

EDGEWOOD FARMHOUSE



This report was written on Oct. 3, 1984

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Edgewood Farmhouse is located at 11124 Eastfield Road in Mecklenburg County.

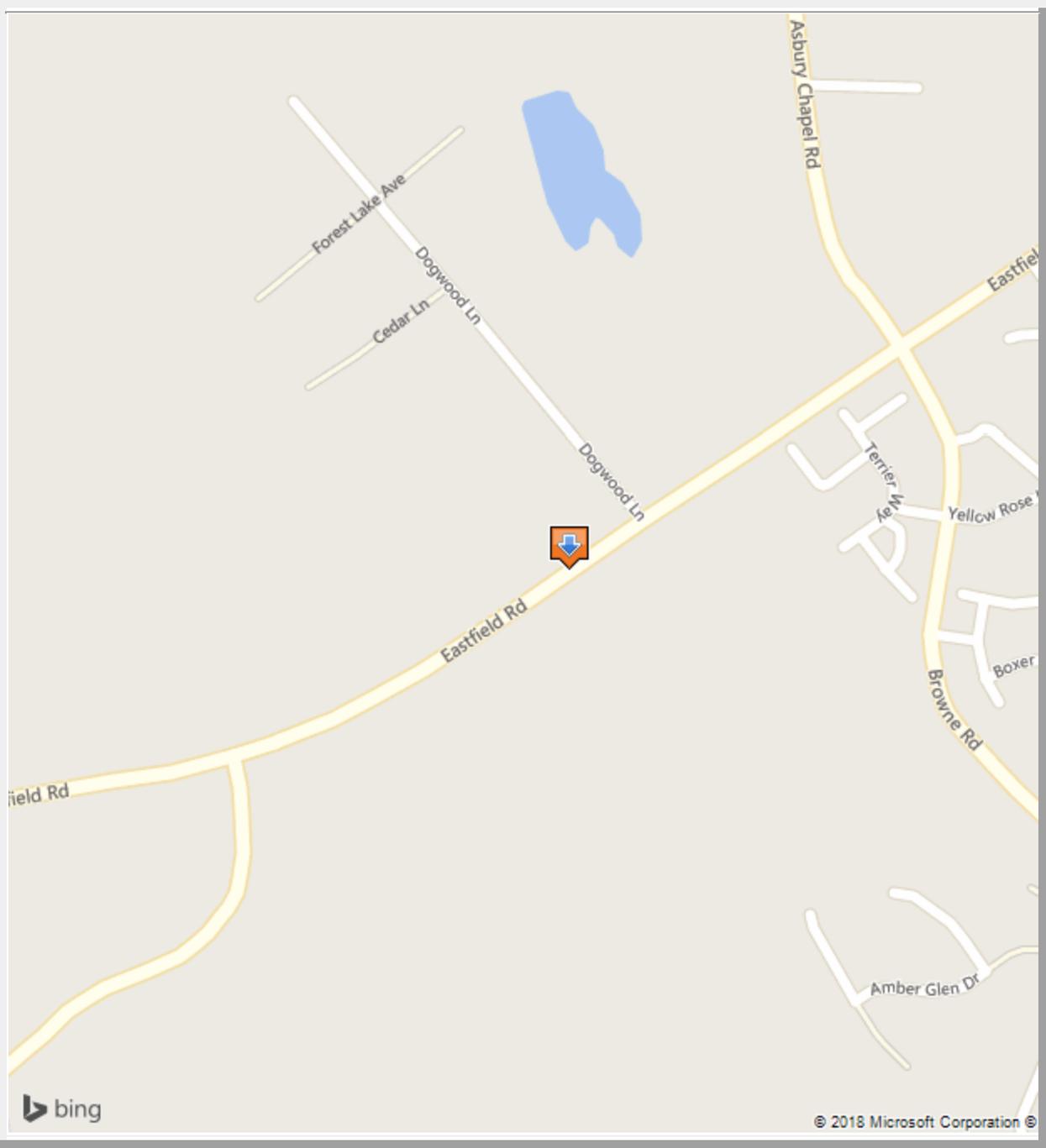
2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property:

Margaret Darden McLeod
Route 1, Box 580
Huntersville, N.C., 28078

Telephone: 704/875-2534

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 most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 4555, page 746. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 027-171-21.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared 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 prepared by Joseph Schuchman.

