

The Earle Sumner Draper House



This report was written on Dec. 7, 1983

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Earle Sumner Draper House is located at 1621 Queens Road, in Charlotte, North Carolina.

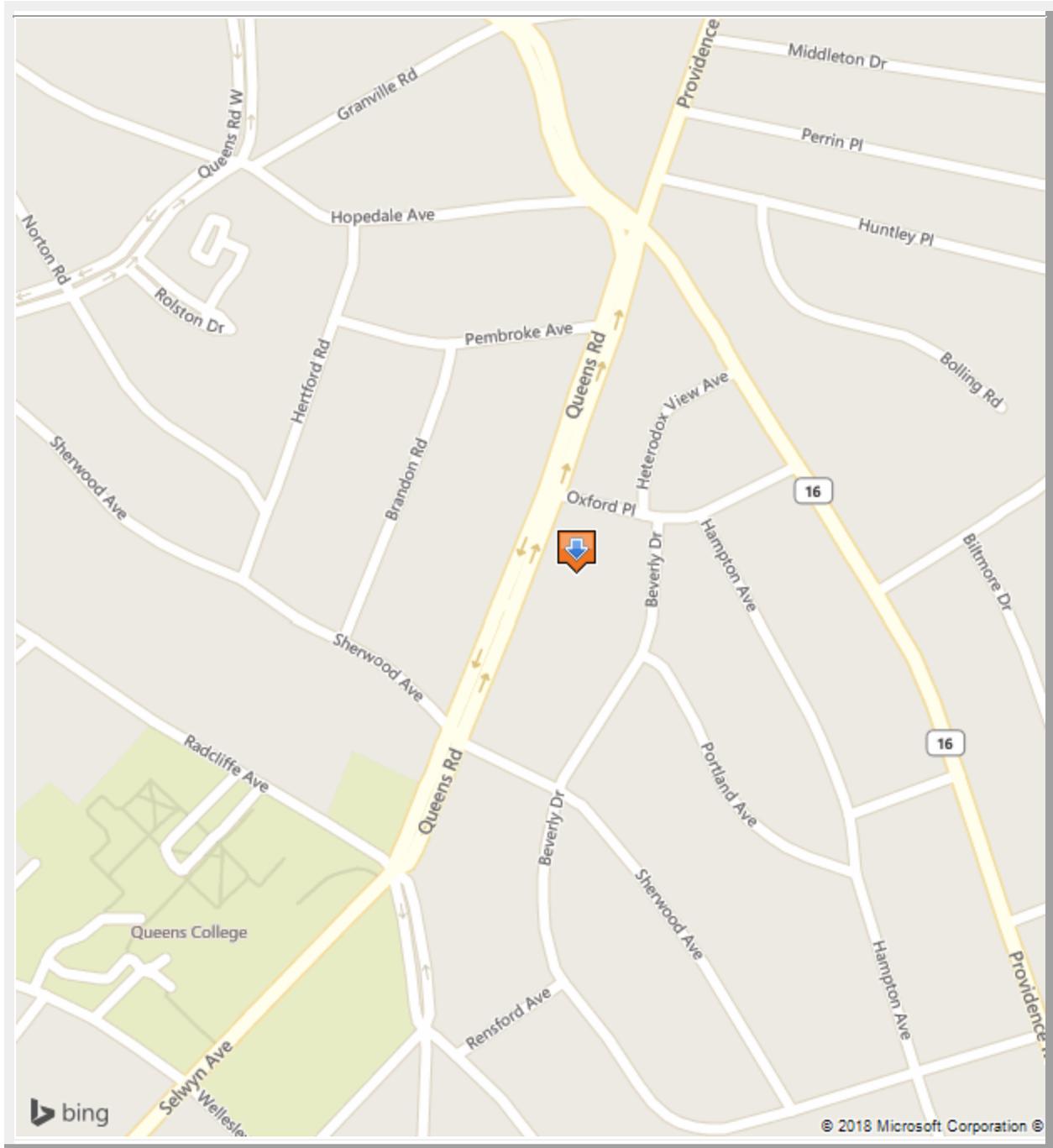
2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property:

The present owner of the property is:
Mr. James R. Boatwright and wife, Lorne
1848 Cavendish Court
Charlotte, N. C. 28211

Telephone: (704) 364-7399

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.



