

THE WALTER L. ALEXANDER HOUSE



This report was written on November 5, 1986

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Walter L. Alexander House is located at 523 Clement Avenue, Charlotte, North Carolina.

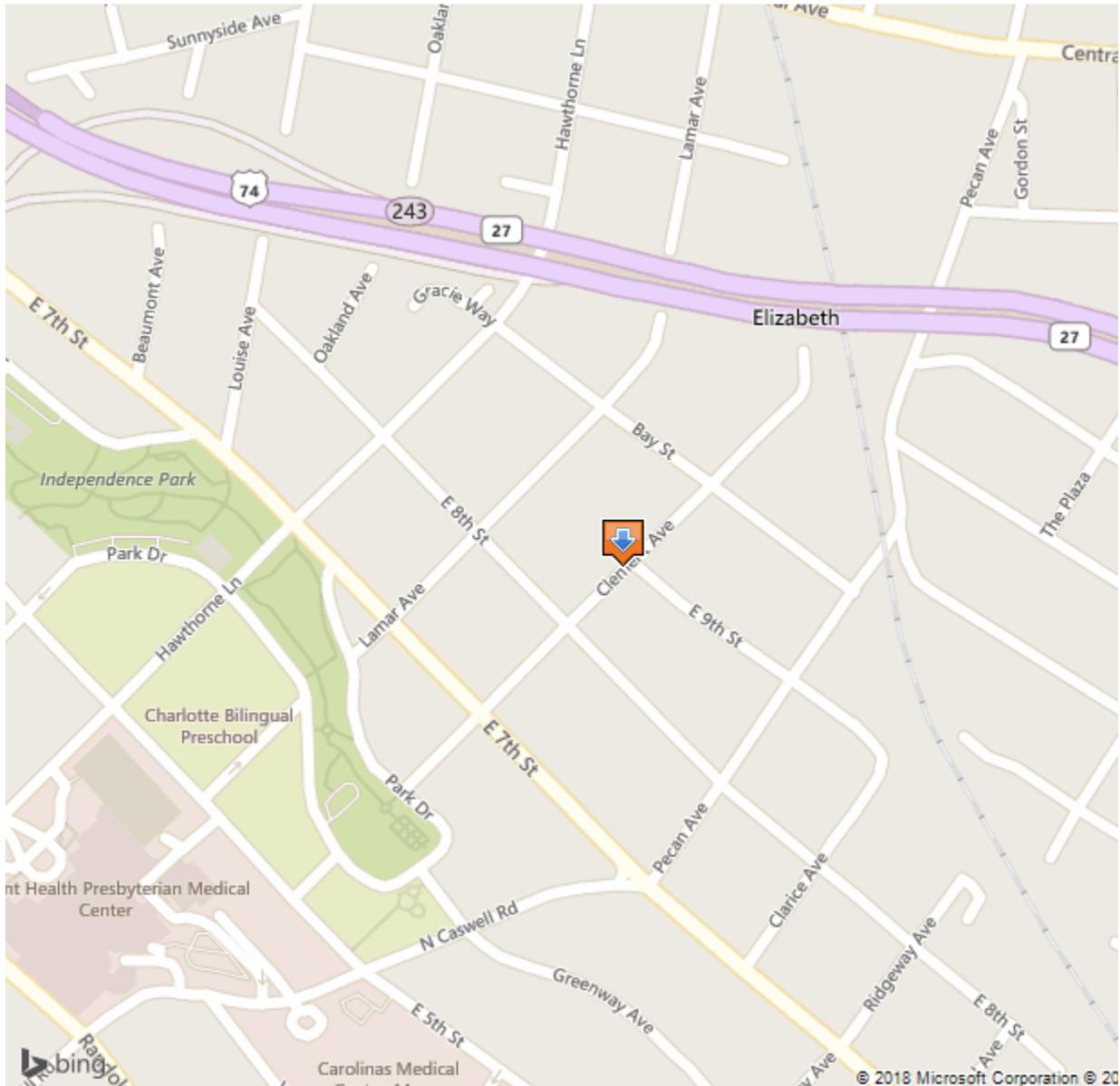
2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property: The owner of the property is:

Mr. Daniel G. Clodfelter & wife, Elizabeth K. Bevan
523 Clement Ave.
Charlotte, N.C., 28204

Telephone: 704/331-1000

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: Two parcels are included in the Walter L. Alexander House. They are:

Tax Parcel Number	Deed Book Reference
127-013-05	Book 4746 Page 287
127-013-23	Book 4777 Page 544

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

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Thomas W. Hanchett.