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 Edgewood Farmhouse does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the structure is one of the few, relatively intact ante-bellum plantation houses extant in Mecklenburg County; 2) the structure, built c. 1853, was the home of Robert Davidson Alexander (1796-1863) and his wife, Abigail Bain Caldwell Alexander (1808-1889), both being members of prominent pioneer families of Mecklenburg County; 3) the transitional Federal/Greek Revival plantation house is an imposing example of this motif in Mecklenburg County; and 4) the structure retains a mostly undisturbed rural setting.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the attached architectural description by Mr. Joseph Schuchman demonstrates that the property known as the Edgewood Farmhouse 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 .899 acres of land is \$3600. The current appraised value of the improvements is \$35,940. The total current appraised value is \$39,540. The property is zoned RU.

Date of Preparation of this Report: October 3, 1984

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

1225 S. Caldwell St.
Charlotte, N.C. 28203

Telephone: 704-376-9115

Historical Overview

The Edgewood Farm house on Eastfield Road north of Charlotte is one of the few relatively intact large antebellum houses left in the county. It is a legacy of Robert Davidson Alexander (1796-1863) and his wife, the former Abigail Bain Caldwell (1808-1889), who built it around 1840. Robert Davidson Alexander was the third child (of fourteen) of William Bain Alexander (1764-1844) and the former Violet Davidson (1771-1821), who was a daughter of Major John Davidson, both families being pioneers of what was known as the Hopewell section of the county around the Hopewell Presbyterian Church. William Bain Alexander owned a 6000 acre plantation in the area, upon which he grazed cattle, horses and sheep until they were changed over to the production of cotton, and he was also for many years the county recorder of deeds and postmaster, for more than fifty years at his homestead, "Alexandria." Abigail Bain Caldwell was the daughter of Rev. Samuel Craighead Caldwell, the pastor of Hopewell and Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Churches. ¹

The two were married on February 12, 1829, and built a one-story log house (which is still extant behind the present one) about one mile east of Alexandria on 400 acres given to them by William B. Alexander in 1830. ² What is now Eastfield Road was at the time known as the Salisbury Road, and the log house was about a hundred yards back to the south from the road. About 1840, the Alexanders built their roomy, two-story frame plantation house in which they raised their five children, Rev. S. C., Dr. J. Brevard, William Davidson, Lottie and Agnes Alexander. ³

Edgewood, as the plantation was known, was reportedly a well-run and prosperous farm which boasted a productive orchard, livestock and even honeybees in addition to the feed crops. The fine hospitality at Edgewood was legendary. "Squire" Robert Alexander, who served almost forty years as the local Justice of the Peace and was a member of the county court, was known for his love of reading and discussion rather than the traditional fox and deer hunts of the other planters. His interest in education was shown by his support of the Alexandria Academy and being an early trustee of Davidson College, from which his three sons graduated, and he was a longtime elder

of the Hopewell Church. Squire Alexander died in the midst of the raging War Between the States, and shortly thereafter there was a brief contemporary mention of the house by a refugee kinsman from Tennessee, Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey:

We stopped at night at Mrs. A. B. Alexander's, the bereaved widow of another kinsman. Her sons were all in the Southern army - as Chaplin, surgeon and commissary...the house was large, some better supplied with provisions and servants than we had met with. Mrs. Alexander proposed to board us for my daughter Mrs. Breck's services as governess of her daughter. I had to stay, of course, in Charlotte.

