

FLOW-LEE HOUSE



This report was written on Sept. 25, 1993

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Flow-Lee House is located at 4122 Hoodridge Lane, in Mint Hill, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

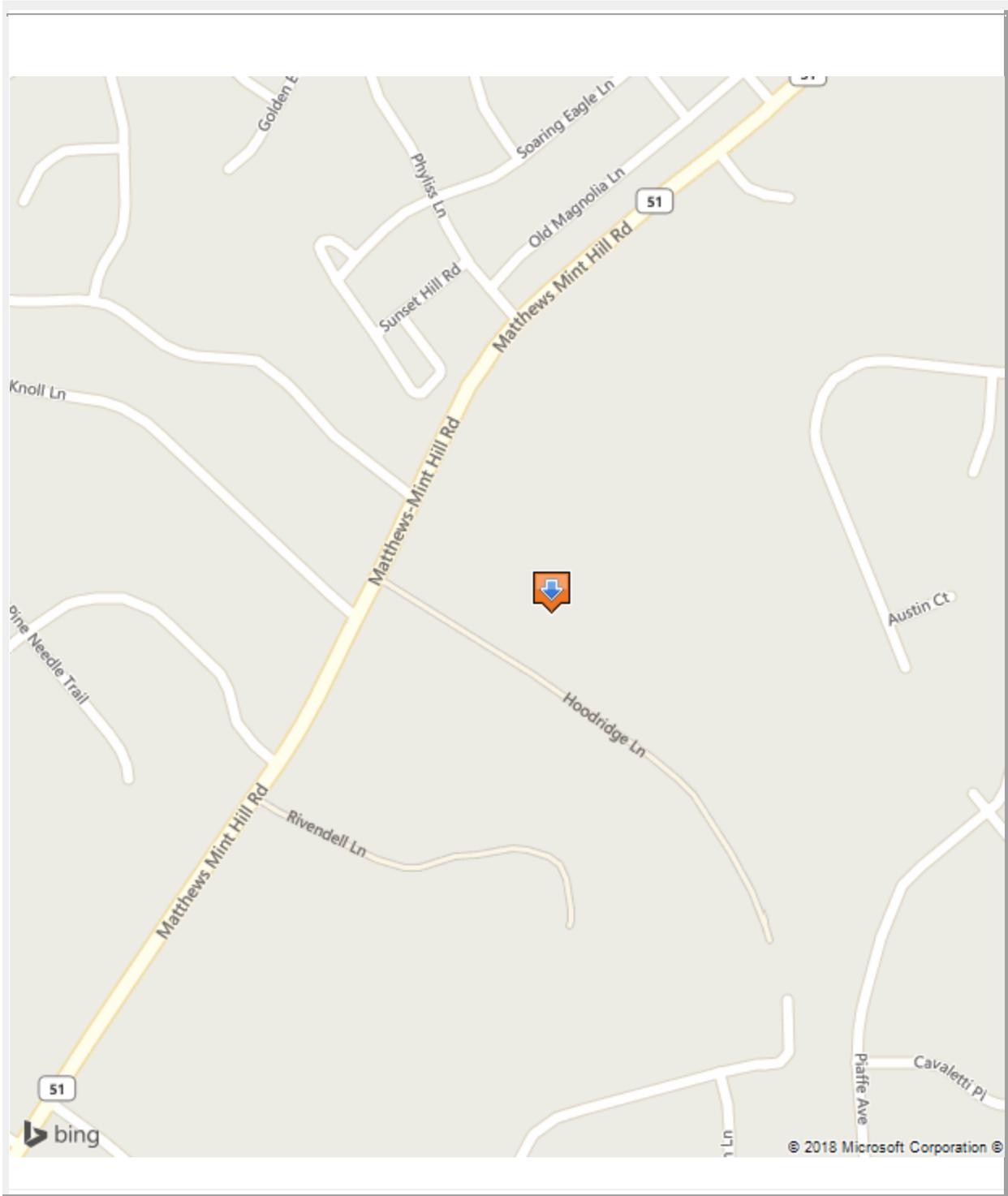
2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner of the property: The owner of the property is:

