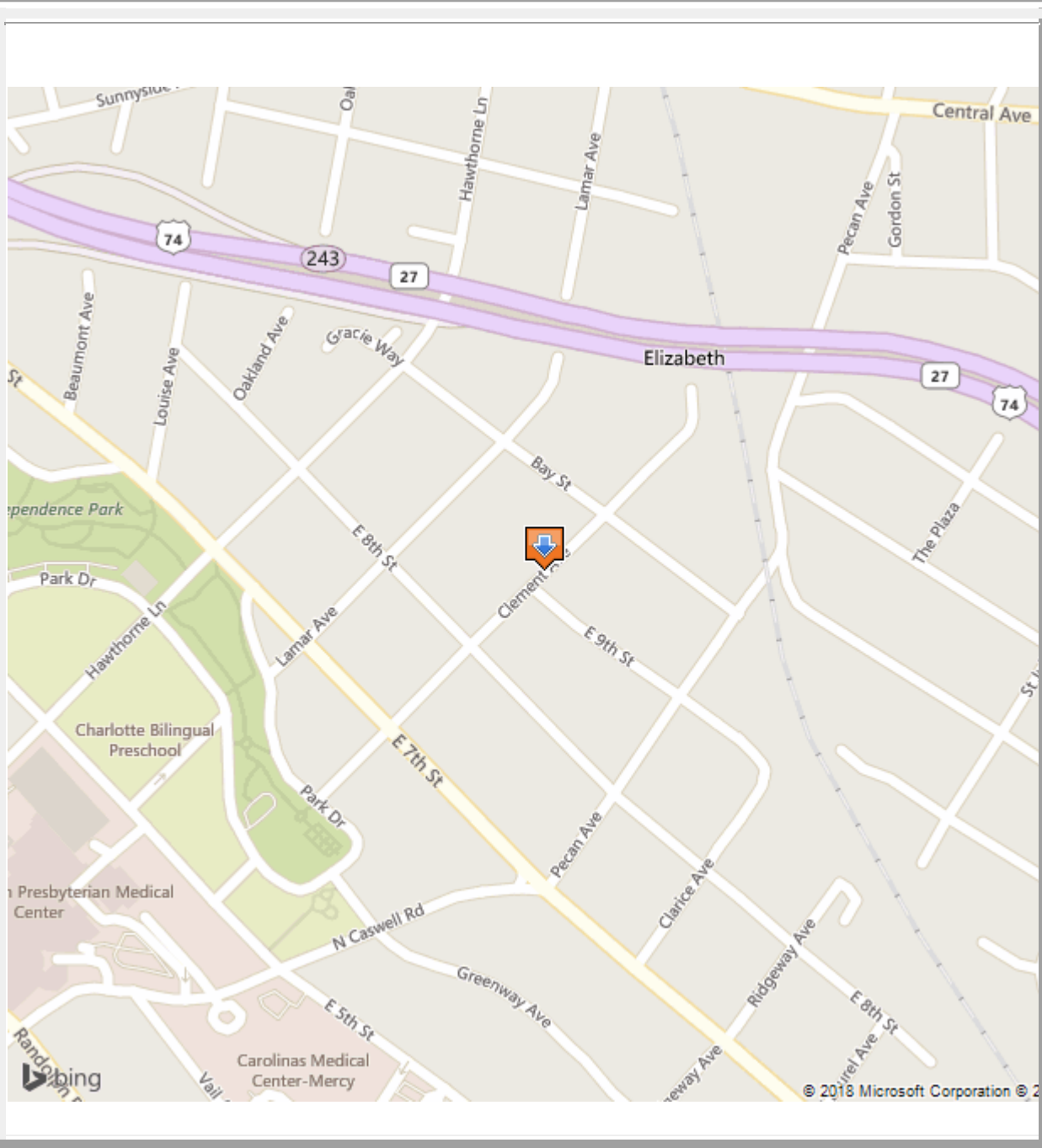
2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property: The owner of the property is:

Mr. John W. Hazel & Wife, Elizabeth P. Hazel
604 Clement Ave.
Charlotte, N.C., 28204

