

The John Baxter Alexander House



This report was written on January 1, 1986

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the John Baxter Alexander House is located at 509 Clement Avenue, Charlotte, North Carolina.

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

Locus Inc.
1533 Lilac Road
Charlotte, N.C., 28209
Telephone: Unlisted

Daniel G. Coldfelter & Wife,
Elizabeth K. Bevan
Moore, Van Allen, Allen & Thigpen
3000 NCNB Plaza
Charlotte, NC 28280

Telephone: 704/331-1000

Steven E. Blackburn
509 Clement Ave, Unit # 1
Charlotte, N.C., 28204
Telephone: Unlisted

Thomas Garrett Ferguson
509 Clement Ave, Unit # 2
Charlotte, N.C., 28204

Telephone: 704/334-1135

Jeanette H. Day
509 Clement Ave, Unit # 3
Charlotte, N.C., 28204

Telephone: 704/333-8903

Lou Ann Smith
509 Clement Ave, Unit # 4
Charlotte, N.C., 28204

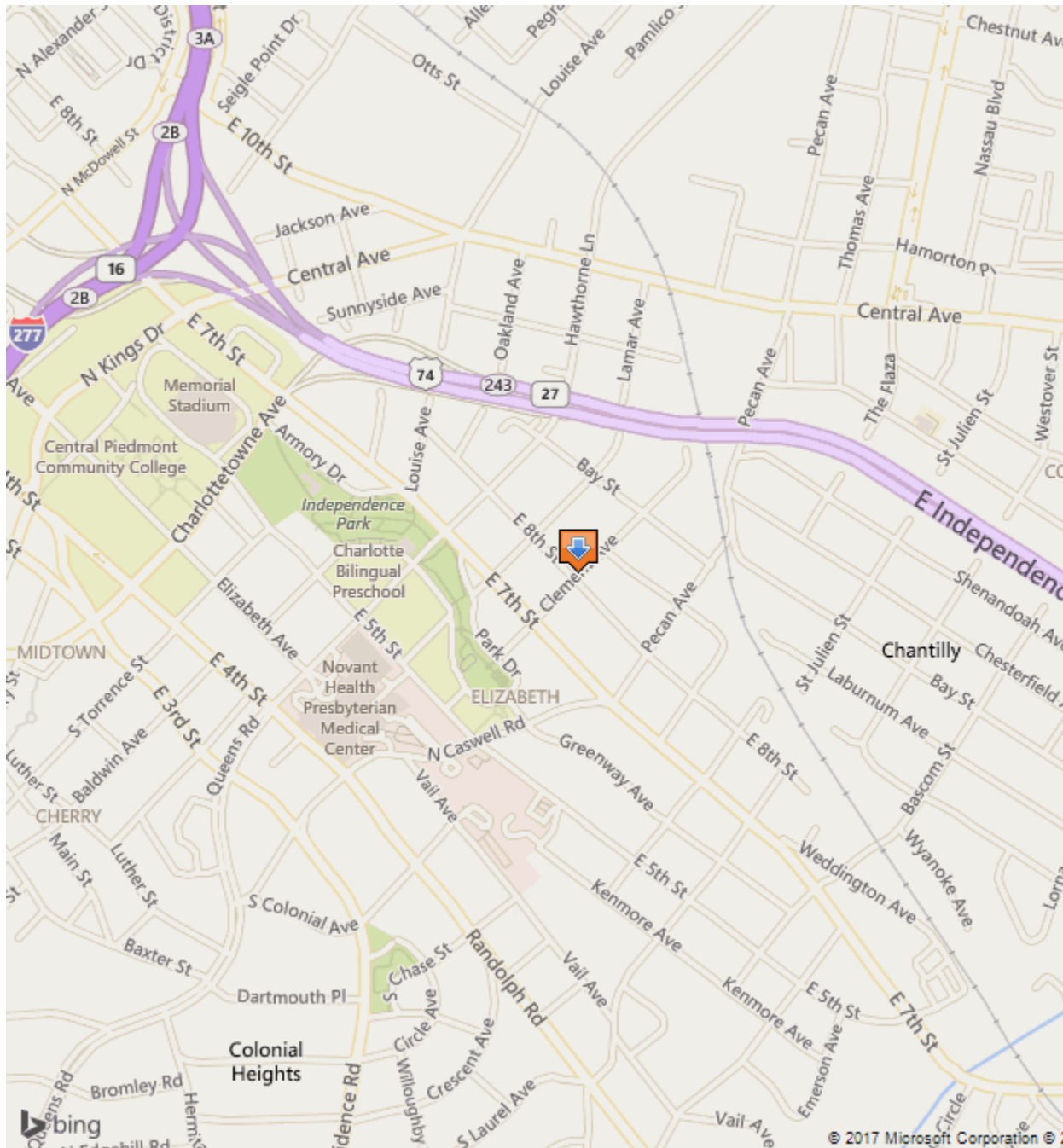
Telephone: 704/377-9099

Francis C. Davis & Joel Scott Davis
509 Clement Ave, Unit # 5
Charlotte, N.C., 28204

Telephone: Unlisted

3. Representative Photographs of the property: This report contains interior and exterior photographs of the property.

4. Maps depicting the location of the property: This report contains a map depicting the location of the property.



5. Current deed book references to the property: The most recent deed to the John B. Alexander House is listed Mecklenburg County Deed Books as follows:

Tax Parcel Number 127-013-22: Deed Book, 4229, Page 46.

Tax Parcel Number 127-013-23: Deed Book 4777, Page 544.

Tax Parcel Number 127-013-24: Deed Book 4909, Page 672

Tax Parcel Number 127-013-25: Deed Book 4987, Page 404.

Tax Parcel Number 127-013-26: Deed Book 4887, Page 374.

Tax Parcel Number 127-013-27: Deed Book 4947, Page 460.

Tax Parcel Number 127-013-28: Deed Book 4954, Page 863.

6. A brief historical description of the property: This report contains a historical sketch of the property prepared by Dorothy Frye.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

8. Documentation of why 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 history, architecture, and cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the John Baxter Alexander House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgement on the following considerations: 1) the house, erected in 1913, is among the most imposing older homes in the Elizabeth neighborhood of Charlotte, North Carolina; 2) the house is one of the finer local examples of a Bungalow style manison; 3) the house occupies a place of great significance in terms of the Clement Avenue streetscape; 4) the house ia part of what was once essentially a residential compound for members of the Alexander family; and 5) John Baxter Alexander, the original owner, was a prominent businessman in Charlotte.