

THE CHARLES AND LAURA ALEXANDER HOUSE



This report was written on 29 June 1990

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Charles and Laura Alexander House is located at 203 Church Street in Huntersville, North Carolina.

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

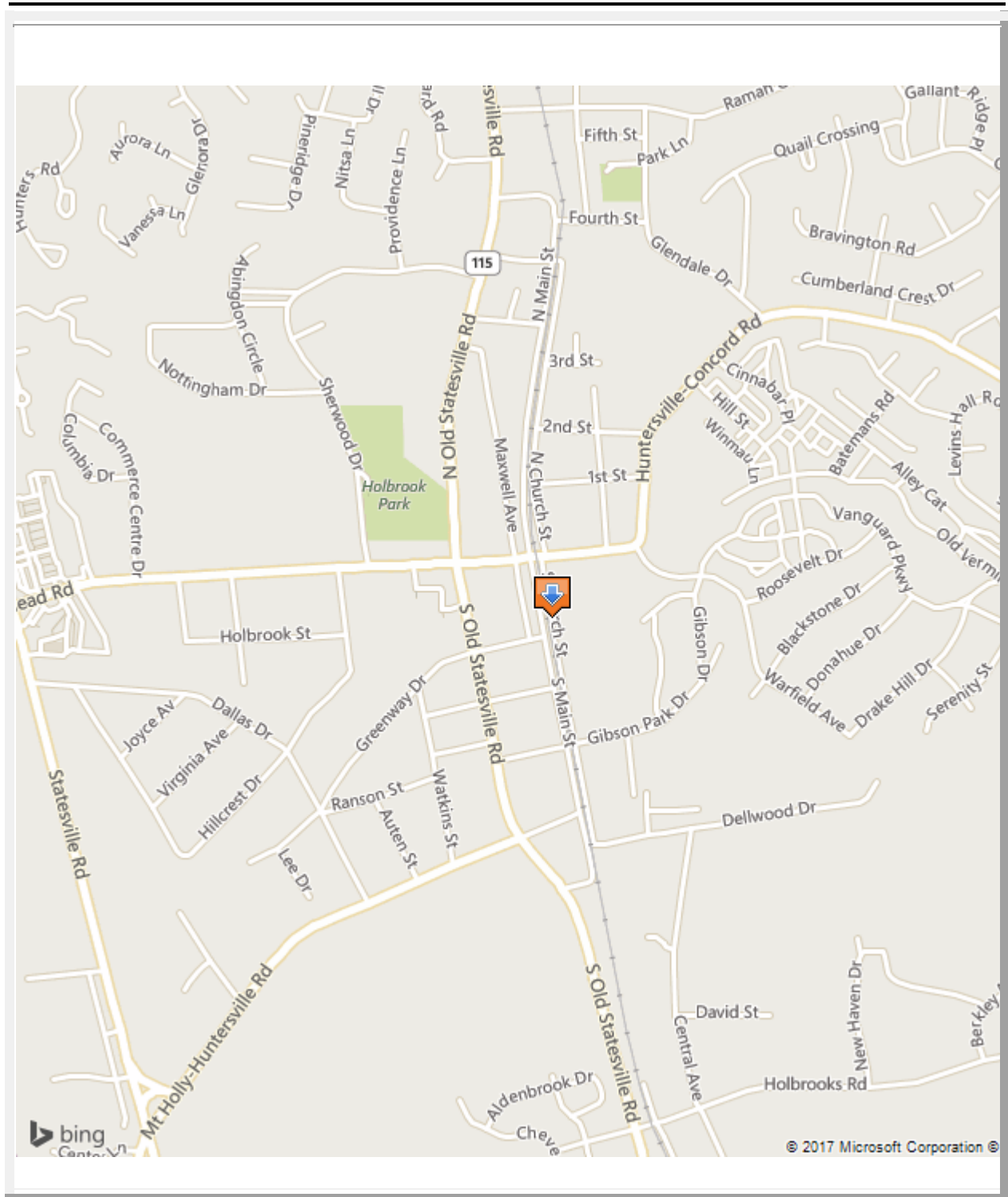
Marion C. and Mary Jane Sparrow
203 Church Street
Huntersville, North Carolina 28078

Telephone: (704) 875-2610

Tax Parcel Number: 019-061-05

3. Representative photographs of the property: This report contains representative photographs of the property by Ms. Nora M. Black.