8. Documentation of 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 Walter L. Alexander House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Walter L. Alexander House, erected in 1915, is the grandest residence dating from the 1910's in the streetcar suburb of Elizabeth; 2) the Walter L. Alexander House has had a distinguished list of owners, including Walter L. Alexander, William C. Wilkinson, and Admiral Percy W. Foote; and 3) the Walter L. Alexander House is part of a cluster of homes (it, the John Baxter Alexander House, and the Jennie Alexander Duplex) which once formed a unique family complex in the Elizabeth neighborhood.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description included in this report demonstrates that the property known as the Walter L. 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 "historic property." The current appraised value of the improvement on Parcel 127-013-05 is \$77,980, for the .562 acres of land, \$13,000, making the total appraised value \$90,980. The parcel is zoned R6MF. The current appraised value of the .248 acres of land in Parcel 127-013-23 is \$8,500. The parcel is zoned R6.

Date of Preparation of this Report: November 5, 1986

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission

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Historical Overview

*by Dorothy Frye
August 1984*

The Walter L. Alexander house at 523 Clement Avenue in Charlotte, built in 1915 for the son of Charlotte banker and real estate developer W. S. Alexander, is a somewhat scaled-down but refined version of the John B. Alexander house next door, at 509 Clement Avenue. Like its neighbor, it is an elegant variation of the bungalow design, with a wide, wraparound front porch rounded at one end to form a pavilion seating area. The front door sidelights and transom are of heavy beveled glass placed in intricate variations of the diamond pattern; windows throughout the house--including the basement--repeat the theme. In use since the 1940s as an apartment house, it is now being reconverted to a single-family dwelling by its present owners, attorney Daniel Clodfelter and his wife, Elizabeth K. Bevan. In order to prevent overdevelopment of the Clement Avenue property, he has also purchased a strip of land 541 x 200 ft between his house and the J. B. Alexander house next door from Koch-Segal Corp., who had planned to build additional condominium units on that property. ¹ With the assistance of interior decorator Calvin Hefner, the Clodfelters are restoring the interior to its original state, modernizing only where restoration is not practicable. ²

In January 1915, Walter Lamar Alexander purchased a large lot, 246 x 76, x 246 x 115 ft, on which to build his home. ³ It was part of an entire block that had originally been purchased in 1906 from the Highland Park Company by Walter's uncle, J. B. Alexander. ⁴ It had changed ownership several times during the interim; its various owners included Carrie Maie and F. O. Landis, W. B. Huntington, contractor W. J. Crowell and his wife Julia, and Harriet E. and Richard D. Thomas. ⁵

Some kind of structure may have been built on the property before it was sold by John B. Alexander; City Water Department records show that a tap application for 523 Clement Avenue was submitted in 1908 by Vance Improvement Company and plumber T. C. Toomey. ⁶ However, construction of the present house must have begun early in 1915, since a contract drawn up in March of that year between the Alexanders states that Walter L. Alexander is the owner of "a certain lot adjoining the said lot of John B. Alexander, fronting 115 feet on Clement Avenue, upon which the said Walter L. Alexander is now building a residence." ⁷ In April 1915, Walter Alexander was able to complete the purchase of five additional lots facing Clement Avenue next to his homesite. ⁸ These five lots, which had formerly been part of the Oakhurst Land Company property ⁹, were owned by Frank R. McNinch, who had just lost his

bid for the Democratic nomination for Mayor of Charlotte to Colonel Thomas L. Kirkpatrick in Kirkpatrick in a close race. (McNinch ran in the next election and won, serving as Mayor from 1917 to 1920.)¹⁰ McNinch had purchased the lots from Carolina Realty Company five years earlier, but had not built on them. Although the home of Walter Alexander did not extend over into these lots, the two closest to his house remained vacant until recent years. John B. Alexander had originally invested in the lots with Walter, but then sold his half-interest to Walter in September 1915.¹¹

Walter Lamar Alexander was born in Charlotte in 1884, the son of Walter S. and Minnie Ramser Alexander. He married Ernestine Bridges of Wilmington, North Carolina, and they had two children, Preston Stewart and Ernestine Lamar.¹² Walter Alexander attended North Carolina A&M College (now N.C. State University) and graduated from Davidson College in 1904. At the time he built his home, he was working as a salesman for his father in the Southern Real Estate Loan and Trust Company.¹⁴ However, he left Charlotte around 1919 to live in Blowing Rock, North Carolina, where--as a successful land developer--he built the Mayview Manor Hotel, a prestigious resort.¹⁵ He died in 1925 of an apparent heart ailment at the age of 41, while in Charlotte for a visit.¹⁶

