



## Walter Brem House



*This report was written on July 12, 1983*

**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Walter Brem House is located at 211 East Boulevard, in Charlotte, North Carolina.

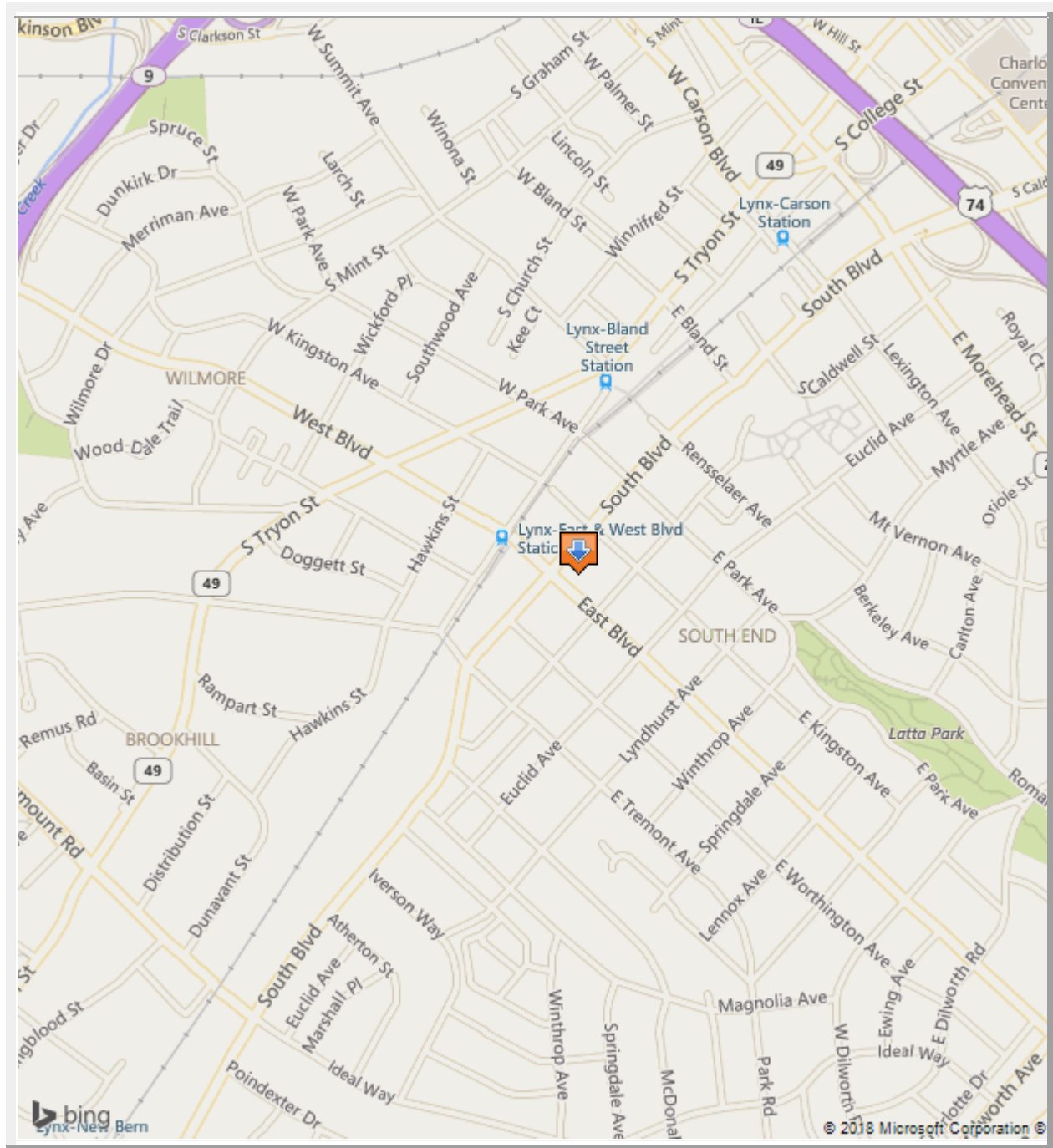
**2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property:** The present owner of the property is:

Mr. Henry Blume  
3601 Kelway Avenue  
Charlotte, N.C. 28210

Telephone: 552-6391

**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 records of the Mecklenburg Tax Office do not contain a current deed book reference to the property. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 123-0742.