At the time, Dr. Ramsey had possession of the Tennessee funds of the Confederate treasury, which he was trying to keep from seizure by Federal troops. ⁴

When Robert D. Alexander died in 1863, Edgewood Farm was willed to son William D. Alexander.⁵ During the latter's long ownership of Edgewood (sixty-three years), both the county and the city of Charlotte underwent tremendous changes. When W. D. Alexander inherited the plantation, it was a part of the slave-owning, cotton-growing South, and the Civil War was raging, the aftermath of which would have a profound impact on the old system. Following the Reconstruction era, when much farming was done by tenants on a sharecropping basis, the New South industrialization of the Piedmont Carolinas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries forever changed the rural way of life. W. D. Alexander himself moved to Charlotte in 1911, where he bought a house in Fourth Ward on W. 5th Street.⁶ At his death in 1927, the home place was willed to his wife, Harriet Alexander, and upon her death in 1934, the farm house and 50 acres were sold by the heirs to a real estate concern, the Commonwealth Land Co. ⁷ The remainder of the Alexander estate was divided into five tracts, and sold individually, thus subdividing the century-old plantation.⁸

In recent times, the farmhouse has had several owners (Sarah W. Tate, 1936-42; Victor and Elizabeth Templeton, 1942-64; T. Bragg and Margaret D. McLeod, 1964-82).⁹ The present owner, Margaret Darden McLeod has taken great care to decorate every room in the house so as to continue its legacy of charm, comfort and hospitality. As one of Mecklenburg's fine antebellum plantation houses in superb condition, the county is fortunate to be able to retain such a site of clear historic value.

NOTES

¹ Charles W. Summerville, *The History of Hopewell Presbyterian Church* (Charlotte: Hopewell Presbyterian Church, 1939), pp. 97-98.

² *Ibid.*; Old Deed Book 22, p. 17, 17 Sept. 1830.

³ Summerville, p. 98; interview with Margaret Darden McLeod, 20 Dec. 1983.

⁴ Chalmers G. Davidson, *The Plantation World Around Davidson*, 2nd ed. (Davidson, N.C.: Mecklenburg Historical Association, 1973), pp. 73-75.

⁵ Will Book J. p. 164, July 1863.

⁶ Deed Book 277, p. 231, 30 March 1911.

⁷ Will Book U. p. 18, probated 11 May 1927; Deed Book 854, p. 234, 1 August 1934.

⁸ Map Book 4, p. 581.

⁹ Deed Book 886, p. 142, 4 May 1936; *Ibid.*, 1075, p. 497, 28 August 1942; *Ibid.*, 2580, p. 270, 21 October 1964.

Architectural Description

Joseph Schuchman
June, 1984

Edgewood Farm is one of the more significant antebellum plantation houses in northern Mecklenburg County. This transitional Federal/Greek Revival house was constructed by Robert Davidson Alexander (1796-1863) and his wife Abigail Bain Caldwell Alexander (1808-1889). Local tradition maintains that the house was constructed about 1840. Author Chalmers Gaston Davidson, in *The Plantation World Around Davidson*, states that the house was built about 1853.¹ Edgewood Farm presents a double pile arrangement, a two story center-hall plan two rooms deep on either side of the hall, and possesses paired interior chimneys. The existence of both of these elements is rare in surviving Mecklenburg County homes of this period. The

exterior has witnessed some alteration including the replacement of the original windows and porch supports; the interior is largely intact.

The house is set back from Eastfield (formerly Salisbury) Road and sits at the head of a curved drive. The double pile main block is of mortise and tenon construction. As is typical with classically inspired homes, fenestration is symmetrically arranged. Front and rear elevations are three bays wide while side elevations are two bays wide. Exterior openings are framed by simple two-part surrounds. 8/8 sash, the primary glazing arrangement, date from the 1950's and replaced the original window lights. The louvered window shutters were installed by the present owner, Margaret Darden McLeod; a turn of the century documentary photograph indicates the presence of louvered shutters. Corner boards rise to a boxed cornice on the front and rear elevations. Side elevations are nearly flush with the exterior wall. A cornice, narrower than the typical Greek Revival cornice, returns on the eaves. The central one-story porch is believed to be original; wrought iron supports, added by an earlier owner, replaced the wood columns. The entrance is flush sheathed and delineated by wood piers. The double leaf entrance door is flanked by symmetrically arranged ten pane side-lights, which are located above recessed molded panels. The entire composition is set in a molded splayed surround. The entrance door is noticeably narrow; according to local tradition, the narrow width was meant to discourage visits from strangers traveling on the Salisbury Road stagecoach, which ran past the house. The paired interior chimneys are of brick, arranged in a stretcher bond, and rise to a corbled top.