Click on the map to browse

5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to this property is listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 4727 at page 881. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 153-074-04.

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 Miss Lisa A. Stamper and Mr. Thomas W. Hanchett.

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 Earle Sumner Draper House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Earle Sumner Draper House, erected in 1923 and designed by Franklin Gordon, noted Charlotte architect, is one of the finer local examples of the Tudor Revival style of architecture; 2) Earle Sumner Draper, the original owner, occupies a position of great importance in the fields of landscape architecture and urban planning; and 3) the Earle Sumner Draper House is one of the older houses on the section of Queens Road between Queens College and Providence Road.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the attached architectural description by Miss Lisa A. Stamper and Mr. Thomas W. Hanchett demonstrates that the Earle Sumner Draper 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 .782 acres of land is \$29,000. The current appraised value of the improvements is \$168,260. The total current appraised value is \$197,260. The property is zoned R12.

Date of Preparation of this Report: December 7, 1983

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director
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Historical Overview

Dr. William H. Huffman
March, 1983

A major reason why Charlotte's suburbs, beginning with the first two made possible by the extension of the streetcar lines, Dilworth and Myers Park, are laid out in curved patterns instead of squares as in the city center, is that Edward Dilworth Latta and George Stephens hired the city planning firms (which became nationally prominent) of the Olmsted Brothers and John Nolen (1869-) to lay out some of their respective developments. In 1905, Nolen, a graduate of the Wharton School and Harvard, who maintained an office in Cambridge, Massachusetts, designed the city's Independence Park, and for the next two years planned the landscape for some private residences in town. Four years after he was called back by George Stephens to lay out Myers Park in 1911, Nolen hired a young graduate of Massachusetts Agricultural College (now the University of Massachusetts), Earle Sumner Draper, to supervise the field work.

It was an excellent opportunity indeed for the bright and talented young man, who arrived by train in his newly adopted city in October, 1915. One of the services offered to purchasers of building lots in Myers Park was a landscape design by Earle Draper, and on one day per month, he supervised the construction of the new town of Kingsport, Tennessee. In 1917, just two years after coming to the city, Draper, with his mentor's approval, hung out his own shingle and went into business for himself.

For the next sixteen years, Draper's firm (which was possibly the first resident firm of a professionally trained landscape architect in the Southeast) participated in the boom times of the late Teens and Twenties throughout the South. At one time, there were

branch offices in Atlanta, Washington, D.C. and New York which employed between twenty and thirty people, and the Draper firm, one of the five largest in the United States, designed over a hundred suburbs, including parts of Myers Park and Eastover in Charlotte, as well as many parks, private grounds, cemeteries and college campuses, including some of Davidson and Winthrop Colleges. Another very important part of Draper's work was mill village design, of which he executed about one hundred and fifty villages or village extensions, perhaps the greatest number of any firm in the country. ¹

In 1918, a year after he started his own business, Draper purchased a lot on Queens Road in Myers Park, but it wasn't until five years later, in 1923, that he finally erected a house in the neighborhood that brought him to Charlotte and which provided him with a show place for prospective planning clients. ² To design his new manse, he hired Charlotte architect Franklin Gordon (1870-1930), one of the senior architects of the city. ³ A Maine native, Gordon came to Charlotte in 1905 to supervise construction of the Selwyn Hotel, and from about 1909 to 1917, was in partnership with L. L. (Leonard Legrand) Hunter (1881-1925) in the city. In addition to designing Mercy Hospital, Gordon was known for his architectural work on some of the city's finest residences, including the E. C. Marshall mansion at Hermitage and Ardsley, and others on Queens Road. ⁴