Telephone: 704/333-0676

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

4. A map depicting the location of the property: This report contains a map which depicts the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent reference to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg Deed Book 4327, Page 17. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 127-015-01.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. William H. Huffman, Ph.D.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Ph.D.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth-in N.C.G.S. 160A-399.4.:

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Thad A. Adams House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Thad A. Adams House, erected in 1908, was the home of Thaddeus Awasaw Adams (1877-1958), a prominent lawyer in Charlotte for nearly fifty years and a president of the Mecklenburg Bar Association; 2) the Thad A. Adams House is one the oldest surviving "period houses" in the Clement Avenue section of the Elizabeth neighborhood, one of Charlotte's earliest and most prestigious streetcar suburbs; and 3) the Thad A. Adams House is situated at an especially strategic location in terms of the Clement Avenue streetscape, which is the most intact historic streetscapes in this section of the Elizabeth neighborhood (the house is on a corner lot with huge oak trees).

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description by Dr. Dan L. Morrill which is included in this report demonstrates that the Thad A. Adams 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 which becomes "historic property." The current appraised value of the improvement is \$58,990. The current appraised value of the 111 by 205 foot lot is \$11,000. The total appraised value of the property is \$69,990. The property is zoned R6.

Date of Preparation of this Report: July 6, 1987

Prepared by:
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A Historical Sketch of the Thad A. Adams House

by Dr. William H. Huffman
May, 1985

The Thad A. Adams house was built in 1908 in the Elizabeth neighborhood, one of the first streetcar suburbs to the east of central Charlotte. Elizabeth is actually an amalgam of several development projects which began with the blocks around Elizabeth Avenue in 1897, and ended with Rosemont in the 1920's. 604 Clement was part of a seven-acre tract bought by prominent Charlotte attorney and North Carolina Supreme Court justice Heriot Clarkson, who built his own house at what is now Eighth Street and Clement Avenue. Clarkson's property was purchased in 1903 from the Oakhurst Land Co. (organized by financier and textile magnate B. D. Heath in 1900), which flanked him on the north, and from the Highland Park Company's Elizabeth Heights on the south (a 1904 development by the Highland Park Company, headed by Peter Marshall Brown).² The development of this suburban area was made possible by two things -- a fast-growing Charlotte economy and the advent of the electric streetcar. Because of its location as a central distribution point for New South industrialization which boomed from the 1880's to the 1920s in the Piedmont Carolinas, Charlotte experienced explosive growth during that period. The first electric streetcar or trolley line was installed by Edward Dilworth Latta in 1891 for his Dilworth subdivision, the city's first, and was subsequently expanded in all directions from the center of the city.³

Clarkson, whose property included parts of what is now Clement, Bay, Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Streets, began to subdivide his holdings, and a number of his lots were sold to other Charlotte attorneys. One of the first lots sold was to Thaddeus Awasaw Adams (1877-1958), who was a member of the bar, in 1908.⁴ A native of Nash County, N.C., Adams received his undergraduate degree from the University of North Carolina in 1902, and his law degree from the same institution in 1903. After he graduated, he traveled for the *Presbyterian Standard*, during which time he chose Charlotte as a place to live. His first job here was teaching in the Mecklenburg schools, and in 1906, he began a nearly fifty -year career in the practice of law in the city. A one-time president of the Mecklenburg Bar Association, for a time Adams also held law classes in his home at night.⁵ In July, 1908, Thad Adams bought what is now the northeastern corner of Clement and Ninth Street for a house lot, and in November of that same year he was wed to Emma Dawson Ford (1 876- 1963), a native of Charlotte County, Virginia.⁶ She had received her higher education at the Southern Female Institute in Petersburg, Virginia, and taught school in Virginia and eastern North Carolina for several years before her marriage to Thad Adams.⁷ Although there is no direct documentary evidence, it seems likely that the newlyweds moved into their new house shortly after their marriage.