The one-story rear ell may have originally been a separate structure. It is believed that the gable roofed building was constructed as a kitchen, a function it continues to serve. A turn of the century photograph appears to indicate that this structure was unattached to the main house. A gable end chimney is of brick laid in stretcher bond and rises to a single step shoulder with a freestanding stack. The ell's fenestration has been altered.

A shed roof porch, which runs across most of the rear elevation, was enclosed about 1974 by the present owner. The date of the shed is unknown. The chamfered post supports indicate a turn-of-the-century construction date. The wall surface is flush horizontal board.

In 1965, the house was underpinned with brick, arranged in a stretcher pattern. The main block originally rested on massive blocks of fieldstone, which were incorporated in the underpinning. The main block is roofed with asphalt shingles. The ell and shed porch roofs are of tin.

The well-maintained interior is largely unaltered. Rooms are symmetrically arranged off a handsome center hall, which is ten feet wide. A straight run open string stair rises from the hall. Identical rectangular banisters and a chamfered newel post support the shaped handrail of this simply detailed staircase. A molded baseboard and chair rail frame the stair wall. Each main block chamber is simply detailed and encircled by a molded baseboard and cornice. Pine flooring is used throughout the house; all the flooring, except that in the center hall and one first story room, is original. Walls, which were originally covered with horsehair plaster, have been replastered. Solid brass fixtures remain throughout the main block and appear contemporary with its construction. As on the exterior, interior openings are set within two-part surrounds. Corresponding storage closets, believed to be original, are located in the dining and breakfast rooms, to the right of the center hall. Mantles are located in each of the four first story rooms and second story bedrooms in the main block. Each mantle is of simple pier and lintel construction, characteristic of vernacular Greek Revival motifs. The mantles are nearly identical in execution. First story mantles feature recessed pier detailing while second story mantles display plain piers. The kitchen, located in the rear ell, has been modernized.

A log house, with half-dovetail corners, stands to the rear of the main house. According to local tradition, Robert Alexander constructed this gable roof structure in 1829 to serve as a temporary residence until the completion of the main house. The open spaces between the logs, originally chinked with clay or mud, have been filled with concrete. The house retains some original features, including exposed beams; an exterior gable end wall has been stuccoed. The fieldstone chimney and shed appear to be later additions.

A brick wall and octagonal brick gazebo, off the rear of the main house, was built by the McLeod's and encloses a landscaped garden. Several frame outbuildings stand to the rear and house guest and storage facilities. Two of these outbuildings were moved to Edgewood Farm from nearby Mecklenburg County locations by the present owners.

Since their purchase of the house in 1964, the McLeod Family has undertaken a considerable maintenance effort. Edgewood Farm stands today as a reminder of the antebellum plantation economy. It recalls a lifestyle forever changed not only by the Civil War but also by the forces of technology and urbanization.

Footnote

¹ Chalmers Davidson's claim to an 1853 construction date is based upon the fact that land was willed to Robert Davidson Alexander in 1853, the year of the death of his uncle "Robin" Davidson of Holly Bend Plantation. In a telephone interview with Joseph Schuchman on June 22, 1984, Chalmers Davidson stated that he based the construction date of the house both on the year Robert Davidson Alexander acquired the land and also on the presence of paired interior chimneys, which Davidson claims did not appear in rural Mecklenburg County structures until about 1850. In 1830, Robert Davidson Alexander was given four hundred acres of land, which is believed to have formed the basis of his plantation, by his father William B. Alexander. Chalmers Davidson makes a strong correlation between house construction and the land acquired from "Robin" Davidson in 1853 but appears to make no correlation for the 1830 change of title.