It is possible that the Tudor style for the house was selected because of Mr. Draper's contacts with English planners and garden designers, some of whom he met in his travels overseas. The choice of architecture in turn would be a factor in hiring Gordon to do the design, since he had a special affinity for that style. ⁵ The Clement Construction Company, a Charlotte concern which also built Duke University's gothic stone buildings, completed the structure in about eight months, at a cost of between \$40,000 and \$45,000, and the landscape design, naturally enough, was executed by the owner. Even the windows were true to the style, requiring 4,400 small, diamond-shaped leaded panes of glass, and the family crest of carved stone was prominently installed in the chimney face. Behind the house was a garage and a stable (with a pony and a horse), and an oval rose garden. ⁶

When E. S. Draper, his wife Norma, and their three boys (another boy and a girl were added to the family in the next few years) moved into the handsome, angled Tudor house, it was located on a broad boulevard with the streetcar line running in either direction down the middle. The line ended just three blocks south, at Queens College, three miles from its beginning at the Square. At the time, there were only a few other houses on that section of Queens Road, and the area in back was still wooded parts of John Myers' former plantation not yet developed by his son-in-law, George Stephens. ⁷

For nine years, the Drapers enjoyed a typical upper-middle-class life of the time, employing a cook (for whom they built on a small apartment with bath downstairs behind the kitchen), a maid and a chauffeur-handyman, as well as gardening help. The children, who played in the large attic on rainy days (and got into much mischief there, according to E. S. Draper, Jr.) attended school in Elizabeth, arriving and departing in the chauffeur-driven family car, until 1928, when Myers Park Elementary opened to serve that area. They all enjoyed the flower gardens immediately in the back and side of the house, as well as the small pool in the back with a marble fountain, a cherub holding a goose, in the middle, which the Drapers had purchased on a trip to Italy in 1922.⁸

In 1932, when the Great Depression was inflicting a heavy economic toll on the nation, E. S. Draper's firm was still in business, although considerably diminished. On a business trip to Washington that year, he was called to a meeting with Dr. Arthur Morgan, the new chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority.

When the two men met at the Washington Hotel, Draper was offered the job of Director of Town Planning and Housing for TVA, based on his reputation as a new-town planner, and he asked for time to think over the proposal. On returning to Charlotte, he saw that his firm still had plenty of work remaining, and he considered that the position he had been offered "was probably the greatest opportunity that would ever be afforded in this country in the field of town planning and regional planning."⁹

Thus he left his planning business to be supervised by an assistant, Harold Burdsley, and accepted the assignment with the idea that he would return to Charlotte after a few years, and the spacious house on Queens Road was rented out. The TVA work turned out to be the exceptional opportunity for Draper that he thought it would, and he was able to make his influence felt in strictly controlling land use, developing shoreline recreation along the reservoirs, and creating the new town of Norris, Tennessee. Draper's plan of returning to Charlotte never materialized, however, because new opportunities continued to beckon. When the TVA work was winding down by 1940, he was offered a position with the recently formed Federal Housing Administration, which wanted him to be involved in new town development. With the onset of the war, however, those plans had to be shelved for the duration, and, instead of civilian dwellings, Draper took on the important task of war housing throughout the country.

Near the end of the war in 1945, President Truman named him temporarily to be the head of FHA as Acting Commissioner. When hostilities finally ceased later that year, Draper remained in Washington as a consultant, and twenty years later, in 1965,

retired to Vero Beach, Florida, some fifty years after coming to Charlotte to launch his career.¹⁰

While pursuing his career in federal service, Earle Draper held on to the Tudor house on Queens Road for twelve years, during which time it was let to a series of tenants and came to have the reputation among the children of the area of being haunted. Thus when Thomas F. Kerr (1885-1962), who had his own real estate and property management firm, and his wife Bleeka purchased the Draper house in 1944, the youngest of their two daughters, Jane (Mrs. Hal R. Williams of Columbia, S. C.) had grave misgivings, since she was one of the neighborhood children who wouldn't even Trick-or-Treat there on Halloween. To give the place a less somber look and change its image in the mind of their daughter (the oldest daughter Nancy, was a student at Finch College, N.Y.), the Kerrs rehabilitated the house and lightened many of its colors, which included the painted landscape on canvas covering the entryway. Despite their pleadings, Mr. Kerr wouldn't buy a horse for the girls to put in the old Draper stable, but he did convert it into a cozy playroom for them with a fireplace at one end.