When Walter Alexander moved to Blowing Rock in 1919, he sold his home on Clement Avenue to William Cook Wilkinson, president of the Merchants and Farmers National Bank, and his wife, Rosalie Booker Wilkinson. From then until Mrs. Wilkinson's death in 1943, it was the Wilkinson family home.¹⁷ W. C. Wilkinson was born in Charlotte in 1866, the son of Thomas Jefferson Wilkinson of Tennessee and Laura Wilson of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. His father was a tailor by trade, and W. C. rose from "self-respecting poverty" to a position of wealth and prominence. At the age of 16, he took a job with the Merchants and Farmers National Bank and worked there for 48 years, becoming president of the bank by January 1919 and one of Charlotte's most prominent citizens. He is perhaps best known for his work as head of the State Highway Commission for the 6th District. Wilkinson Boulevard, a twenty-mile road built in 1926 between Charlotte and Gastonia, and considered one of the best highways of that period, is named for him. He was also president of the Charlotte Bonded Warehouse Company, of Elizabeth Mills, Inc., and of the Lowell Mills at Lowell, North Carolina, as well as director of the Mechanics Building and Loan Association.¹⁸

Rosalie Hamlett Booker Wilkinson, born in Martinsville, Virginia in 1868, was the daughter of John W. and Adelaide Hamlett Booker. She married W. C. Wilkinson in 1888, and they had five sons and two daughters: W. C. Jr., T. Harvey, Lawrence H., James W., George B., Laura (Mrs. W. R. Hopkins) and Mrs. Rosalie W. Haynes. After W. C. Wilkinson died in May 1930, his wife continued to live in the home, joined during the last few years of her life by two of her children, Mrs. Rosalie Haynes and George B. Wilkinson.²⁰ At her death in 1943, the property at 523 Clement Avenue was left to her four surviving children, Rosalie Haynes, and James W., George B., and Thomas H. Wilkinson.²¹ They house remained in their possession until November 1944, when it was sold to Mildred Myatt Aycock.²²

Richard Noble Aycock and his wife, Mildred Myatt, had come to Charlotte in 1942 when he became treasurer of Rulane Gas Company. He was born in 1886 in Johnson County, North Carolina, and had become a school teacher at age 17. In 1918 he became the first National Bank

Examiner in North Carolina, and lived in Raleigh. Later, he became vice-president of the First National Bank of Gastonia and business manager of Glenn Mills in Lincolnton, North Carolina. He and his wife had one daughter, Jane, and four sons, Richard N. Jr., William L., Everett, and Daniel Aycock.²³

In 1946, the Aycocks sold the house to Rear Admiral Percy W. Foote and his wife, Genevieve C. Foote.²⁴ Adm. Foote had retired in 1936 after a distinguished career in the U.S. Navy. Among his honors were the Order of the Crown, personally awarded to him by King Albert of Belgium in 1919, and the Distinguished Service Cross given him by President Woodrow Wilson. He also served as an aide to Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels from 1918 to 1921. After his retirement he served as Commissioner of the Pennsylvania Motor Police Force before moving to Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Adm. Foote was born at Roaring River, North Carolina in 1879, and was the son of Confederate Army Major James H. Foote, a founder of Wake Forest College.²⁵ Until Adm. Foote and his wife bought the home, it had remained a single-family residence. However, in 1947 three couples were living there in addition to the Footes: Cyril and Eloise Jones, Russell and Virginia Smith, and Dr. Julian Neel and his wife, Phoebe.²⁶

