

The Reverend George H. Detwiler House



This report was written on Nov. 3, 1981.

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Reverend George H. Detwiler House is located at 801 Sunnyside Avenue, Charlotte, North Carolina.

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

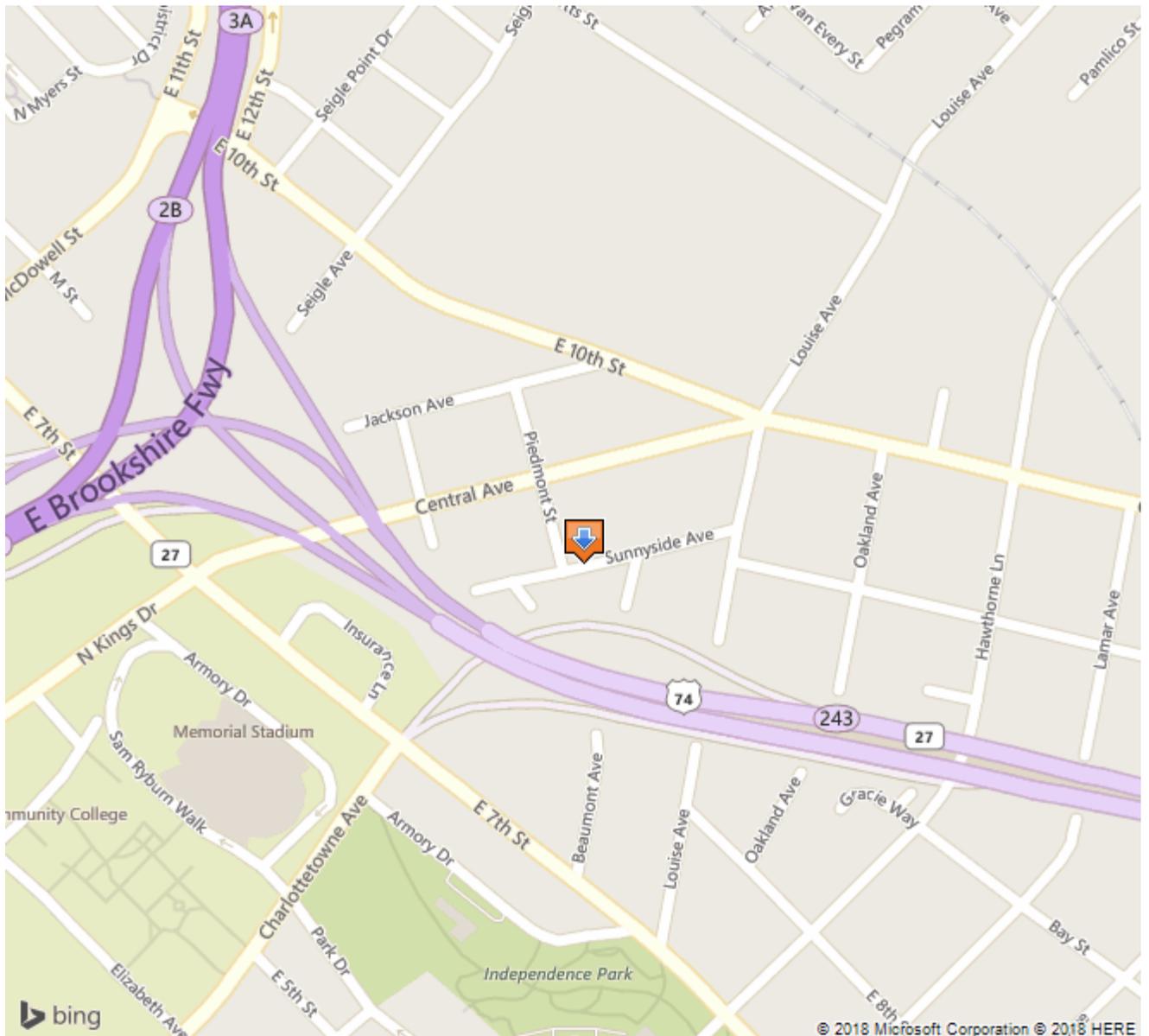
The present occupants and owners of the property are:
George C. Stevens and Kenneth E. Davis

801 Sunnyside Avenue
Charlotte, North Carolina 28204

Telephone: 704/376-5028

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 maps which depict the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book reference to the property: The most recent deed to this property is listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 4369 at page 737. The current tax parcel number of the property is 080-212-02.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property by Dr. William H. Huffman, Ph.D.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property by Mary Alice Dixon Hinson.