Catherine B. Curlee
4122 Hoodridge Lane
Charlotte, North Carolina 28227

Telephone: (704) 394-4838

3. Representative photographs of the property: This report contains representative photographs of the property.

4. Maps depicting the location of the property: This report contains maps which depict the location of the property.



Click on the map to browse

5. Current deed hook references to the properties: The most recent reference to the Flow-Lee House property, Tax Parcel Number 195-043-69, is listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 6907 at page 277.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Frances P. Alexander.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains brief architectural description of the property prepared by Frances P. Alexander.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the properties meet criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S. 160-400.5:

a. Special significance in terms of history, architecture, and cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Flow-Lee House property does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Flow-Lee House was built ca. 1890 and is one of the few historic buildings remaining in the crossroads community of Mint Hill; 2) as the home of a local cotton gin and mill owner, the Flow-Lee House is a vestige of the once predominant cotton culture of rural Mecklenburg County during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and 3) the Flow-Lee House is a rare surviving example of vernacular Victorian domestic architecture in the county.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association: The Commission contends that the architectural description by Frances P. Alexander included in this report demonstrates that the Flow-Lee House property meet 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 properties which become designated historic landmarks. The current appraised value of the improvements to the Flow-Lee House property is \$64,630. The current appraised value of Flow-Lee House, Tax Parcel Number 195-043-69 is \$22,500. The total appraised value of the Flow-Lee House property is \$87,130. Tax Parcel Number 195-043-69 is zoned R20.

Date of Preparation of this Report: 25 September 1993

Prepared by: Frances P. Alexander, M.A.
for
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Physical Description

Location and Site Description

The Flow-Lee House is now located on a sparsely developed residential street off Matthews-Mint Hill Road in Mint Hill, North Carolina. Formerly located in the town center of Mint Hill, the house was moved approximately 1 mile to this 1.19 acre site in 1992 when the structure was threatened with demolition.

The house occupies a large, roughly rectangular lot on the north side of Hoodridge Lane. Once part of a large farm tract owned by the Hood family, the area is now comprised of large, single family parcels, some of which are undeveloped. The house is the only building on this lot which is bounded by woods on the north side, a vacant parcel to the west, and a house to the east. Having been moved to this site recently, there is little landscaping. The proposed designation includes the house and the 1.19 acre tract on which the building is situated.

Architectural Description

Exterior The Flow-Lee House is a one story, wood frame dwelling with asymmetrical massing and a multiple gable roof. A hip roof porch extends across the facade (south elevation) and along the west elevation. The house rests on a modern brick foundation which replicates an alteration, made in the mid-1930s, of the original open brick pier foundation.

The house is covered in wooden German, or shiplap, siding, and there are molded pilasters at the corners of the house. The siding under the steeply pitched gables is laid in a herringbone pattern. The roof has wide, overhanging eaves and is covered in replacement asphalt shingles. One of the two brick chimneys has a decorative vernacular Victorian cap.

The porch has the original turned posts and railing pickets, reputedly constructed of heart of cedar, but the floor has been recently replaced because of deterioration. The porch roof has a single gable marking the entrance.

The windows on the facade and portions of the side elevations are one-over-one light, double hung, wooden sash with diamond shaped upper lights. The windows in the rear portions of the house are four-over-one light, double hung, wooden sash. All windows have molded surrounds.

The facade has a central entrance with a bay on the west side and a single window to the east. Decorative jigsaw millwork is evident above the porch roof where the gable projects over the bay. The single Eastlake door has replacement lavender stained glass in the upper section which is said to be the color of the original. There is no transom or sidelights. The original decorative wood framed screen door is also intact.

Two gable end bays project on the side elevations, with the porch terminating at a doorway to the projection on the west side. The paneled wooden door with single light upper section is original. On the east elevation, the end bay is three-sided. This east bay has the same jigsaw millwork found on the facade, marking the extension of the gable over the bay.

There is a rear ell with an enclosed hip roof porch extending along the east side of the ell. The porch was enclosed in the late 1940s, but has been remodeled in the past year with four one-over-one light, double hung, wooden sash windows and the addition of a wood framed, glass door. Until recently, the rear bay of the porch was open and had turned porch posts, but this bay has been enclosed to accommodate a bathroom.