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that they attached architectural description by Dr. Dan L. Morrill demonstrates that the John Baxter Alexander house and grounds meet this criterion.

9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal: the Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automtic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes "historic property".

Tax Parcel Number 127-013-21:	\$8,500.
Tax Parcel Number 127-013-22:	\$8,500.
Tax Parcel Number 127-013-23:	\$8,500.
Tax Parcel Number 127-013-24:	\$57,280
Tax Parcel Number 127-013-25:	\$57,580.
Tax Parcel Number 127-013-26:	\$41,070.
Tax Parcel Number 127-013-27:	\$41,440.
Tax Parcel Number 127-013-28:	\$41,440.

All the land is zoned R6.

Date of Preparation of this Report: January 1, 1986

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill
 Cahrlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
 125 Caldwell St. Box D
 Charlotte, NC 28203

Telephone: 704-376-9115

Historical Overview

*by Dorothy Frye
 August 1984*

The John Baxter Alexander House, built in 1913, represents an elaborate variation of the bungalow style of architecture popular after the turn of the century and seen in modified forms throughout the Elizabeth neighborhood--Charlotte's second-oldest suburb. Situated at the corner of Clement Avenue and East Eighth Street, it commands, from its rounded verandah, a fine view of the wide tree-shaded intersection and the large, comfortable homes along the avenue. Despite numerous alterations since the 1940s (when it was converted into a rooming house), the John B. Alexander House has retained most of its basic structure. In recent years, the interior has been restored to much of its original state while retaining its use as a multi-unit dwelling. Purchased in January 1984 by Koch-Segal Corp., it has now been converted from apartments into condominiums. In September 1906, John Baxter Alexander purchased a large block ¹ in the Highland Park Development which was later to

become known as Elizabeth Heights. His brother, W. S. Alexander, already a successful banker and real estate developer, was one of the original group to form the Highland Park Company²; in 1913, the year his house was built, John B. Alexander was vice-president of that company as well as a salesman for his brother's other business, Southern Real Estate Loan and Trust Company³.