Over the next five and a half decades, the Adamses lived, worked, played and raised their three children in the suburban house. Although it was relatively close to the center of town, in the early days the house was still out in the country. Attorney Adams went to work in the mornings

by catching the trolley that ran down Seventh Street. During the 1920's, the Adamses kept a cow, chickens and pigs, and Mrs. Adams, who was "quite a gardener," maintained a large grape arbor, fruit trees and other plantings in the back of the house. Thad Adams, Jr. recalls that he had to take the cow to a field at the very end of Seventh Street every day to graze. He also fondly remembers the sound of the rain falling on the tin roof over the sleeping rooms in the back of the house.⁸ Over the years, the neighborhood filled in around the Adams residence with many individually-designed and distinctive houses built by Charlotte's business and professional leaders. Although the architect of the Adams house is not known, it remains, one the earliest and best houses in that part of the Elizabeth neighborhood.

¹ Information compiled by Thomas Hanchett, Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission.

² Deed Book 179, p 62, 7 May 1903; Ibid., p. 104, 7 May 1903.

³ "Dilworth," brochure, Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission.

⁴ Deed Book 236, P. 464, 14 July, 1906; Ibid., p. 498.

⁵ *Charlotte Observer*, April 16, 1958, p. 16B.

⁶ Ibid. see note 4.

⁷ *Charlotte Observer*, February 7, 1963, p. 6A.

⁸ Interview with Thad A. Adams, Jr., Charlotte, N.C., 28 May 1985.

***Architectural Description Of The Thad A. Adams House
604 Clement Avenue Charlotte, North Carolina***

*Dr. Dan L. Morrill
Professor of History
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
July 6, 1987*

The Thad A. Adams House, a one and one-half story, German or drop-sided, frame dwelling with brick foundation, erected in 1908 for Thaddeus Awasaw Adams (1877-1958), a prominent lawyer, and for his wife, Emma Dawson Ford Adams (1876-1963), belongs to a broad and

diverse category of so-called "period houses" which were erected in the affluent suburbs of early twentieth-century North Carolina.¹ Situated on a corner parcel at Clement Avenue and East Ninth Street in a grid section of the Elizabeth neighborhood of Charlotte, the house, which sprawls across the width of its tree-shaded lot, is inspired in part by the decorative vocabulary of Colonial Revivalism, although less slavishly so than in the Colonial Revival style edifices built later in this century.² Colonial Revivalism, which emphasizes classical ornamentation, geometric massing and, at least in North Carolina, simplicity of detail in comparison with the more adventuresome specimens of this motif found in the major cities of the North and Midwest, was probably the most popular example of historic eclecticism which emerged in the late 1800's and early 1900's in the United States, including the South. This widespread acclaim was in no small part due to the fact that Colonial Revivalism provided compelling images which enabled wealthy suburbanites to satisfy their "search for order" and their desire to live in an "idyllic escape from the overcrowding, crime, and ethnic strife identified with the city."³

The most striking architectural detail of the exterior of the Thad A. Adams House, and the element which draws its primary inspiration from Colonial Revivalism, is a large central dormer, which surmounts the bell-cast gambrel roof -- a feature which gestures toward the Dutch Colonial style. Located at the front of the upstairs hallway, the dormer has returns and a handsome, elongated Palladian window, with fanlight and a wooden keystone at the apex of the arch. Small, flanking triangular dormers with fanlights serve to reinforce the essential symmetry of the front facade, as do the central entranceway with sidelights of diamond shaped leaded glass, the central pedimented projection of the shed roof atop the wraparound front porch (the right or south side of which has been enclosed), and the cement sidewalk and replacement cement steps which lead up to the front porch.⁴ The predominant window type is 1/1 sash; but two quarter circle windows, a design element reminiscent of the Victorian era, adorn each gambrel end of the house.

In keeping with the conservative tastes of North Carolina suburbanites of the early 1900's, the Thad A. Adams House is not ornate or lavish. Indeed, its ornamentation is quite restrained. The porch columns, which were initially connected by a balustrade, belong to the Doric Order; and the window frames, cornerboards, frieze, fascia, and soffit are all very plain.⁵ One encounters similar decorative restraint upon entering the house. Except for a mantel with egg and dart moulding in the front right room, window seats in the front right room and in the original downstairs bedroom, a staircase with a modest but pleasant Colonial Revival balustrade, rising in a single run of nineteen steps, an arched passageway into the downstairs center hall, and, especially, the dining room, which contains wainscoting with a plate slot, the remnants of a china closet, and an exquisite mantel with overmantel, mirror, and a hearth composed of glazed green tile, the Thad A. Adams House has interior features, such as crown mouldings and baseboards, which are generally quite meager.

