

The Berryhill House



This report was written on May 5, 1976

1. Name and location of the Property: The property known as the Berryhill House is located at 324 W. Ninth St., Charlotte, N.C.

2. Name, addresses, and telephone numbers of the present owners and occupants of the property:

The present owner of the property is: Berryhill Preservation, Inc.
c/o Mr. Gibson L. Smith
2500 Jefferson First Union Plaza
Charlotte, N.C. 28282

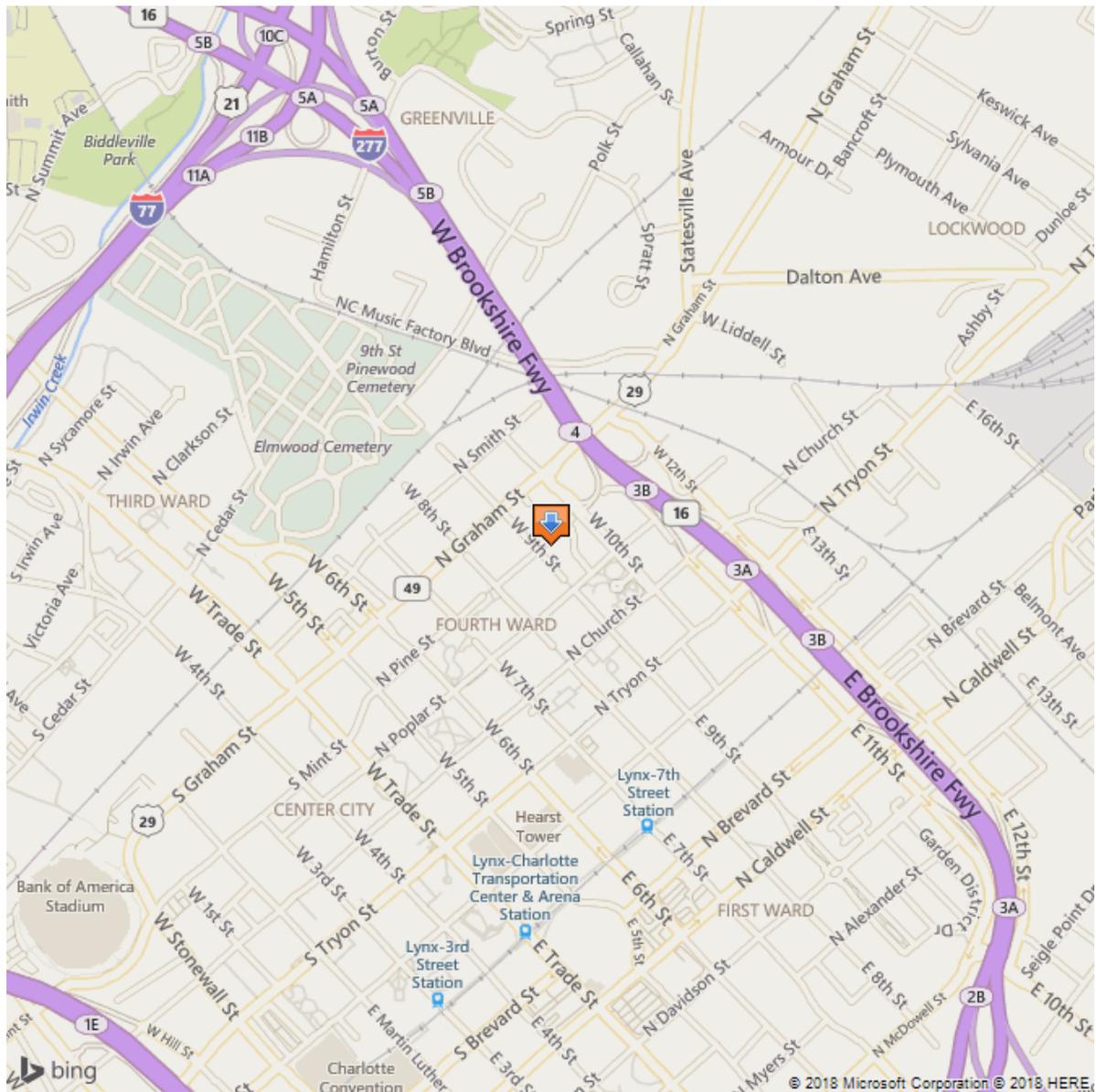
Telephone: 332-4525

The present occupant of the property is: Mr. David Roy Seymour
324 W. Ninth St.
Charlotte, N.C.