The lot--bordered by Lamar Avenue, East Eighth Street, Clement Avenue, and land belonging to Oakhurst Land Company--would become the site of three separate homes built for members of the Alexander family. The John B. Alexander house, completed in 1913, was followed by one next door at 523 Clement Avenue, built for his nephew, Walter L. Alexander (1915), and by a duplex built at the corner of Lamar Avenue and East Eighth Street for John's sister, Jennie Alexander⁴. The Sanborn Insurance Company maps for 1929 show additional buildings behind each of the three homes; in addition to a barn and stables on the J. B. and W. L. Alexander properties, each had a small house built as servants' quarters. Only the servants' house behind the W. L. Alexander house is still standing; it was built to match the design of the main house. There is a carriage house behind the Jennie Alexander house which is currently in use as an apartment. John Baxter Alexander was born March 27, 1867, the son of Dr. Elias Cook Alexander and Sarah Ann Coburn Stewart of Union County, North Carolina⁵. Dr. Alexander moved his family to Charlotte in the 1860s, and John, his brothers Walter S. and W. C., and his sister, Jennie, grew up in a house located at the corner of West Fifth and Pine Streets⁶. John attended Charlotte Military Academy and was a graduate of Davidson College. Around 1895, he married Mary Virginia Mott, the daughter of Henry Yeomans Mott and Mary Roxana Smith of Lincoln County, North Carolina. They had two children, John Mott Alexander and Mary Stuart Alexander⁷.

When John B. Alexander's daughter, Mary Stuart, married Dr. Edward Jones Wannamaker, Jr., a physician, in 1925, they lived with her parents so Mary could take care of her ailing mother. Dr. Wannamaker, who specialized in internal medicine, had an office in the Medical Building at Seventh and Tryon Streets⁸. Mrs. Alexander died in 1928 of spinal meningitis and the Wannamakers continued to live in the home until 1938 when John Alexander remarried, at the age of 71. His second wife, Flax LeGrand Caldwell, who was 54 years old at the time of the marriage, was the widow of Pearson Caldwell, who had died when their four children were quite young⁹.

After the Wannamakers moved to their own home, John and Flax Alexander began to use part of the house for rental apartments; their first tenants were Herbert R. Holman, a sales representative for the Machine Manufacturing Company, and his wife, May Hicks Holman. Herbert Holman was a native of Paragould, Arkansas, and had come to Charlotte from Atlanta in 1920. The Holmans remained in the house until 1944¹⁰. In 1942, two young nurses, Sarah Berryhill and Beulah Pruett, rented rooms in the

house, and after Beulah Pruett left, her apartment was taken by John F. Wentz, an electrician, and his wife, Lucy M. Wentz ¹¹ . When John B. Alexander died intestate in 1943, the property was inherited by his widow, Flax Alexander, and by his two children, Mary Stuart Wannamaker and James Mott Alexander ¹² .Mrs. Flax Alexander left Charlotte to live with one of her daughters, Mrs. Morgan Gilrey, in South Carolina. She remained there until her death around 1949 in a hospital in or near Conway, South Carolina ¹³ . In 1945 the house was sold to Pearl B. Vaughn, who operated it first as a convalescent home and then as a rooming house until about 1972 ¹⁴ .

Pearl Belle Vaughn was born in South Carolina in 1891 and apparently never married. When she died on January 10, 1974 in a Huntersville hospital, her only survivors were nephews Samuel Clyde Vaughn of California, and a niece, Beverly V. Shoygert of Maryland. In 1971, she had named City National Bank as Trustee of her estate, and stipulated in her will that half of her estate was to go to her nephew and the other half to the United Methodist Church in Charlotte ¹⁵ . During the residency and ownership of Pearl Vaughn, the condition of the house deteriorated considerably as more and more rooms were rented as furnished rooms. In 1975, Fred L. Thompson, manager of Carolina Golf Club, purchased the house from City National Bank ¹⁶ . The same year he sold the property to Lynn L. Wagner, but continued to live there ¹⁷ . In 1976, the Charlotte City Directory lists nine apartments in the house, but in 1978-79 there were only two, occupied by Fred Thompson and Lynn Wagner. In 1978, Fred Thompson re-purchased the house ¹⁸ and from that time until 1983, there were between five and seven apartments rented ¹⁹ . During this time, however, Fred Thompson took steps to restore much of the interior and exterior of the house to its original state. In January 1984, Fred Thompson sold the property to Koch-Segal Corp., which has now converted it into five condominium units ²⁰ .