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

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Lisa A. Stamper.

**8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria 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 Brem House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Walter Brem House, erected in 1902-03, was designed by C. C. Hook, Charlotte's first permanent resident architect and an architect of local and regional significance; 2) the original owner, Walter Brem, was married to the daughter of Governor Todd Robinson Caldwell, was an early business associate of George Stephens, developer of Piedmont Park and Myers Park, and was an important civic leader in Charlotte until his death in 1925; 3) Mr. R. D. Craver, a subsequent owner, was a pioneer in the motion picture business in the two Carolinas; 4) the Walter Brem House is one of the earliest and grandest examples of the Colonial Revival style in Charlotte; 5) the Walter Brem House is one of the oldest houses on East Boulevard and occupies a strategic townscape position in Dilworth, Charlotte's first streetcar suburb.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:** The Commission contends that the attached architectural description by Miss Lisa A. Stamper demonstrates that the Walter Brem 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 .321 acres of land is \$42,000. The current appraised value of the improvements is \$55,420. The total current appraised value is \$97,420. The property is zoned B1.

**Date of Preparation of this Report:** July 12, 1983

**Prepared by:** Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission  
218 N. Tryon Street  
Charlotte, North Carolina 28202

Telephone: 704/376-9115

### *Historical Overview*

*Dr. William H. Huffman*  
*August, 1981*

In July, 1902, the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company, otherwise known as the Four C's, began building one of the early houses on Boulevard East in the new streetcar suburb of Dilworth for Walter and Hannie Caldwell Brem.<sup>1</sup> The Four C's was organized in 1890 by Edward Dilworth Latta to develop 250 acres of rural land south of the city, the accomplishment of which was facilitated by the opening of Charlotte's first trolley line from the Square to Latta Park in 1891. The Brems had engaged C. C. Hook, Charlotte's first resident architect, to design the house.<sup>2</sup> Charles Christian Hook (1870-1938) had settled in Charlotte in 1891 to teach in the Charlotte Graded School at South Boulevard and E. Morehead Streets. His arrival in the same year as the beginning of the Four C's development of Dilworth resulted in many early commissions for dwellings in that community. Some of the best known structures designed by Hook were the Charlotte City Hall and the James B. Duke mansion.<sup>3</sup>



*Sketch of the Walter Brem house  
from "Some Designs," a promotional booklet published by Hook & Sawyer Architects  
ca. 1902*

Walter Brem was born in Charlotte July 31, 1849, and was one of the few citizens of the city whose parents were also born in town. He was the son of Col. Thomas H. Brem, commander of Brem's Battery in the Civil War, and Martha Fox Brem, who descended from the prominent Erwin family of Burke County. Walter Brem, in association with William H. Martin, was at one time the owner of a hardware store at the southeast corner of Trade and Tryon Streets, and, about 1890, went into the insurance business with George S. Stephens, who was a college friend of his son's from Chapel Hill. In 1902, Mr. Stephens married Sophie Myers, daughter of John Springs Myers, and subsequently developed his father-in-law's 1200-acre farm into the Myers Park subdivision. Mr. Brem spent the remainder of his business career as head of Walter Brem and Sons, general agents for the Traveler's Insurance Co. During his life he was actively involved in the Charlotte public school system and the city YMCA. He died at the age of 76 on February 11, 1925. <sup>4</sup>