4. A map depicting the location of the property: This report contains maps which depict the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to this property is listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 3268 at page 179. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 019-061-05.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Ms. Paula Stathakis and Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Ms. Nora M. Black.

8. Documentation of how and in what ways the property meets 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 Commission judges that the property known as the Charles and Laura Alexander House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

- 1) the Charles and Laura Alexander House was constructed ca. 1880, during a period of factory growth in Huntersville;
- 2) J. N. Hunter, an early owner of the property, served as Postmaster ca. 1880;
- 3) C.S. and S.W. Davis, 1930's owners of the property, were important merchants and operated a cotton gin in the Huntersville community;
- 4) the Charles and Laura Alexander house is an excellent example of an in-town house in a largely farming community;
- 5) the Charles and Laura Alexander House is architecturally significant as an outstanding example of the two-story, extended I-house of the National Folk House period;
- 6) the interior of the Charles and Laura Alexander House retains much of the early woodwork including mantels, flooring and some board ceilings;
- 7) the exterior of the house is enriched with Folk Victorian details; and
- 8) the location of the Charles and Laura Alexander House on an historic rail corridor in Huntersville helps document the economic growth of the town.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship), materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description by Ms. Nora M. Black, which is included in this report, demonstrates that the Charles and Laura Alexander 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 a designated "historic landmark." The current appraised value of the improvements is \$43,320. The current appraised value of the 0.848 of an acre is \$10,170. The total appraised value of the property is \$53,490. The property is zoned RL.

Date of Preparation of this Report: 29 June 1990

Prepared by:

Dr. Dan L. Morrill

in conjunction with

Ms. Nora M. Black

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission

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History Of The Charles and Laura Alexander House

by

Paula Stathakis

Dr. Dan L. Morrill

June 28, 1990

The Charles and Laura Alexander House is situated in Huntersville, a cotton mill and farm support community which emerged in post-bellum Mecklenburg County beside the A.T. & O. Railroad (now Norfolk Southern) line from Charlotte to Statesville. The earliest record of the property on which the Charles and Laura Alexander House is located shows that it originally belonged to the Hunter family. J. N. Hunter and J. H. Hunter sold the property to J. F. Grady for \$300 in 1884.¹ Grady held the property for six years and sold it to Charles Alexander.² Charles and his wife, Laura, were long-time residents of the house, and passed the property on to Margaret L. Patterson.³ The property was returned to the children of Charles Alexander after Margaret Patterson's death in 1925. According to her will, Miss Patterson left the house, furniture and lot in Huntersville, which adjoined the manse of Huntersville Presbyterian Church, to her nieces, Mrs. Bessie Alexander Grier, and Miss Mary Alexander.⁴ By this time, the former Alexander children were adults who chose not to keep the property. Bessie Alexander Grier had married Reverend Grier, minister at Ramah Presbyterian Church and Huntersville Presbyterian Church, and probably had no need for an additional household.⁵

Bessie and Mary sold the house in 1925 to W. W. and Minnie Lee Brown. ⁶ The Browns kept the property until 1932, when they sold it to C. S. Davis, S. W. Davis, and Nannie J. Davis.⁷ The Davis brothers held an important position in the

Huntersville community and its environs. The C. S. and S. W. Davis General Store, situated in nearby Croft, supplied area farmers with dry goods and other supplies. The Davis family sold the house to I. I Earnhardt and Annabelle Earnhardt.⁸ The Earnhardts, in turn, sold the property to Howard L. and Ellen Rodgers in 1944.⁹ The Sparrows, the current owners, purchased the property from the Rodgers in 1971.¹⁰