Unit One, on the first floor, has 1,156 square feet of space and includes a living room, solarium, bedroom, bath, two fireplaces, and a kitchen-dining room. Unit Two, also on the first floor, consists of a living room, dining room, kitchen, bedroom, bath, and fireplace, with a total of about 1,219 square feet. This unit also has a basement area of 494 square feet. Unit Three, on the second floor, includes a living room, bedroom, two fireplaces, a combination kitchen-dining room, and a bath; total living space is about 1,080 square feet. The smaller Unit Four, also on the second floor, has about 937 square feet and contains two bedrooms, living room, kitchen-dining room, and bath. Unit Five, covering the entire third floor of the house, includes in 1,129 square feet of finished living space a common living-dining-kitchen area, an alcove, bath, and several spacious closets, plus 405 square feet of unfinished space. When Koch-Segal Corp. purchased the house, the plan was to build an extension on each side of the building which would also be made into condominium units. However, after

efforts were made by neighboring property owners to prevent this further development of the land space on Clement Avenue ²¹ . Koch-Segal finally agreed to sell all of the land on either side beyond six feet from the house. The purchaser of the land on East Eighth Street agreed not to build closer to Clement Street than the back of the J. B. Alexander house; the strip of land on the other side was purchased by Daniel Clodfelter ²² , who has bought the W. L. Alexander house next door. Through these efforts, the J. B. Alexander house is assured of its prominent position as a corner property, and its wide galleried porch will continue to command an uninhibited view of the other three corners of the intersection.

NOTES

¹ Block 17 on the Highland Park Company map. See Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds, Deed Book 190, page 188; Deed Book 216, page 16.

² Mecklenburg County Record of Corporations, Book A, page 235 (9 June 1891).

³ Charlotte City Directory, 1913.

⁴ Hanchett, Thomas W., "Charlotte Neighborhood Survey: An Architectural Inventory. The Elizabeth Neighborhood". Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, May 1984. (This document also includes a brief architectural description of the house.)

⁵ Mecklenburg County Certificates of Death, Book 63, page 121.

⁶ Genealogical records of John Baxter Alexander, from the papers of Mrs. E. J. (Mary Stuart Alexander) Wannamaker, Jr., given to the author by Mrs. Wannamaker in August 1984.

⁷ Ibid.; *Charlotte Observer*, 28 July 1943, page 12; 10 January 1928, Section 2, page 1.

⁸ Mrs. E. J. (Mary Stuart Alexander) Wannamaker, Jr., personal interview by Dorothy Frye, 21 August 1984.

⁹ Ibid.; *Charlotte Observer*, 16 October 1938, Section 2, page 6.

¹⁰ Charlotte City Directory, 1939; Death Certificates (1950), page 584; *Charlotte Observer*, 4 May 1950, page 17-A.

¹¹ Charlotte City Directories, 1942-1944.

¹² Mecklenburg County Clerk of Superior Court, Records of Administrators, Book 19, page 83 (30 July 1943).

¹³ Mrs. E. J. Wannamaker, Jr. (see note 8).

¹⁴ Deed Book 1148, page 406 (19 April 1945).

¹⁵ Death Certificates, 1974, page 48; *Charlotte Observer*, 10 January 1974; Will Book 74-E-98; Deed Book 5328, page 595 (22 November 1971).

¹⁶ Deed Book 3772, page 46 (7 July 1975); Charlotte City Directory, 1977.

¹⁷ Deed Book 3793, page 967 (2 October 1975).

¹⁸ Deed Book 4142, page 11 (13 December 1978).