Dr. Neel was a resident physician at Charlotte Memorial Hospital. Between 1947 and 1958, a series of tenants are listed in the Charlotte City Directory at that address with Adm. and Mrs. Foote--sometimes with as many as five apartments being occupied.²⁷ Adm. Foote died in 1961, and his widow apparently went to Hawaii to live. She sold the house to Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Gibson and to two brothers, Arthur Pue, Jr. of Charlotte and Charles Leslie Pue of Hillsborough County, Florida.²⁸ The Gibsons apparently never lived in the house, and in 1963, when they sold their interest in the house to the Pue brothers, were living in Fulton County, Georgia.²⁹ Charles and Arthur Pue, Jr., were the sons of Arthur Pue, Sr. of Clarksville, Maryland. Their mother, Leslie Gray Pue, was living in Charlotte at the time of her death in 1976, but her burial was in Brunswick, Georgia. Of this family, only Arthur Pue, Jr. lived in the Alexander house during their ownership; he was salesman for Engineering Sales Associates.³⁰ In 1965 the house was sold to Francis R. Samaha, assistant supervisor for Ford Motor Company in Charlotte, and his wife, Martha.³¹ They lived in the house until 1969 when it was sold to David L. and Maria Ditroi Douglas. The Douglases were later divorced, and Maria Douglas was awarded the deed to the house as part of the settlement.³² Maria Ditroi Douglas was a native of Hungary, and two of her sisters, Miss Lili Ditroi and Mrs. Emil Mascovits, also settled in Charlotte.³³ Maria died in 1980, and in her will she named her eldest daughter, Nora Drye, as trustee of her estate. The property at 523 Clement Avenue remained in trust until 1983, when her children, Nora (Drye), David Paul, Michael Barry, and Maria Lili Douglas sold it to Daniel G. Clodfelter and his wife, Elizabeth K. Bevan.³⁵ Dan Clodfelter, an attorney with Moore, Van Allen and Allen, is the son of Billy G. Clodfelter of Thomasville, North Carolina, and Lorene Wells Clodfelter of Rocky Mount, North Carolina. His father's family were among the earliest settlers in the Thomasville area in the 1800s. Elizabeth K. Bevan, who works for First Union National Bank, is from Sumter, South Carolina, where her mother's family--the Dabbs--lived for many generations. Her father is from a Welsh family in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. The Clodfelters have one daughter, Julia. Dan Clodfelter, a member of the City-County Planning Commission, has served for about seven years on the Board of Directors of the

Elizabeth Community Association, which actively works for the preservation of the Elizabeth neighborhood.³⁶

NOTES

¹ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds, Deed Book 4777, Page 544 (18 January 1984).

² Daniel G. Clodfelter, personal interview by Dorothy Frye, 21 August 1984.

³ Deed Book 340, page 205 (23 January 1915).

⁴ Deed Book 216, page 16 (4 September 1906).

⁵ Deed Book 248, page 356 (23 November 1909); Deed Book 280, page 524 (22 December 1911); Deed Book 290, page 22 (8 February 1912); Deed Book 290, page 87 (6 March 1912).

⁶ Charlotte City Water Department, Tap Application No. 2336, 7 January 1908.

⁷ Deed Book 337, page 511 (27 March 1915).

⁸ Deed Book 337, page 510 (23 February 1915); Deed Book 334, page 596 (29 April 1915).

⁹ Deed Book 257, page 618 (5 April 1910); Deed Book 257, page 682 (5 April 1910).

¹⁰ *Charlotte Observer*, 14 April 1915, pp. 1, 6; Blythe, Legette, and Charles L. Brockman, *Hornets' Nest: The Story of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County*. (Charlotte: McNally of Charlotte, 1961), page 449.

¹¹ Deed Book 340, page 593 (17 September 1915).

¹² Mecklenburg County Record of Deaths, Book 23, page 227; *The Charlotte Observer*, 10 September 1925, page 9, and 11 September 1925, page 5. These two sources differ in the spelling of Walter L. Alexander's mother's name; it is either Ramser or Ramsey.

¹³ *Charlotte Observer*, *Ibid.*; *Alumni Catalog of Davidson College, 1837-1924*. (Charlotte: The Presbyterian Standard Publishing Co., 1924), page 156.

¹⁴ Charlotte City Directory, 1916.

¹⁵ *Charlotte Observer*, 10 September 1925, page 9.