Telephone: 372-3672

3. Representative photographs of the property: Representative photographs of the property are included in this report.

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



5. Current Deed Book Reference To the Property: The most recent reference to this property is found in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 3822 at Page 462. The Parcel Number of the property is: 07803103. This report contains a Chain of Title from 1870 to the Present.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property:

The Berryhill House was erected in 1884 by John H. Newcomb. He and his brother, George E. Newcomb, had come to Charlotte in 1879. Brought from White Plains, NY, by Brown and Weddington, Inc., to establish a bellows factory, the Newcomb brothers supervised the construction of the plant on East Ninth St. along the western side of the railroad tracks just east of College St. From here blacksmith bellows were shipped by rail throughout the region. John Newcomb lived with his wife and two children in a house at the intersection of East Fifth and North Caldwell Sts. His wife, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Moseman of New York City, was Annie Augusta Newcomb. Commonly known as "Gussie" she had given birth to two children before coming to Charlotte. A son, George H. Newcomb, was born in 1869; and a daughter, Gussie Newcomb was born in 1871. They had no other children.

The Newcombs prospered in Charlotte. By 1884 John and his brother had acquired sole ownership of the bellows factory and had greatly expanded the scope of its operations. Now known as Newcomb Bros., it manufactured windows and sashes. Moreover, the brothers had entered the building construction business. Gussie Newcomb and her sister-law, Susie A. Newcomb, were also active in the local business community. One afternoon in 1881 they entered Miss Gray's Millinery Store at 24 W. Trade St. to learn that Miss Gray, who was from Baltimore Md., had to leave the city immediately because of a death in her family. Consequently she wanted to sell the business, A sale was negotiated that very day and Gussie and Susie opened S. and G. Newcomb's Millinery Store the next morning. It is reasonable to assume that the two ladies must have rushed to E. Ninth St. to obtain funds for the purchase. If so, John and George were wise to respond affirmatively. Gussie and Susie catered to the wealthier ladies of the community. Gussie would travel to New York City to acquire the finest material and ribbons. The making of the elaborate hats of that era, resplendent with ornamental trimming was done in the store by several milliners. To say that your hat came from Newcomb's was enough said. The store was a resounding success.

On February 16, 1884, Gussie and Susie Newcomb jointly purchased two vacant lots to the northeast of the intersection of N. Pine and W. Ninth Sts. The price was \$1400. This was expensive land for that day. No doubt the Newcomb families were ready to build homes which would reflect the status of their financial position in the community. The site was probably selected because it stood approximately midway between the manufacturing plant on E. Ninth St., and the millinery store on W. Trade St. On May 1, 1884, the families secured a loan of \$3600 for purposes of building the two houses. John's house stood on the corner lot. Both were occupied in the second half of 1884.

The early years of occupancy were for the most part uneventful. The routine of daily life proceeded normally. John and George were busy at Newcomb Bros. Gussie and Susie operated the store. From time to time Gussie would travel to New York City on buying trips.

John and his family were active in St. Peter's Episcopal Church. John was a mason and a member of the Royal Arcanum, a benevolent association in the town which met on the first and third Tuesdays of each month at City Hall. John celebrated his fortieth birthday on January 30, 1885. Gussie turned forty on September 13, 1890. The loan for constructing the houses was paid off on August 20, 1889.