¹⁹ Charlotte City Directories, 1977-1983.

²⁰ Deed Book 4777, page 548 (17 January 1984); "Declaration, Restrictions, and Covenants of the Alexander House Condominiums", Deed Book 4808, page 784; Amendments, Deed Book 4877, page 170.

²¹ Daniel C. Clodfelter, personal interview by Dorothy Frye, 21 August 1984.

²² Deed Book 4777, page 544 (18 January 1984).

Architectural Description

Dr. Dan L. Morrill

January 1986

The John Baxter Alexander House is a three bay wide by five bay deep, gable roofed, two and one-half story structure which stands on the northwestern quadrant of the intersection of Clement Avenue and East Eight Street in the Elizabeth neighborhood of Charlotte, North Carolina. Originally part of a family complex of three main buildings -- also including the Walter L. Alexander house and the Jennie Alexander House -- it has experienced a gradual diminution of its once-grand setting. A barn, stables, and a servants' house have been demolished; and much of the rear yard has been sold and developed. Presently, the sideyards have been divided into separate parcels (lot 22 and a portion of lot 23 depicted on the map included in this report); and they are available for development.

The John Baxter Alexander House itself has undergone several alterations since it was constructed in 1913, most notably in the late 1930s and in the 1940s, when it was converted into apartments and, later, into a convalescent home, and in 1984, when it was renovated more sympathetically into condominiums. The house now contains five residential units -- two on the first floor, two on the second floor, and one in the attic, each with its own bathroom and kitchen.

The John Baxter Alexander House (1913) and the adjacent Walter L. Alexander House (1915) are similar in form, detail, materials, massing, and setting. The brother and the son respectively of the principal developer of the Elizabeth neighborhood, the two Alexanders selected the Bungalow style as the dominant motif for their homes. Indeed, except for a different placement of chimneys, a less elaborate window treatment, and a stone-columned porch, all in the Walter L. Alexander House, the residences were essentially identical when built; and, happily, the exteriors of the houses are still very similar in appearance.

Exteriorly, the John Baxter Alexander House exhibits many of the essential qualities of the Bungalow style -- irregularly punctuated fenestration, especially the grouping of windows; shed dormers; broad eaves with brackets; large porches; in this instance an open verandah; case granite, in the foundation wall, in the two chimneys which penetrate the main gable roof, and in the base supports for the columns in the wraparound verandah.

On balance, however, the John Baxter Alexander House is a mixture of styles. The wraparound verandah is suggestive of the Queen Anne style; the Doric columns, incorporated in the verandah, and the front entrance, especially the flanking sidelights and the transom, are derived from Colonial Revivalism. The house even contains hints of Medieval motifs, with diamond shaped upper lights in many of the windows, decorated fascia, and a large bay on each side of the house.

The interior of the house has experienced many alterations over the years. For example, a wall has been constructed over the right front, and the pocket doors have been moved forward to create a separate residential unit on the right. The original kitchen on the right rear, and many of the original porches have been altered to accommodate additional bathrooms or rooms for other uses. The mantels in the condominium to the left of the front entrance are most probably not original. A doorway leading from the hallway to the second floor and toward the front of the house and toward the second floor platform porch, which is also bordered by a Colonial Revival balustrade, has been removed. The upper portion of the stairway leading to the attic has been enclosed, and the attic bears little resemblance to the original.

However, the interior of the John Baxter Alexander House retains its essential integrity. The elegant mahogany beamed ceiling in the central hallway and in a portion of the residential unit to the right of the front entrance remain, as do the impressive mahogany wainscoting and stairway balustrades. The former dining room, now the center room of the condominium to the right side of the first floor, contains an impressive built-in desk and cupboard. And, even more fundamentally, one still experiences the over-all spaciousness of the house.

In a sense, the most compelling argument for the architectural significance of the John Baxter Alexander House is basic not upon the design features of the house itself but upon the importance of the house to the overall streetscape of Clement Avenue. Thomas W. Hanchett, in the draft copy of his manuscript on the architectural history of pre-World War II Charlotte, writes, "The Walter L. Alexander house and its next-door neighbor the J. B. Alexander House are the grandest residences dating from the prestigious early years of Clement Avenue."