Hannah Caldwell Brem, who was born in Morganton on November 4, 1851 and died in Charlotte April 21, 1931, was the daughter of Governor Todd Robinson Caldwell of Morganton. <sup>5</sup> The Brems had four children: Dr. Walter Brem (a fraternity brother of, and semi-pro ballplayer with George S. Stephens), who practiced medicine in Los Angeles; Todd Robin Brem, Mina Brem (Mrs. Robert A.) Mayer, and Helen Brem (Mrs. R. R.) Beatty, all of Charlotte. In 1903, when they moved into the fine house on

Boulevard East (for which they paid \$6045.86), the latter three children were still at home, but Mina Brem was married later that same year and no longer lived at the residence. <sup>6</sup> In 1912, the Brems bought a smaller, Queen Anne style house a block to the east of the one they had built, which was constructed eight months after theirs. <sup>7</sup> Their original house was rented briefly and stood vacant for some months before it was sold to Regger D. Craver in 1914 for the consideration of \$9000.00. <sup>8</sup>

Mr. Craver was a pioneer in the motion picture business in the Carolinas. At one time, he was one of the largest individual theater owners in the South, which included movie houses in the Carolinas and Virginia. In Charlotte, he operated the old Broadway theaters on East Trade and West Trade Streets, and afterward operated the Broadway theater on South Tryon. The Cravers lived on East Boulevard with their four sons, Gilda, R. D., Jr., William and Alton. In 1928, Mr. Craver was stricken and died after a brief illness at the age of 50. He was survived by the children and his wife, the former Bessie Jenkins of Gastonia. <sup>9</sup> Mrs. Craver continued to live in the house after he husband's death, but apparently could not maintain it when the Great Depression hit with full force, for in 1931, it was sold at a foreclosure sale to the South Atlantic Investment Corp. for \$8470.64. <sup>10</sup>

Once more the house stood vacant as it changed owners among investors twice in 1932, then went back to the ownership of the South Atlantic Investment Corp. in 1934. <sup>11</sup> In the latter year, the house was rented to Thomas K. Culp, a foreman for the Southern Power and Utility Company, who remained until it was purchased in 1936 by Mrs. Mae King Blume. <sup>12</sup> Mrs. Blume, the widow of John H. Blume, converted the property to the Colonial Apartments, a name which was maintained for many years. <sup>13</sup> In 1936, Mrs. Blume was the proprietor of the Piedmont Hotel, Queen City Hotel, Frances Hotel, Windsor Hotel, Southern Hotel, the Franklin Hotel and the manager of the New Albert Hotel. <sup>14</sup> Mrs. Blume moved to 211 E. Boulevard in 1939, and has lived there to this date. <sup>15</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, July 15, 1902, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Some Designs by Hook and Sawyer, Architects*, Charlotte, N.C. (Charlotte: Queen City Printing, 1902, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> "Survey and Research Report on the Seaboard Air Line Railroad Passenger Terminal," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, undated.

<sup>4</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 12, 1925, p. 4; Interview with Dr. Walter Brem Mayer, 28 July 1981.

<sup>5</sup> Certificate of Death, Book 48, p. 615; *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 12, 1925, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> See note 4; Deed Book 173, p. 497, 20 Feb. 1903.

<sup>7</sup> The house was built for William G. Crutchfield, who purchased it from the 4 C's on 13 Oct. 1903. (Deed Bk. 182, p.8) See "Historical Sketch of the Crutchfield House," by Dr. William H. Huffman, Charlotte-Mecklenburg. Hist. Prop Comm., August, 1981.

<sup>8</sup> Charlotte City Directory, 1913, p. 530; 1914, p. 591; Deed Book 327, p. 574, 7 Sept. 1914.

<sup>9</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, Dec. 20, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Deed Book 809, p. 487, 14 Nov. 1931.

<sup>11</sup> Deed Book 814, p. 593, 28 April 1932; Deed Book 827, p. 49, 25 Oct. 1932; Deed Book 849, p. 266, 20 Feb. 1934.