In 1891 the stability which the Newcombs had known began to end. George and John sold the manufacturing plant. On August 8, 1891, common ownership of the two lots was terminated. Gussie now owned the corner lot; Susie owned the lot next door. Soon thereafter George and his family sold the house and lot next door and moved to Richmond, Va. John erected a bellows factory immediately behind his home. He was returning to the trade that he knew best. His son, George E. Newcomb, assisted his father in this new enterprise. But the greatest transformation in the life of the Newcombs came on July 27, 1892. John H. Newcomb died at the age of 47. The newspaper account of his funeral reveals that he had gained the respect and affection of his fellow citizens. "the funeral services over the remains of Mr. J. H. Newcomb," the *Charlotte Observer* reported, "were held last evening at 6 o'clock at his late residence by Rev. P. C. Reed. The house and yard were thronged with friends of the deceased, seldom there been a larger funeral in Charlotte. After reading several passages from scripture, Rev. Reed made a short talk, full of comfort to the bereaved, and of admonition to the living to 'be ye also ready.'" Gussie Newcomb carried on with the millinery store until 1898, when failing health forced her to sell it to Miss Minnie Shuart of Baltimore, Md.

Happiness was not unknown to the Newcomb in the 1890s. Gussie's son George E. Newcomb, operated the bellows factory to the rear of the house. In 1897 he married Mary E. Kendrick of Charlotte and established his residence on W. Fourth St. Shortly after her father's death, Gussie Newcomb married Earnest Wiley Berryhill, whose parents had resided for many years in the 300 block of N. Poplar St. In 1894 Gussie gave birth to her only child, J. Newcomb Berryhill. In 1898 Mr. Berryhill purchased the grocery store at 401 W. Ninth St., and moved his family into the house with his mother-in-law. Only then did the name "Berryhill" become directly associated with the house.

In 1899 misfortune struck the Newcombs once more. An infant child was born dead to George H. Newcomb and his wife. In 1905 George's wife died at the age of 34. In 1906 George lost one of his three sons, James K. Newcomb, to death at the age of 9. Not surprisingly, Mr. Newcomb's ability to cope with life was lessened by the events. He returned to live with his mother and his sister's family on W. Ninth St. He had to call upon his brother-in-law, S. W. Berryhill, to assist with the bellows factory. But life was never the same for George E. Newcomb. The bellows factory closed and was torn down in 1914. Shortly thereafter George left Charlotte. He died in 1925. He was survived by two sons, John and George, who resided in Detroit, Michigan.

Earnest Wiley Berryhill lived in the house until his death on February 7, 1931. For all these years he operated the store at 401 W. Ninth St. His wife, mother-in-law, and son had enormous respect for Mr. Berryhill. An honest and compassionate man, Mr. Berryhill had a heart of gold. His delivery wagon carried many a basket of groceries to the needy from

whom he expected no money. He knew how to make friends and keep them. The most compelling illustration of Mr. Berryhill's character and personality appears in an article by Mrs. Sam Presson in the *Charlotte Observer* of March 31, 1940.

The writer grow up with Mr. Berryhill, and shall never forget when as children we attended a Sunday school picnic at the Catawba River. I had the misfortune to slip and fall into the river where the water was over my head. When I came to the top, I yelled, "Save me! Save me!" Mr. Berryhill helped pull me out and after that I never saw him that he didn't throw up his hands and with a twinkle in his eye, say: "Save me! Save me!"

Mr. Berryhill's son, J. Newcomb Berryhill, worked along side his father in the grocery store. He married Miss Helenora Lanier on December 20, 1920. He moved out of the homeplace and established his residence on what is now N. Graham St. Amzi Rosman, a black man, also assisted Mr. Berryhill.

On February 9, 1931, the Berryhill House gave shelter to its second funeral. Earnest Wiley Berryhill had died two days before after an extended illness. Rev. W. W Peele, pastor of the First Methodist Church where Mr. Berryhill had been an active member, conducted the ceremonies. Mr. Berryhill had made his mark upon this community. In addition to the grocery business, he had served as a founder and director of the Citizens Savings Bank, an institution which specialized in loans to the so-called common man.