- ¹⁶ Ibid.; Record of Deaths, Book 23, page 227.
- ¹⁷ Deed Book 399, page 637 (13 August 1919); Charlotte City Directories, 1920-1943.
- ¹⁸ *Charlotte Observer*, 12 May 1930, pp. 4, 5; Ibid., 5 December 1937, Section 3, page 9; North Carolina, special limited supplement. (The American Historical Society, Inc., 1927), page 9; Record of Deaths, Book 37, page 469.
- ¹⁹ *Charlotte Observer*, 12 May 1930, pp. 4, 5; Ibid., 12 March 1943, Section 2, pp. 1, 13.
- ²⁰ Charlotte City Directories, 1942-1944.
- ²¹ Mecklenburg County Clerk of Superior Court, Will Book V, page 189; Will Book 2, page 517.
- ²² Deed Book 1126, page 527 (1 November 1944).
- ²³ Charlotte City Directory 1945/46; Death Records, 1983, page 3559; *Charlotte Observer*, 25 December 1983, page 10-B.
- ²⁴ Deed Book 1221, page 311 (29 November 1946).
- ²⁵ *Charlotte Observer*, 24 June 1961, page 8-A; *The Heritage of Wilkes County*, Wilkes County Genealogical Society, Mrs. W. O. Absher, ed. (Winston-Salem: Hunter Publishing Co., c. 1982); Death Records, 1961, page 987.
- ²⁶ Charlotte City Directory, 1947.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 1947-1958.
- ²⁸ Deed Book 2279, page 591 (22 November 1961); Death Records, 1961, page 987.
- ²⁹ Deed Book 2463, page 3 (7 October 1963). The City Directories do not list Calvin and Charlotte Gibson as residents of 523 Clement; they lived at 1233 East Boulevard, Apt. 44, in 1963.
- ³⁰ Charlotte City Directory, 1965; *Charlotte Observer*, 22 November 1976, page 7-A; Estate File 77-E-107.
- ³¹ Deed Book 2678, page 572 (25 August 1965); Charlotte City Directory, 1965.
- ³² Deed Book 3113, page 590 (31 July 1969); Deed Book 3746, page 860 (4 April 1975).
- ³³ *Charlotte Observer*, 7 January 1980, page 4-C.

³⁴ Ibid.; Estate Files 80-E-84, 80-E-1622.

³⁵ Deed Book 4746, page 287 (3 November 1983).

³⁶ Daniel Clodfelter, *ibid.*; *Charlotte Observer*, 15 May 1982, page 16-A, and 1 November 1983, page 1-B.

Architectural Description

by Thomas W. Hanchett
July 1986

The Walter L. Alexander House is a large two and a half story residence whose broad roofs, wood shingle siding, and rustic stone trim show the architectural influence of the Bungalow style. Along with its near-twin., the J. B. Alexander residence next door, the Walter L. Alexander House ranks as the grandest residence dating from the 1910s in the streetcar suburb of Elizabeth. Today the exterior, interior, and large tree-shaded lot (complete with servants cottage) look much as they did after Walter L. Alexander moved in about 1915.

W. S. Alexander, chief developer of the Elizabeth neighborhood, conceived Clement Avenue as one of the suburb's grand streets, a broad boulevard that would connect Seventh Street to Central Avenue. The connection was never made, and today Clement Avenue remains a handsome, tree-shaded by-way, retaining the elegance which most of Charlotte's main streets have lost in the age of automobile traffic. The two dwellings which dominate the street were erected for members of the developer's family. John Baxter Alexander, W. S.'s brother, built the house at 509 Clement Avenue in 1913. Walter L. Alexander, W. S.'s son, was evidently so impressed by the house that he copied it for his own residence at 523 Clement Avenue two years later.

In massing, the Walter L. Alexander House is basically a gable-roofed, two-and-a-half story rectangle, enlivened by asymmetrically placed two-and-a-half-story gabled wings at the front (east) and north sides, and two hip-roofed rear wings. The roof is sheathed in asphalt shingles, and features front and rear gabled dormers, plus a small decorative front gable. Near the center of the main ridgeline is a small stone chimney, and a larger interior chimney rises at the south side of the house. Eaves extend far out beyond the walls of the house, and are supported by large brackets built of square timbers.

Exterior walls are covered in wood shingle siding and windows have wide, plain surrounds. Most are double-hung sash units with a single lower pane and multi-paned upper sash with the mullions arranged to create a series of interlocking diamonds. In the main front and side gables, windows are arranged in a tripartite form that represents a variation on the Palladian Window.

At the first story, a huge porch shelters the entire front of the house. Its wide-eaved roof is supported by square pillars of rough-hewn stone. The balustrade has flat wooden balusters. The porch wraps around the north side of the house, and then extends to form a porte cochere over the driveway. At the south side the porch extends beyond the edge of the house to form a semicircular nook, then wraps around the north facade connect with a one story enclosed sunporch, whose bay-windowed form echoes the porch curve. The rear of the house also has porches, at the first and the second story level. They are skillfully interwoven with the two rear wings, until all becomes one form.