The Charles and Laura Alexander House was built during a period of substantial growth in Huntersville. The town expanded in the late nineteenth century because of its strategic location on the railroad. Also, Huntersville participated in the cotton mill campaign which gripped the Piedmont section of the two Carolinas in the late 1800's. Accordingly, the Anchor Mills, a large enterprise, opened in Huntersville in the 1890's.¹¹ The mainstay of Huntersville's economy, however, were the owners of the modest farms that surrounded the town. The census agriculture schedule in 1880 for J. N. Hunter indicates that he was a typical small farmer in the Huntersville community. He owned thirty tilled acres and two unimproved acres. He employed no tenant farmers or sharecroppers. His harvest for 1879 was one acre of Indian corn yielding twenty bushels, two acres of wheat yielding nine bushels, and fifteen acres of cotton yielding six bales. Hunter also produced ten bushels each of Irish potatoes and sweet potatoes. Most noteworthy in his agricultural pursuits was the dedication of the majority of his land to cotton, a common practice for small farmers in the South during this period. It is interesting that Hunter did not employ tenant farmers or sharecroppers to assist with cotton, a labor intensive crop. Few of Hunter's neighbors in the Dewese township, which encompasses Huntersville and its environs, employed tenant farmers or sharecroppers in 1880.¹²

Of all the early owners of the property, the most is known about J. N. Hunter, whose commercial activities were at least episodically detailed in census records. In addition to farming, Hunter also served as postmaster according to the 1880 manuscript census of the population. Charles Alexander, a later resident of the property, was described in the 1890 census as a farmer; however, his agricultural record is unavailable. The Record of Settlements from his estate suggests that tenants worked for him, but since Alexander owned other properties, it is not clear where these tenants lived and labored.¹³

¹ Register of Deeds, Mecklenburg County Courthouse, Deed Book 42, Page 103, November 21, 1884.

- ² Deed Book 70, Page 15, January 4, 1890.
- ³ Deed Book 605, Page 90, August 22, 1900.
- ⁴ Will Book R, Page 392, Item 5. Mecklenburg County Courthouse, office of the Clerk of Estates.
- ⁵ Mary Boolean Bradford, "Huntersville Sparrow Echoes a By-Gone Era" *Mecklenburg Gazette* n.d.
- ⁶ Deed Book 605, Page 119, October 29, 1925. W. W. Brown briefly had joint ownership of the property with J. H. and Edith Brown who sold their share in 1929, see Deed Book 794, Page 490, February 8, 1929.
- ⁷ Deed Book 817, Page 57, February 17, 1932.
- ⁸ Deed Book 973, Page 264, March 9, 1934.
- ⁹ Deed Book 1125, Page 215, July 12, 1944.
- ¹⁰ Deed Book 3268, Page 179, February 25, 1971.
- ¹¹ The Anchor Mill building still stands.
- ¹² 1880 Census Agriculture Schedule. Mecklenburg County.
- ¹³ Record of Settlements, Book 11, Page 234, Mecklenburg County Courthouse, Office of Clerk of Estates.

***Architectural Sketch: Charles and Laura Alexander House, 203 Church Street,
Huntersville, North Carolina 28078***

by
Ms. Nora M. Black

The Charles and Laura Alexander House is located on the east side of Church Street, north of the intersection with Cemetery Street and south of the intersection with Gibson Park, in the Town of Huntersville in northern Mecklenburg County. The entry

facade of the house faces west. One house and one outbuilding are still standing. The house is currently owned by Marion C. and Mary Jane Sparrow.

The house is an excellent example of the "in-town" version of the two-story, extended I-house with center hall that was fairly common in the post-railroad years between approximately 1850 to 1890. This period, often referred to as the National Folk House period, coincided with the spread of the railroad throughout the United States. The Charles and Laura Alexander House is enriched with Folk Victorian decoration on the front porch. On a street of simpler houses, it stands out to all passersby as a town home for cultured, relatively well-to-do people.

Construction of the Charles and Laura Alexander House was probably begun in the early 1880's. Over the years, the house evolved to meet the needs of the owners. Most of the structure has been covered with blue vinyl siding to reduce the owners' heating bill; however, the original material was not removed and remains in place under the new siding and trim. The original siding was painted, lapped horizontal boards - The original foundation consisted of brick piers; the piers have been infilled with brick.