<sup>12</sup> Deed Book 900, p. 467, 9 May 1936.

<sup>13</sup> Charlotte City Directory, 1937, p. 776 and subsequent years.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1936, p. 105.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1939, p. 747.

## *Architectural Description*

*by Lisa Stamper*

Located near the corner of East and South Boulevards, the Walter Brem house still exhibits the grandeur of the fine Colonial Revival homes of the turn of the century. One of Charlotte's first examples of the style, this magnificent two-story residence was designed by C. C. Hook, a prominent Charlotte architect. When erected in c. 1902-1903, East Boulevard was a fashionable residential street which was the showplace of Dilworth, the city's first streetcar suburb. The Brem House has been added to over the years, and the original wooden clapboard siding has been covered with white asbestos siding. However, much of its fine detailing remains intact.

Originally, the Brem House was basically a rectangular house with two squarish, small 'pavilions' on both front corners. Between the projecting pavilions was a large one-story balconied entry portico. It also had a balconied one-story back porch. Over the years, numerous additions have been made to the back of the house. Also, an addition has been made to each side of the building.

The main portion of the house has a decorative slate tile roof, with a low pitch. It also has two small, symmetrically placed dormers at the front. The dormers are heavily pedimented and have diamond shaped glass panes. The two pavilions have flat roofs with broad bracketed eaves. Originally a wooden balustrade topped these roofs. These balustrades had heavy, paneled corner posts.

The Brem House has four original brick chimneys. Two identical exterior side chimneys bisect the sides of the pavilions. Another chimney is an interior one which is located in the back and off to one side. It was an interior chimney to avoid interference with the back porch design. The first two chimneys mentioned are thin, arcaded stacks with slightly stepped shoulders. The tops of these stacks have five courses of corbelling. These two chimneys have been painted brick red from the ground to the eaves, but have not been painted above the eaves. The interior chimney within the hipped roof is thicker and more square than the side chimneys. However, the five-course corbelled top is the same style. The back chimney is very simple. It is just a thin, rectangular stack without embellishment. New brick can be seen at the top of this chimney; therefore, possibly the top of this chimney once had corbelling like the others.

The composition of the impressive front facade was symmetrical and very well planned. Decorative corner boards on the second level of the wings lightened the



second story as well as defined it. The first level was separated from the second level by horizontal wooden coursing. Repetition of the pedimented dormers was created by the pediment window heads of the second-level windows of the wings. On the second level, two more single-paned, double-hung windows were placed below the dormers. The first level of the front facade had for single-paned windows, topped with stained glass rectangular panels. Straight wooden window heads and frames unified the two types of glass. One windows was located in each wing, while the other two flanked the double door. The door was horizontally paneled with glass in its upper portion. Wooden pilasters flanked the door.

The front portico was magnificent. Six symmetrically placed columns held up the portico. These columns, along with the plain entablature, were of the Tuscan Order. Large projecting brackets support the projecting cornice. Its balustrade had six thick, paneled posts that corresponded to the columns below. However, these posts were thinner than those on the pavilions' balustrades. These posts were topped with urns. Steps lead from the columns up to the porch deck, which extended from pavilion to pavilion. A railing identical in style to the pavilions' balustrades enclosed the high porch.

Today, the corner boards are gone. One pediment window head is missing. A door has been placed between the two second story windows in the central section to allow access to the top of the portico. An awning covers the doors and windows. The portico's wooden balustrade has been replaced with a simple, cast iron one. The other balustrades are gone. A side section of one porch was removed and a set of metal stairs was added. However, only one bracket is missing, the rest of the railing is intact, the columns are in excellent condition, the dormers seem unaltered, and the slate tile is still intact.

The sides of the house were identical before the additions were made. It is difficult to discern exactly how many windows were on each side, but it appears to have been six, four on each wing and two on the main portion, near the back. Both the first- and second-story windows were single-paned, double-hung sash. Probably all the windows of the Brem House, and definitely the ones on the sides and front, had dark, louvered shutters. None of these shutters remain on the house today.