Annie Augusta Newcomb outlived her son-in-law. She had lived in the house for over 45 years. She had witnessed the death of her husband, her son, a daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren. Her brother-in-law, Henry L. Landridge, who had come to Charlotte with his wife to live in the Berryhill House had died in 1930. George and Susie Newcomb had died in Richmond, Va., some years earlier. One can imagine the serenity with which Mrs. Newcomb contemplated her own death. Ironically, she died on her 83rd birthday, September 13, 1933, Again, the funeral was hold in the house. At 4 o'clock on the afternoon of September 15, 1933, the ceremonies began. Rev. Edgar A.Dillard of the Tenth Ave. Presbyterian Church officiated.

Mrs. Newcomb's sister, Mary M. Landridge, died in 1934, leaving Gussie Newcomb Berryhill alone in the house. J. Newcomb Berryhill continued to run the grocery store across the street however. In 1940 Gussie suffered a stroke. Her son was forced to place his mother in a nursing home. Her departure marked the end of occupancy of the house by members of the family. It was now transformed into a four unit apartment house. Having sold the grocery business but not the building itself, Mr. Berryhill devoted the majority of his time to managing the apartment house in the old homeplace. In the early 1950s he occupied the house to the immediate rear of the grocery store as his residence. Gussie Newcomb Berryhill died on September 7, 1956, at the age of 84. The grocery store on W. Ninth St. closed the same year. J. Newcomb Berryhill and his wife moved from N. Pine St. to Mamolake Dr. in 1958. The Berryhill House, continuing to serve as a four-unit apartment, could not escape the overall decline experienced by Fourth Ward in the 1960s. Its eventual destruction seemed

certain. But on October 28, 1975, the Junior League of Charlotte purchased the house and made plans to renovate the structure. At this writing the renovation of the house is underway.

The Berryhill House promises to become a viable dwelling once more. But no future activity will overshadow the past events associated with the structure. Indeed, Elmwood Cemetery contains a number of graves which will stand as reminders of the joy and suffering of the family that built and occupied the Berryhill House.

John H. Newcomb (1845-1892)

Infant (1899)

Mary S. Newcomb (1871-1905)

James K. Newcomb (1897-1906)

George H. Newcomb (1869-1925)

Henry L. Landridge (1851-1930)

Earnest W. Berryhill (1865-1931)

Gussie A. Newcomb (1850-1933)

Mary M. Landridge (1855-1934)

Gussie N. Berryhill (1872-1956)

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains an architectural description prepared by Jack O. Boyte, A.I.A.

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

a. Historical and cultural significance: The historical and cultural significance of the property known as the Berryhill House rests upon three factors. First, it is one of the few structures which forms the domestic architecture of late nineteenth Charlotte that has not been destroyed. Admittedly, if Charlotte possessed a large number of Victorian structures, the Berryhill House would probably not be of outstanding architectural significance. Within the existing local context, however, the Berryhill House stands as a indispensable link in the architectural evolution of this community. Second, the Berryhill House possesses substantial cultural significance as a basic element in the overall ambiance of Fourth Ward. Third, the structure has associative value in that it reflects the lifestyle and values of a middle class Charlotte family of the late 1800's.

b. Suitability for preservation and restoration: The Berryhill House is currently being renovated. While not being returned to its original condition, the structure will become a viable dwelling once more.

c. Educational value: The Berryhill House will become one of the best known houses in Charlotte. It will have enormous educational value, both as an example of historic preservation and as reminder of the early appearance of Fourth Ward.

d. Cost of acquisition, restoration, maintenance or repair: The Commission has no intention of purchasing this property. It assumes that all costs associated with renovating and maintaining the structure will be paid by the owner or subsequent owners of the property.

e. Possibilities for adaptive or alternative use of the property: The Commission concurs with the present owner's intention to sell the property for use as a residence.

f. Appraised values: The current tax appraisal value of the structure is \$720.00. The tax appraisal value of the land is \$12,770.00 The Commission is aware that designation of the property would allow the owner to apply for a special tax classification.

g. the administrative and financial responsibility of any person or organization willing to underwrite all or a portion of such costs: As indicated earlier, the Commission has no intention of purchasing this property. Furthermore, the Commission assumes that all costs associated with the structure will be met by whatever party now owns or will subsequently own the property. Clearly, the present owner has demonstrated the capacity to meet the expenses associated with renovating the structure.

9. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria established for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places: The Commission Judges that the property known as the Berryhill House does meet the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places. Fundamental to the Commission's position is the following explanation of the nature of those criteria which has been provided by Dr. Larry Tise, State Historic Preservation Officer.

It is absolutely true that the National Register has undergone a significant change from its inception in 1966 to reflect a much broader preservationist philosophy. As long as there is an evolution of the meaning and use of the National Register criteria, there is likely to be a discussion of the merits of a broad or a restrictive approach to historic preservation.

With regard to the specific question of what meets National Register criteria, it is absolutely true that many properties meet the criteria today that would have been rejected in 1969 or even 1973. The criteria seem to operate much like the national Constitution in that different courts and different judges in different ages see different applications of the criteria.

(Letter of Dr. Larry E. Tise to Mr. James A. Stenhouse, May 3, 1976).

Also basic to the Commission's judgment is its knowledge of the fact that the National Register of Historic places functions to identify property of local and State historic significance. The Commission believes that the property known as the Berryhill House is of local historic significance and thereby meets the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places.

10. Documentation of why and in what ways the property is of historical significance to Charlotte-Mecklenburg: As noted earlier, the property known as the Berryhill House is of local historic importance for three essential reasons. First, it is architecturally significant as one of the few remaining examples of Victorian architecture in the City of Charlotte. "This building," Mr. Boyte writes, "is significant locally because it is very nearly alone in illustrating the once widespread Eclectic Victorian residential design in Charlotte." Second, it is significant to the overall ambiance of Fourth Ward. Mr. Boyte contends that "the work of various groups and individuals on the development of an environment of significance in Fourth Ward is greatly enhanced by the preservation of such structures as the Berryhill (or Newcomb) House" Third, it has associative value in that it reflects the middle class values and lifestyle of late nineteenth century Charlotte.

Bibliography

An Inventory of Older Buildings In Mecklenburg County And Charlotte For The Historic Properties Commission.

Interview with Mr. J. Newcomb Berryhill (April 1976).

Charlotte City Directory (1879, 1882, 1889, 1893-94, 1896-97, 1897-98, 1899-1900, 1902, 1903, 1907, 1910, 1914).

Records of the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office.

Sanborn Insurance Maps (1885, 1896, 1900, 1905, 1911, 1929).

Charlotte Observer (February 8, 1931).

Charlotte Observer (September 15, 1933).

Charlotte Observer (May 5, 1935).

Charlotte Observer (March 31, 1940).

Charlotte Observer (September 8, 1956).

Daily Charlotte Observer (July 27, 1892).

Date of Preparation of this report: May 5, 1976

Prepared by: Dan L. Morrill, Director
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
139 Middleton Dr.
Charlotte, N.C. 28207

Telephone: 332-2726

Chain of Title: 1870 to the Present

1. September 28, 1870 (Book 6, page 999).

Grantor: Robert F. Davidson & wife, Eliza B. Davidson
Grantee: Miss M. S. Alexander & Miss A. L. Alexander

2. February 16, 1884 (Book 36, Page 418).

Grantor: Mary Sophia Alexander & Alice L. Alexander
Grantee: Annie A. Newcomb & Susie A. Newcomb

3. May 1, 1884 (Book 37, Page 414).

Grantor: George E. Newcomb & wife, Susie A. Newcomb John H. Newcomb & wife, Annie A. Newcomb
Grantee: T. R. Robertson & the Mechanics Perpetual Building & Loan Association

4. August 8, 1891 (Book 81, Page 37).

Grantor: George S. Newcomb & wife, Susie A. Newcomb
Grantee: Mrs. Gussie Newcomb (wife of John H. Newcomb)

5. July 2, 1913 (Book 314, Page 180).

Grantor: Mrs. Gussie Newcomb (widow)
Grantee: Mrs. Gussie Newcomb, wife of B. W. Berryhill