The Draper house is still a fine piece of Tudor architecture from another time in Charlotte. It is at once a credit to Franklin Gordon's skills as an architect and his knowledge of that style, as well as a reflection of an up-and-coming city where professionals like Earle Draper could launch a successful career which led to national recognition. It is also intimately a part of an upper-middle-class style of life in Charlotte of the Twenties, with its new streetcar suburbs laid out by a new breed of town planners and landscape architects. The Tudor house on Queens Road is, without question, a classic example which represents a particular time and place in Charlotte's history.

NOTES

¹ Tom Hanchett, "Charlotte's Neighborhood Planning Tradition," unpublished paper, 1983, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission.

² Deed Book 392, p.54, 2 May 1918.

³ Interview with E. S. Draper, Jr., Charlotte, N.C. 10 March 1983.

⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, September 25, 1930, p.10.

⁵ Interview with E. S. Draper, Jr.

⁶ Ellen Scarborough, "The Story of the Draper House" *ASID Designer House* (Charlotte, 1981), p.8.

⁷ Interview with E. S. Draper, Jr.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Charles W. Crawford, Memphis State University Oral History Research Office Project, 30 December 1969, p.3.

¹⁰ Hanchett, pp.13-15.

¹¹ Deed Book 1132, p.587, 27 July 1944.

¹² Interview with Thomas Kerr Freeman, Charlotte, N.C., 10 March 1983; Scarborough, p.16.

Architectural Description

by Lisa Stamper and Tom Hanchett

The Earle Sumner Draper residence on Queens Road in Charlotte's Myers Park suburb is among Charlotte's finest examples of Tudor Revival architecture. Draper, perhaps the leading planner and landscape architect in the Southeast during the first half of the twentieth century, chose Charlotte architect Franklin Gordon to design his residence, which was completed in 1923. Today the exterior of the Draper house remains in excellent original condition, though the interior was remodeled in the Colonial style in the 1940s.

The Draper house is a three-dimensional play of materials and shapes formed into an asymmetrical but balanced design. In massing, a two-story main block faces the boulevard, with an angled service wing projecting to the rear off the northeast side of the structure. A variety of building materials gives the house a horizontal, three

layered look, with a different material dominating each level. The first story is brick, the second story wooden "half-timbering" with stucco infill, and the high-pitched roof is covered with black slate.

Windows and doors fill the facades of the house, carefully subordinate to the overall composition, yet providing a wealth of light to the interior, unusual for the Tudor Style. Window groupings vary in shape and pattern as one moves around the structure. Those on the first floor feature Tudor arches or rectangular label-moldings executed in limestone by John Morton and Company, the region's premier stonemasons in the period. Upstairs windows are set into the half-timbering without further surrounds. All windows are casement type, with wooden frames and rectangular or diamond-shaped lights.

Two elements give the asymmetrical front facade a vertical balance. A gabled, full-height entrance bay projects from the front of the house. A heavy, six-paneled wooden front door with diagonal-pane sidelights is contained under a stone Tudor arch in the first story of the bay. At the second story, half-timbering with diagonally-set brick infill instead of stucco provides visual emphasis. A tall, half timbered gable with bracketed bargeboards and a small, diamond-paned casement window crowns the bay. The second vertical element is the massive double-shouldered chimney. Made of brick with stone shoulders and a carved stone "family crest," it projects an air of domesticity, promising the visitor a merry hearth within.