The Alexander House has a compound, U-plan. The ground plan of the section of the house nearest the street is that of a side-gabled structure three units wide. Two gable-roofed, one story wings at the rear (east) of the house form the rest of the U-shape. The gable-roofed wings have small shed-roofed additions on the extreme east end; additionally, a rear porch (on the east facade) has a shed roof. The shed-roof porch fills in the interior of the U-shape.

The side-gabled (west or Church Street) section of the house is one unit deep by three units wide. The front (West) elevation of the house is divided into two units having symmetrical single windows and one unit with a door on each floor. The two upstairs 6/6 windows and door are original. On the first floor, the main entry and one 6/6 window are original; one window was replaced with a smaller, 2/2 window unit during remodeling. The gable ends each have two windows, a single, 6/6 window centered on each story; one window on the first floor of the north gable end has been replaced with a smaller, 2/2 window unit. The side-gabled section of the house has two masonry chimneys on the east facade exiting the house at the peak of each gable wing. This unusual arrangement allows each of the two chimneys to serve three rooms, one room upstairs and one downstairs in the side-gabled front section and one room in each gable wing.

The two one-story wings to the rear of the side-gabled section are two rooms deep by one room wide. The north wing has an exterior masonry chimney located on the east gable wall; the windows of this wing are 2/2 replacement units; one is a double window over the kitchen sink and the other is a single window. The south wing has a

pair of original 6/6 windows and one 2/2 replacement unit. Each of the small, symmetrical shed additions (on the east facade of each wing) has a 4-pane square window centered on the east wall.

One unit of the width in the interior of the house is devoted entirely to a hallway and enclosed stair from the front entry to the rear entry. A small half-bathroom has been added in the hallway near the rear of the house. The entrance appears to have changed little over the years with the exception of the addition of a white storm door. The entrance consists of a wooden enframing with full transom light and abbreviated side lights surrounding the four panel door. Beneath the sidelights are white wooden panels. The door itself is original with two glass panels and two raised wooden panels with moldings. The full transom light has been covered for energy conservation.

The two-tiered entry porch on the street (west) facade of the gable section of the house is its most distinctive feature. The porch has wooden flooring; it is lit by an unshielded bulb in a ceramic fixture. The first floor section has square white fluted aluminum columns resting on brick piers. The original second floor columns are made of wood with chamfered corners. The second floor balustrade is composed of fluted pieces of wood assembled in an asterisk pattern. Jig-saw cut detailing on the second floor porch, done in a floral pattern, adds to the Folk Victorian look of the basic I-house.

A shed-roofed porch runs along the east (rear) facade of the house; it is enclosed at the back but open at the ends. This rear porch shelters an unusual back door with decorative enframing and abbreviated sidelights (very similar to the front entry).

The western half of the gable roof of the I-house section is covered with black shingles. All other roofs are metal with the exception of the back porch which has brown shingles. The roofs have a low pitch which causes the wall to dominate the view of the facades. The boxed eaves have a moderate overhang but there are no moldings or decoration. There is a wide overhang on the gable ends.

The interior of the house has many original features; however, some remodeling has occurred. The ceilings in the south side of the first floor and the entire upstairs are of beaded board. The ceilings in the north side of the first floor have been lowered; the original board is above the suspended ceiling. There are six original fire surrounds in the Alexander House. Each surround exhibits a different look with various examples of raised, jig-saw cut panels. Early cabinets includes a large corner cupboard and a three-quarter height, two-door closet. The original wood floors have in some rooms been covered with carpet or hard flooring.

The year of construction of the only surviving outbuilding is unknown. It is possible that it was once used as a stable and later was converted to a garage/storage area.

The Charles and Laura Alexander House can provide important information about small town life in the early days of Mecklenburg County. Its presence on Church Street in Huntersville enriches the streetscape and reminds those who pause to admire the decorative "gingerbread" of a more peaceful, slower-paced era.