6. June 29, 1923 (Book 498, Page 283).

Grantor: Mrs. Gussie Newcomb
Grantee: Mrs. Gussie N. Berryhill

7. March 24, 1949 (Book 1366, Page 327).

Grantor: Mrs. Gussie N. Berryhill (widow of E. W. Berryhill)

Grantee: J. N. Berryhill

8. March 22, 1961 (Book 222, Page 353).

Grantor: J. N. Berryhill

Grantee: J. N. Berryhill & wife, Leonora L. Berryhill)

9. October 28, 1975 (Book 2796, Page 798).

Grantor: J. N. Berryhill & wife, Lenora L. Berryhill

Grantee: The Junior League of Charlotte, Inc.

10. February 9, 1976 (Book 3822, Page 462).

Grantor: The Junior League of Charlotte, Inc.

Grantee: Berryhill Preservation, Inc.

An Architectural Description

by Jack O. Boyte, A. I. A.

During the decades immediately following the Civil War Charlotte experienced, along with much of the country, a period of rapid and chaotic growth. Larger concentration of people and the accelerating growth of industry involved new conditions and new experiences. This increasing variety of circumstances found expression in greater diversity of building than had been known in the American past. A romantic mood lingered over the entire scene. Mark Twain called this the "Gilded Age". Leading Architects drew inspiration from many sources for their exuberant new designs. Numerous new ideas were developed, usually with deference to a dominant theme such as Greek, Gothic, Tuscan, Egyptian, etc. Often they were combined in a single eclectic style known vaguely as 'Victorian'. From R. M. Hunt, H. H. Richardson, A. J. Davis, Stanford White, and other leading architects came trend setting designs. Their work was published regularly and provided regional inspiration for widespread use of these new ideas.

In the carefully developed grid street pattern of Fourth Ward, well-to-do citizens purchased newly available lots, and built an astonishing variety of 'Victorian' houses. On the corner of West Ninth and Poplar Streets the brothers John and George Newcomb bought side-by-side

lots and built identical houses in 1883-84. Today the house of John Newcomb remains on the corner, a well-preserved and remarkable example of Eclectic Victorian Architecture.

Basically the house is a two story square form with a classic center hall plan. Drawing strongly from the work of Charles Eastlake, the exterior ornamentation is highly elaborate and reflects the obvious fact that the Newcomb brothers operated a planing mill a few blocks from the house where Ninth Street met the North Carolina Railroad.

Variations in the form are achieved with a wide covered front verandah wrapping around each side of the house, a projecting front tower with a peaked roof added to the house in later years, and a low roofed kitchen wing on the left rear of the house. There are later additions at the rear which have no historical significance.

The house rests on uniformly spaced high, red brick piers on the exterior perimeter and at regular intervals under the interior first floor framing. These interior supporting piers were whitewashed, probably at an early date since they were exposed to view. Where the interior chimney foundations occur under the house arched brick alcoves were built into these masses to minimize their bulk. The foundation wall is now solid, having been bricked in at a later date.

Starting with a sill band with a molded drip, the exterior surfaces are horizontal square edged, narrow, lapped, siding rising two stories to a broad molded frieze. At close intervals on the frieze, heavy carved brackets form a console supporting a wide overhang and a molded fascia which conceals a built-in gutter. The main roof surface was originally low sloped tin not visible from the ground. At the front and extending half way down each side, the covered verandah creates the dominant exterior feature. Set high above the ground, the verandah has a narrow wood strip floor, beaded ceiling, and a low tin covered roof supported by extraordinary columns and brackets. Fabricated of solid eight inch square posts, the columns rest on elaborate carved pedestals rising to rail height. Above this, chamfered edges have turned half round members with knob ends applied to each edge. At eye level there are molded capitals creating imposts for elaborate carved brackets which flare to the sides and front where they support a moderate overhang. Centered on the front an offset verandah section emphasizes the main entrance with even heavier bracketing.