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 Historic Properties Commission judges that the property known as the Reverend George H. Detwiler House does possess historical significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: (1) the house, erected c. 1903, is the oldest house on Sunnyside Avenue, the best-preserved street in Piedmont Park, one of Charlotte's earliest streetcar suburbs. (2) the House is the finest local example of an extant one-and-one-half story Queen Anne style brick home. (3) Reverend George H. Detwiler, the original owner, was a Methodist minister of local and regional significance.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission judges that the architectural description included herein demonstrates that the property known as the Reverend George H. Detwiler House meets this criterion.

c. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal: The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply annually 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 Ad Valorem tax appraisal of the entire .347 acre tract is \$5,290.00. The current Ad Valorem tax appraisal on the improvements is \$21,780.00. The total Ad Valorem tax appraisal is \$27,070.00.

Date of preparation of this report: November 3, 1981

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

3500 Shamrock Drive
Charlotte, NC 28215

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Historical Overview

*Dr. William H. Huffman
August, 1981*

On March 2, 1903, Mattie E. Detwiler (1853-1920), the wife of the Reverend Doctor George H. Detwiler, purchased a lot on Sunnyside avenue in Piedmont Park for \$850.00. ¹ Piedmont Park was a new suburb east of Charlotte which was made possible by a streetcar line which ran out Central Avenue from 7th, McDowell, and Trade Streets.

Rev. Detwiler was born at Findlay, Ohio, August 31, 1853, but was raised in Mercer County, Illinois. Following his education in that state, he taught school in Illinois and Iowa. In 1877, the young man married Mattie Griffin of Iowa, and in that same year entered the ministry there, where he served several charges for the following nine years. He studied for a year at the Garrett Biblical Institute in 1886, then became an evangelist in Iowa and neighboring states for about seven years. In 1894, he was placed in charge of a school for mountain children in Hendersonville, N.C., where he served for three years. After 1897, Rev. Detwiler began to rise rapidly in church ranks, and was appointed to a series of positions. ² In that year he was assigned to the Rutherfordton circuit, then a year later posted to Gastonia, where he remained until 1902, when the church called on him to pastor the Trinity Methodist Church in Charlotte. ³ Trinity Methodist Church was organized in 1895 and built in 1898 at the southeast corner of S. Tryon and 2nd Streets. ⁴ It merged with the Tryon Street Methodist Church in 1927, which eventually became the present First United Methodist Church on N. Tryon. ⁵

The house on Sunnyside Avenue in Piedmont Park was probably commissioned to be built by the Piedmont Realty Co. in March, 1903, several months after the Detwilers were assigned to Charlotte. The purchase of that date suggests a lot without a house yet built on it. A former resident of the house, Katherine McLeskey, understood that

Mrs. Detwiler designed the house, and a former owner, Virginia Casey, reports old-time neighbors saying that the minister's wife carefully supervised all the materials and construction of the dwelling, which was the first to be erected on Sunnyside Avenue. ⁶ Considering that the Detwilers were brought from distant places for burial in Charlotte, and that two of their four daughters had settled in Gastonia, it seems probable that Mrs. Detwiler built her "dream house" as an investment or for retirement, or both, since it would have been obvious to them that they would be transferred a number of times in the future. ⁷

After two years at Trinity, Rev. Detwiler was made the presiding elder of the Salisbury District, where he only served one year before transfer to Greensboro as pastor of the West Market Street Church, a post he held for four years. About 1908, the popular minister was again posted to Charlotte for a year, this time to the Tryon Street Church. Following this assignment, he was sent to Asheville for a year, then sent on to Nashville in 1910 to the West End Church, which was an important post because of its service to the students of Vanderbilt University. While serving in Nashville, Rev. Detwiler's health broke, and he retired to Asheville in early 1914 with the hope of recovering, but he died there July 5, 1914. ⁸

Dr. Detwiler's popularity was proven by the several hundred people who attended his funeral at the Tryon Street Church in Charlotte on July 8th. Delegations came from Gastonia, Greensboro and Asheville, and four locally prominent ministers gave laudatory orations which were quoted at length in the local newspapers. The deceased pastor was regarded as exceptionally gifted with the use of words, and was "regarded by all denominations as one of the ablest and most influential preachers of the city." ⁹ In 1907, the Detwilers sold the house to Mr. John Elmer Dye for the price of \$3500.00. ¹⁰ Mr. Dye was a traveling salesman who was born in Boone County, Indiana. ¹¹ The residence provided the home in which the two children of the family, Robert M. and Hanna May Dye, grew up. The Dyes had a piano in the living room for the use of their son, who apparently showed considerable talent on the instrument. The mother of one of his friends, Hal Kemp, would not let her boy practice his horn at home, and the group that gathered as a consequence in the Dye living room for practice became the nucleus of the Hal Kemp Orchestra, a well-known name of the Big Band era. ¹²