Before venturing inside the residence, we will take a look at the yard and servants cottage. The Walter L. Alexander house sits on an oversize lot, a bit further back from the street than most Elizabeth residences. This siting is very important, because the surrounding greenery gives the house a spaciousness and rusticity that complements its rustic Bungalow architecture. Today the yard is plainly landscaped with grass and trees and a minimum of shrubbery, but probably once had carefully manicured gardens. At the rear of the lot is the servants house, one of the largest such structures of its era surviving in Charlotte. It is a full-sized one-and-a-half story Bungalow, as big and well detailed as many middle class dwellings of the day. It has a gabled roof whose bracketed eaves and gabled side dormers echo the main house. Also like the main dwelling, the cottage has wood shingle siding, double-hung windows with diamond-shaped upper panes and wide surrounds, and a broad front porch (with wood columns on brick piers, rather than stone). The cottage appears to contain three living units. It has a small, shed-roofed addition on the west side.

Returning to the main house, we will examine the interior. Its design matches the Bungalow exterior -- handsomely detailed throughout with high ceilings and wide, plain moldings and wainscoting, but with none of the intricate ornament characteristic of the earlier Victorian era. Despite the dwelling's years as rental property, little has changed. This is especially apparent in the main downstairs rooms and in the second-floor hallway, where the fine varnished woodwork survives unpainted. Even the early electric switched, brass plates with pushbuttons, remain in use throughout the house.

One enters through the front door (the door itself is not the original one) into a large corner-entry hall. Exterior windows here have beveled glass in their upper panes, said to be leaded with copper to best split the morning sun into rainbows. The space is dominated by a massive fireplace of red brick. To the right, a French door opens to the port-cochere. Waist-high paneled wainscoting rings the walls. The ceiling is criss-crossed by beams. The blond wood floor is trimmed by two strips of dark wood near the edge of the room, which form an ornamental design at each corner. At the rear of the entry hall is the grand stair, located near the exact center of the house. The stair features wainscoting, a curved banister with square balusters, and a chunky, square newel post. At the back of the stair area on the first floor are closets, an opening for what was once a dumb-waiter, and a door to a porch that is now an enclosed utility room.

The two other main first floor spaces-- the dining room and the library -- open off to the entry hall. To the left, through a large pocket door, is the dining room. Its wainscoting is nearly five feet high, broken at one side by a built-in china cabinet with beveled glass doors and vintage electric lighting. The ceiling has beams like those in the entry hall and the floor has an identical

ornamental border. Adjoining the dining room is the sun porch. It has unusual, sliding, double-hinged exterior windows, as well as an early screen door. Behind the dining room was the kitchen and pantry. This area has been completely rebuilt over the years with new walls and fixtures. Returning to the entry hall, we can move right and toward the rear of the house through a small pocket door into the library. It also has a beamed ceiling and ornamented floor. The room is dominated by an angled fireplace whose hooded mantel is supported by massive curved uprights. Wainscoting here is five feet high, and there is a built-in bookcase along the rear wall. Next to the bookcase is a door to the original downstairs bathroom, which retains its high tile wainscot and original fixtures.

On the second floor is a wainscoted central hallway with a window seat at either end. On each side of the hall is a four-room suite, consisting of a front bedroom, a shared bath, a back bedroom, and a sleeping porch. Each bedroom has a closet with a built-in bureau. The bedrooms also retain their brass sconces and ceiling fixtures. The north bathroom still has its original high tile wainscoting, pedestal sink, and unusually long tub, while the south bathroom has recently been remodeled. The north front bedroom was probably intended as the master bedroom, for it alone has a fireplace. The fireplace has a white tile hearth, cast iron coal grate, and a plainly designed mantle flanked by pilasters. Close inspection shows that the pilasters are surprisingly not solid, but rather are hinged to reveal several small cupboards inside.

From the second floor hallway, the stair rises to the small third floor, nestled under the roof. Unlike most big houses of the period in Charlotte, this space is fully finished, and in fact surpasses downstairs detailing in one room. Pilasters flank a central hallway. On the south side is a bedroom and closet, similar to those on the second floor. On the north side is a spectacular room with five foot high paneled wainscoting and a window seat along one wall. Its highlight is its parquet floor, which mixes light and dark woods in one main pattern and one border pattern. It is a showpiece of the woodworker's art, unexpectedly tucked away under the eaves.

The house also has a half basement. It is divided into several rooms, and may have once held a servant's apartment.