The porch railing consists of closely spaced turned balusters-- much like table legs - capped by a relatively simple rounded hand rail, molded at each edge. At the center front on Ninth Street a wide stair, originally wood and now concrete, rises five feet to the extended verandah platform. Above this platform the verandah roof is raised several feet and forms, at the house wall, a base for the center projecting tower bay. With four high narrow windows across the front and a square peaked roof this tower gives the front a strong Italianate flavor borrowed from Etruscan Villa designs. The tower roof rises from a pronounced overhang resting on small scroll brackets. The high tower surfaces are covered with small square edge slate tiles and terminate in a turned finial at the peak.

Windows are all full length double hung units rising from a sill near the floor to a height of nearly eight feet. Sash are glazed with two large lights and one center vertical muntin,

conforming to the typical vertical lines of the period. Exterior window trim features pedimented heads with simple carved inserts. At the lower edges of the trim slightly flared blocks add a classical touch. All this is reminiscent of the Second Empire mode. The main entrance, centered under the tower, consists of nine foot high double doors of oak, half glazed with oval headed windows, and with lower molded panels. Two sets of double doors create a shallow entrance vestibule defined on the exterior by paneled side walls which flare outward. Above the doors delicately patterned transom windows extend up to the ceiling of the porch.

Inside the entrance a center hall forms a relatively narrow foyer at the front. The main stair begins at the right center of the hall. This stair was originally a single run, rising along one wall thirteen or more feet to the second floor. In recent years the stair was altered and now rises in two runs in the front section of the hall. At the rear, new bath rooms have been installed in the original hall areas on both floors. The stair features an unusually massive turned newell post at the first floor and two delicate turned balusters on each tread. A plain oval rail completes the balustrade. One might notice in the undisturbed first run of the stair curious triangular pressed tin dust shields at the juncture of treads and risers adjoining the closed strings.

Interior finishing trim is relatively simple and shows little of the rich decorative characteristics usually found in Victorian houses. The first floor entrance hall contains a heavy molded chair rail which has been recently replaced. There are no wood paneled wainscoted areas. Floors are all wide pine planks. Walls and ceilings are plaster on wood lath. From the foyer, double divided light doors open to a sitting room on the left. Here the walls have decorative panel molding applied at a later date over earlier wall paper. At the ceiling a narrow crown mold shows elaborate leaf carving said to have gilded originally. In this room an elaborate fireplace mantle provides the feature of most note. This mantle has classical detailing with small round Doric columns at each flank and molded trim under the mantle shelf with egg and dart motif. In the over mantle a fine beveled mirror is also surrounded with egg and dart molding. To the rear through another pair of divided light doors one enters the dining room. Here the trim is also very simple. There is a fireplace with milled mantle trim reflecting no classical influence. Adjoining the dining room at the back is a one story kitchen wing, showing little distinction in the finishing trim.

At the front right of the entrance foyer another pair of divided light doors open to a parlor. Here there was originally another fireplace which likely had a elaborate mantle and over mantle similar to that in the sitting room. This feature has been removed, however, and the opening plastered over. To the rear of this parlor is a smaller library or study trimmed with the simplest of millwork. In the original plan all first floor rooms opened to the central hall which extended from front to rear.

On the second floor there are four original bedrooms, and two rooms in a later addition. In these rooms the detailing is restrained. The four original bed chambers have small fireplaces finished with simple wood mantles showing little elaboration. At each fireplace on both

floors, the hearths and fireplace opening surrounds are faced with small glazed marbled tile.

At the front of the second floor hall the tower windows are set out from the main walls and create a shallow bay. Evidence of original window construction in the main wall confirms the fact that the tower was added subsequent to the original construction.

In Fourth Ward as well as in all other early neighborhoods in Charlotte, the list of remaining historic structures is distressingly limited. And, of course, the work of various groups and individuals on the development of an environment of significance in Fourth Ward is greatly enhanced by the preservation of such structures as the Berryhill (or Newcomb) House. This building is significant locally because it is very nearly alone in illustrating the once widespread Eclectic Victorian residential design in Charlotte. The present commendable effort of the Junior League toward refurbishing the house demonstrates a growing community awareness of the need for saving Charlotte's architectural past. This effort should be vigorously supported.