After twenty-two years at the Sunnyside address, the Dyes sold the house to Dr. Joseph Hamilton McLeskey in 1929. ¹³ They waited until the next year to move (to Glen Falls, NY), in order to allow Hanna Dye to finish high school in Charlotte. Dr. McLeskey practiced medicine from an office on N. Caldwell Street, and it was he who built the still-standing double garage in the back of the property to accommodate his necessary automobile. Dr. McLeskey's daughter recalls that she and her friends used to ride the streetcar on Central Avenue and remark about the unusual house visible

down on Sunnyside, and one day her father came in to supper and announced that he had just bought that very house. The McLeskeys were South Carolina natives, and retired there to Clemson after the doctor quit active medical practice, but they raised their two children, Katherine and Joseph Hamilton, Jr., in Charlotte.¹⁵ In 1941, the McLeskeys moved to Hermitage Road and rented the house to Carson D. Stout, who was a superintendent at the Carolina Bedding Co. in Charlotte.¹⁶ a year later, Dwight Lyman Casey and his wife, Virginia Lea Cathey Casey, bought the property, but did not move in until 1943.¹⁷ The Caseys also lived in the house for over twenty years, and it was the home in which they raised their four children. In 1966, the Caseys leased the house to the Carolina Chapter of the National Electrical Contractors Association, who did extensive interior modernizing to use it as their office.¹⁸ In 1972, the property was sold to Advanced Lighting Products, Inc., but the Caseys repurchased it in 1978 as a result of a defaulted deed of trust.¹⁹ After Mr. Casey's death in 1978, Mrs. Casey sold the site to Michael M. Normile, who is a contractor specializing in restoring houses for resale.²⁰ Mr. Normile in turn sold the house, after exterior restoration, to the present owner, George C. Stevenson, who has taken great interest in restoring the house to its original condition.²¹

NOTES

¹ Deed Book 173, p. 526, 2 March 1903.

² *Encyclopedia of World Methodism* (United Methodist Publishing House, 1974), I, 671.

³ *Charlotte Observer*, July 6, 1914, p. 1.

⁴ Information supplied by the Church archivist, Mrs. George Scranton of Charlotte; *Charlotte City Directory*, 1903, p. 28.

⁵ *Ibid.*, also information given by Mr. Owen McClure, Historian of Trinity Methodist Church, Charlotte.

⁶ Interview with Katherine McLeskey, Clemson, SC, 9 August 1981; Interview with Virginia Casey, Charlotte, N.C., same date.

⁷ Rev. Detwiler died in Asheville; see below; Mrs. Detwiler died in Morganton: *Charlotte News*, Nov. 26, 1920, p. 3; both are interred at Elmwood Cemetery, Charlotte.

⁸ *Charlotte News*, July 6, 1914, p. 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, July 8, 1914, p. 2; *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, cited above.

¹⁰ Deed Book 222, p. 672, 25 May 1907.

¹¹ *Delayed Certificate of Birth Registration*, Vol. 2, p. 310.

¹² See Note 6.

¹³ Deed Book 735, p. 172, 5 Feb. 1929.

¹⁴ Interview with Mary Maffitt by Kathy Fox, 22 Jan. 1981.

¹⁵ Interview with Katherine McLeskey, cited above.

¹⁶ *Charlotte City Directory*, 1941, p. 485.

¹⁷ Deed Book 109, p. 491, 14 Aug. 1942; *Charlotte City Directory*, 1942, p. 758.

¹⁸ Interview with Virginia Casey by Kathy Fox, 20 Jan. 1981.

¹⁹ Deed Book 3400, p. 70, 2 March 1972; Deed Book 4053, p. 165, 28 Feb. 1978.

²⁰ Deed Book 4072, p. 966, 16 June 1978.

²¹ Deed Book 4369, p. 737, 11 Nov. 1980.

Architectural Description

The Detwiler House, built about 1903, is a one-and-a-half story Queen Anne structure that displays the asymmetrical massing and textural contrasts typical of the genre. The house stands on a lot measuring 100 feet by 150 feet and anchors the northeastern

corner of the intersection of Sunnyside Avenue and Piedmont Street in Piedmont Park. Although the neighborhood is bisected by Central Avenue and bordered by Independence Boulevard, of the city's most congested traffic arteries, it still retains many small houses; the Detwiler, with its strategic corner site, picturesque elevations, and two detached dependencies, acts as an architectural stabilizer and focus for the surrounding residential fabric.