The dirt partial basement has a coal storage area which is no longer used (the outside coal chute door is on the right gambrel end of the house); a pit for the original furnace; a water closet, no doubt intended for servants; and a series of trenches filled with sand. The current owner surmises that these trenches were once used as components of a root cellar. No original outbuildings survive. A building which is used for raising birds was constructed in the back yard

in 1980 by the current owner.⁶ Substantial ground disturbance has occurred on the site over the years, thereby virtually eliminating the potential archeological significance of the property.

The Thad A. Adams House has experienced substantial alterations over the years. A one-story projection extends from the rear of the left gambrel end; the wraparound portion of the front porch has been enclosed; the front porch balustrade and the original steps leading to the front porch no longer exist; a center metal balustrade has been added to the front steps; and major changes have occurred at the rear of the house, when apartments were added, most probably in the 1930's. Specifically, the rear porch was enclosed, and the rear portion of the roof was raised to permit the addition of several rooms. On balance, however, the Thad A. Adams House retains its essential integrity and makes an important contribution to the historic ambiance of the Clement Avenue streetscape.⁷

¹ For a detailed analysis of the architecture of North Carolina early twentieth century suburbs, see Catherine W. Bishir and Lawrence S. Early, *Early Twentieth-Century Suburbs in North Carolina: Essays on History, Architecture and Planning* (Raleigh: Archeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1985), hereinafter cited as *Suburbs*. For an explanation of the term "period house", see John Poppeliers, S. Allen Chambers, and Nancy B. Schwartz, "What Style Is It? Part Four." *Historic Preservation* (January-March, 1977), pp. 14-23. Thaddeus Awasaw Adams was known locally as "Thad A. Adams", hence the name which this report assigns to the house. All directions in this manuscript, such as "right side" or "left side", take as their reference point the front of the house as one faces it from the front sidewalk.

² The Colonial Revival style arose in the 1880's and is attributed to the architectural firm McKim, Mead and White (Charles Follen McKim, W. R. Mead, Stanford White). For additional information, see Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1969), pp.159-165. In Charlotte, the Colonial Revival style, called initially the "true classical style", was introduced in 1894, by Charles Christian Hook (1869-1938), the first architect who resided in Charlotte throughout his career. *Charlotte Observer*, September 19, 1894. This writer believes that C. C. Hook might well have been the architect for the Thad A. Adams House, but no direct evidence has been found to prove this belief. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission has substantial information on the architecture and history of the Elizabeth neighborhood. They include: Thomas W. Hanchett, "Charlotte And Its Neighborhoods. The Growth of a New South City, 1850-1930" (An unpublished manuscript in the files of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission), Chapter 6. Thomas W. Hanchett, "Charlotte And Its Neighborhoods. The Growth of a New South City" (A draft copy of an unpublished manuscript in the files of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission), Chapter 6. "Elizabeth. The New South Neighborhoods" (Charlotte: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1985).

"Historic Walking Tour Elizabeth" (Charlotte: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, 1986).

³ Bishir, "Introduction", *Suburbs*. David R. Goldfield, "North Carolina's Early Twentieth-Century Suburbs and the Urbanizing South", *Suburbs*, p. 9. Margaret Supplee Smith, "The American Idyll in North Carolina's First Suburbs: Landscape and Architecture", *Suburbs*, p. 23.

⁴ Interview of John W. Hazel by Dr. Dan L. Morrill (July 2, 1987), hereinafter cited as Interview.

⁵ Interview.

⁶ Interview.

⁷ The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission has recently secured the designation of two houses as "historic property" which are across Clement Avenue from the Thad A. Adams House. They are the Walter L. Alexander House and the John Baxter Alexander House. For detailed histories of these houses, see the appropriate Survey and Research Reports which the Commission has deposited in the Carolinas Room of the Main Branch of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library.