Both gable-ends of the main block of the house have smaller projecting gable-within-gable roofs. The north one covers a first floor porch topped by an enclosed sleeping porch. The slate floor of the open first level is a few steps above the ground, and is visible through three large tudor-arched openings. The south projection covers a first-story sunroom and second story sleeping porch. The sunroom opens onto an outdoor garden enclosed by a brick wall, which leads one toward the rear yard.

At the back of the house, the main wing and the angled service wing shelter an outdoor living area. An ornate brick and carved stone balustrade encloses a raised terrace. A tudor-arched brick porch covers a small part of the terrace where the two wings meet. Thick brick posts topped by lamps indicate openings in the terrace balustrade that lead the visitor out into the back yard. A low fountain and pool surrounded by shrubbery provide a focus for the terrace. Landscaping has undoubtedly changed much with the passage of time, but slate pathways still define the old gardens that Draper laid out, and the trees he planted still shade the lawns.

A former stable is located at the end of the asphalt driveway that snakes around the north side of the service wing. The stable is a one-story rectangular structure with a high hipped roof. A rectangular double-hung window with eight-over-one lights is

located on its southwest side. The clapboard sheathed structure was converted to a playroom in the 1940s and an addition was made at the rear, using similar materials, with a brick chimney.

Returning to the house, one quickly realizes that it is but one room deep in most places in order to provide the maximum natural light to the interior. Entering through the front door, the visitor arrives in a spacious foyer. To the right is the "great hall," a combined living and dining room, with the sunroom at its end. Originally the hearth in this space boasted a massive oak Tudor mantle. This mantle was relegated to the attic in the 1940s, where it remains to this day, and was replaced by a delicate Federal style mantle in keeping with the new owner's Colonial Revival tastes. The foyer holds the grand stair leading to the bedrooms on the second floor. Its Tudor balustrade has been replaced with a spindly Colonial one. Bedrooms for adults occupied the second floor of the main block of the house, Earle Sumner Draper, Jr., remembers, while the Draper sons slept and played in the rooms on the second floor of the service wing. The first story of the service wing holds the large kitchen and a small servants' bedroom in a one-story extension at the end.

The Colonializing of the interior in the 1940s was skillfully done, and it is difficult to pick out what was changed. The stair balustrades and delicate wood and black marble mantles date from that time, and probably the dentil cornices in some of the rooms do also. Draper remembers that the huge windows that dominate the "great hall" originally had leaded diamond panes, but now have square wooden ones. The noteworthy hand-painted wallpaper in the foyer also dates from the forties.

The house was used as Charlotte's annual American Society of Interior Designers "Designer House" in 1981, and received more superficial alterations. The current owners, Jim and Lorne Boatwright are now stripping and staining the first-story wood floors and painting all the rooms. They plan to replace much of the plumbing, necessitating destruction of tile bathroom floors, and will remove all bath fixtures and radiators. Second-floor bathrooms will be enlarged, and a second story bedroom wall will be removed to create a larger space which will then connect to a bath. In the service wing, a wall will be demolished to expand the kitchen and all cabinets and fixtures will be discarded. New central heating and air conditioning will be added to the house, along with an alarm system.

Both historically and architecturally, the Earle Sumner Draper House occupies an important place in Charlotte. It is the grandest residence on the section of Queens Road stretching from Providence Road to Queens College. For sixty years it has been a notable part of the Myers Park neighborhood, said to be the finest suburb south of Baltimore in its early days, a development widely emulated throughout the Southeast. Today Myers Park remains one of the city's most fashionable neighborhoods, but

Queens Road with its picturesque grassy median is now a major thoroughfare. Charlotte's zoning board is under constant pressure to allow high-density multifamily redevelopment in the area, and has recently given in to demands in other parts of Myers Park. Because of its outstanding and well preserved Tudor Revival exterior, because of its important place in the streetscape of Myers Park, and because of its association with the Southeast's most active early planner, the Earle Sumner Draper House merits protection as an historic property.