The back facade is covered with a hodgepodge of additions, so it is difficult to determine what was once there. To visually balance the asymmetrically placed back chimney, a pediment was located on the back. From an early photograph, a corner of the back porch can be seen. The back porch was not as impressive as the front, but it also had a balustrade complete with urns, wide eaves, Tuscan Order columns, and a surrounding wooden rail. The columns, railing, etc., were removed when the back porch was converted into part of an apartment.

The additions are used as apartments, as is the original house. Some of the additions are two-story and some are one-story. Stairs run wild on the exterior of these additions. The additions have brick foundations, as does the original house. For uniformity, all the brick was painted, and white asbestos siding with wood grain texture was placed on all the additions and the original house.

Inside the Walter Brem House, the original floor plan seems to have been symmetrical, as befitting a Colonial revival style house. Many walls were later added to create apartments, especially on the second level, and original walls are often hard to identify. The first level rooms all have high ceilings, while the second level rooms all have standard height ceilings. All of the original flooring was probably of wood. Much of the original wall molding is intact. The first level original rooms still have their simple, horizontal wooden wainscoting along most of their walls.

The front entry door opens into a small foyer. Another wooden double door with eighteen glass panes (three panes by six panes) in each side opens into what was once the great hall and is currently used as a lobby. Except for a small additional wall at the left back corner, the great hall is practically unaltered. Much of the early paneled wainscoting and wooden chair rails are still intact. A chandelier was recently removed from the middle of the great hall.

The grand stair begins slightly to the left of the foyer, turns to continue up the back wall of the great hall, and turns once more to connect with the second level. Its wooden balustrade, with thick paneled posts resembling those of the exterior balustrades' posts, is still intact. Also, the same type of wainscoting found on the great hall walls is found on the walls of the grand stair. Large round pendants hang from underneath the stair posts at the ceiling.

A brick mantel is located in front of the stair facing the front door, offset slightly to the right. Brick brackets support a wide wooden shelf. The fireplace is not currently used.

It appears that four doors lead from the sides of the great hall to the remainder of the home. One single eighteen glass-paned door leads to each pavilion room. The other doors lead to the back rooms of the home.

The mantle in the pavilion room to the right is very ornate. The mantle is mainly of wood, with a brick interior and an intricately-detailed solid metal screen. The mantle has flanking wooden stylized Ionic columns plus large brackets supporting the shelf. Egg and dart molding plus fine dentil molding is used freely in the design, as are garland and festoon ornamentation. It may be assumed that the other pavilion's mantle

is also very elaborate and similar in design. Neither of the pavilion fireplaces are currently in use.

The mantle at the back of the house is of very decorative brickwork. In the middle of the upper portion of the mantle a diamond shaped pattern is created with bricks. The upper portion is separated from the lower portion by massive corbelling. Vertical corbelling is also employed as a decorative feature. This is the only fireplace in the house still in use, according to Mr. Trull, resident of approximately 23 years.

East Boulevard runs in front of the Brem House. A driveway runs next to the South Boulevard side of the house and to the rear of the property. The back of the site is used as a small parking lot for residents. The front yard is well kept and landscaped. Boxwood foundation plantings dominate the yard.

Although a good bit of the interior and exterior decoration is missing from the Brem House, enough is still present to justify historic designation. Also, with the aid of an early photograph, copies of which are in the possession of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, a very accurate restoration could be made.

This grand home sits on the outskirts of Dilworth, in an area which is fighting to keep its historic character despite the insensitive commercial construction which is replacing many of its interesting earlier buildings. However, this area still has many of those turn of the century grand homes which have been beautifully restored and currently house a variety of businesses. The Brem House is currently for sale, and historic designation could save this home from losing all of its historic significance while encouraging buyers who would positively use the house as an asset to the community.