The house is built of brick laid in running bond. It stands one-and-a-half stories high on a brick basement trimmed with a three course water table. The body of the house is capped by a broadly splayed hipped roof. Two interior end chimneys, one hipped dormer, centrally located on the main (south) facade, and a polygonal corner pierce the roof. The rectangular lot is sharply elevated above the sidewalks that edge the southern and western perimeters of the yard. A run of five concrete steps leads from the main (south) to a symmetrically-curved pavement. This pavement fronts a steep run of seven wooden stairs that rise to the central entrance bay of the generous wrap-around porch. The porch engulfs the principal story for almost the full length of the south and west elevations. In plan, the porch consists of a pentagonal bay that sweeps along the southwestern corner of the house, protecting while dramatizing a rounded corner bay projecting from the body of the house. The corner bay serves as base of the one-and-a-half story polygonal corner tower.

The porch is supported by a foundation of brick piers connected by wooden lattices. A slightly pent roof shelters the porch. Its boldly overhanging eaves are broken by a central gablet positioned to indicate the entrance. A simple rakeboard outlines the gablet and its face is sheathed with shingle shingles. The center of the face carries a rectangular louvered vent.

Ten unfluted wooden columns, paired at the porch entrance bay, hold up a simple two-part entablature running beneath the porch roof eaves. Beneath a plain abacus the necking of each column is heavily encircled by astragals whose profiles complement the horizontal beaded molding dividing the entablature in two. A wooden balustrade runs between the columns. The balustrade is built of a plain molded handrail above turned balusters that rest on a rectangular-in-section footrail. The porch floor is covered with thin ceiling and the ceiling is covered with thin beaded ceiling.

The main entrance contains a single-leaf door, glazed above the lock-rail, and divided into two horizontal raised-panels along the lower register. Two sidelights above raised, lead aprons flank the door. A three-light transom set with translucent glass runs across the top of the entrance. A segmental arch, built of three courses of rowlock bricks, surmounts the entire composition.

East of the entrance the porch is stepped back to meet a demihexagonal bay carry full length one-over-one sash. These windows are set in plain board surrounds framed by rectilinear raised and flat panels trimmed with bead and ovolo molding. West of the entrance the rounded corner bay is pierced by two one-over-one sash windows. Each is framed by plain board surrounds placed beneath segmental arches built of rowlock bricks, echoing the motives of the central entrance. Above the body of the bay the polygonal corner is lit by five translucent glass plates set in attic level walls covered with shake shingles. The tower is crowned by a large conical cap articulated by rounded ribs. It is splayed at the base and crowned at the apex by a spiky metal finial. The tower, embedded in the sweeping first story bay, dramatizes the potential for double facades offered by the elevated corner site.

The eastern elevation includes a rectilinear projection, one bay wide and two deep. This contains two one-over-one sash windows above flat-paneled aprons and one single-leaf door facing south. a small shed roof shelters this side entrance.

The rear of the house has been expanded in a manner compatible with the original structure. The rear elevation is six bays long and has three rectilinear set backs. To the northeast a one story gabled wing extends two bays wide and three deep.

Rear fenestration generally repeats the patterns established in the front and side elevations: one over one sash alternate with single plate glass windows. Both varieties are capped by a double course of rowlocks arranged in a segmental arch.

The interior of the house is unpretentious. Rooms are organized around the stem of a center hall trimmed with a plain board, flush-laid baseboard. Single-leaf doors carry five raised-panels arranged in horizontal tiers. The surrounds have simple cyma recta profiles and support cornices composed largely of fillet moldings above a modest blank frieze.

The southwestern front room contains a tripartite mantel ornamented with garlands along the sides. A floral festoon trims the raised-panel central block of the frieze. A simple molding underlines this panel. A built-in cabinet flanks the mantel. The cabinet is glazed with full-length glass doors. The southwestern front room contains a built-in bookshelf with a decorative wooden trim along the top shelf.

Northwest of the center hall is the kitchen. It is decorated with an ovolo and beaded picture molding. Two built-in corner cabinets carry raised-panel doors. A third built-in corner cabinet carries raised-panel doors. A third built-in cabinet has frosted glass double doors above raised-panel wooden doors.

The interior of the house has been cosmetically remodeled, although the original features appear to be largely intact. Rear additions have been made, paneling has been applied to the walls, and the ceilings were lowered about 1955. The attic and cellar remain unfinished. The cellar contains a furnace.

To the rear of the house stands a wooden shed. It is rectangular in plan and capped by a hipped roof with projecting rafter ends. The roof is sheathed with standing seam tin. Large wooden doors carry simple paneling. Southwest of the house is a small brick dependency, built well after the construction of the house. The dependency is almost square in plan and is capped by a hipped roof. Four-over-four sash windows appear more recent.