Interior

The house originally had a center hall plan, but the front section of the hall was removed in the 1940s to create a larger parlor. The front entrance now leads directly into the parlor which has vertical beaded board wainscoting, molded chair railing, plaster walls, beaded board ceiling, molded cornice, and hardwood floors. A fireplace is located on the interior (north) wall. The classical mantel with scrolled overmantel and classically derived, turned posts is original as are the fire bricks which have been recently cleaned. The molded door and window surrounds with bull's eye modillions found in the parlor are repeated throughout the house. All rooms also have 12 foot high, beaded board ceilings except the ell porch which has a ceiling of German siding. The parlor has doorways leading to the dining room on the west side, and on the north side, to what is now an interior hall. The door to the dining room is an original paneled door, while the multiple light, hall door appears to have been added in the 1940s when the hall was remodeled.

The dining room has the same interior features as the parlor, including the vertical beaded board wainscoting, chair railing, hardwood floors, and paneled doors. However, the mantel in this room is not original, but was chosen because it was compatible with the period of construction for the house and because it matched the shadow outline of the original. This mantel has simple classically derived piers, but a highly decorative overmantel with an oval mirror, molded frame, classical columns, and a swag motif. Behind the dining room is a small closet (approximately 4 feet deep), covered in horizontal beaded board, which connects to what is now the kitchen.

The kitchen has a horizontal beaded board walls, vertical beaded board wainscoting, molded chair railing, hardwood floors, and an original fireplace mantel. The mantel is a heavy, vernacular fixture with turned posts and molded panels. Modern appliances and cabinets have been added along two walls. A door to the porch opens from the kitchen, which occupies the projecting west end bay. A wide doorway, situated in the center of the north kitchen wall, opens into one of two rear bedrooms.

The middle bedroom on the west side has the same horizontal beaded board walls above a vertical beaded board wainscoting and hardwood floors. French doors lead to the rear bedroom. Used earlier in this century as a kitchen, the second bedroom apparently was the scene of a stove explosion, and the horizontal beaded board walls show scars from this accident. Because of damage to the hardwood floors during the explosion, this bedroom is the only room to have carpet. A paneled door with multiple light upper section leads to the enclosed porch, which retains the once exterior shiplap sheathing and wooden floors. A modern bathroom is now situated in the rear portion of the enclosed porch. Added in the mid-1930s, a second bathroom is located at the juncture of the main house and the porch. This bathroom has new fixtures, with the exception of a footed tub, and linoleum flooring. Stained glass was used in the single window to

prevent the need for more extensive remodeling in this small room. This bathroom is also connected to the east bedroom.

The eight foot wide interior hall allows access to the parlor, kitchen, rear porch, and the east bedroom, located directly behind the parlor. This bedroom has the vertical beaded board wainscoting and molded chair railing found throughout the house, but the walls are plaster. A fireplace is located along the south wall and is identical to the one found in the parlor. The fireplace is flanked by two closets, one of which has a mid-twentieth century, two paneled door rather than the five paneled doors original to the house. Two small overhead storage areas are built into the wall above the closets.

Historical Overview

The Flow-Lee House was built ca 1890 by Thomas Jefferson Flow in the crossroads community of Mint Hill, twelve miles east of Charlotte. Little is known about Flow except that he was born in 1844, married three times, and had no children. He was also an elder in Philadelphia Presbyterian Church, one of the seven eighteenth century Presbyterian churches in the county, around which some of the earliest rural communities were established by the Scotch-Irish settlers. Flow married his third wife, Jeannette Davidson Rankin in 1905, and she continued to live in the house after his death in 1913 (Records of Catherine B. Curlee).

In 1920, John Newton Lee and his wife, Catherine Miller Wilson, bought the house and the eleven acre tract from Mrs. Flow (Letter of Clarkson, Taliaferro, and Clarkson, 6 April 1920). The Lees were also members of Philadelphia Presbyterian, and Mr. Lee owned three farms as well as operating a cotton gin and grist mill in Mint Hill. The family grist mill was located on Bain School Road. John Lee died in 1927, but his wife continued to live in the house with her son, Louis Wilson Lee, and his wife. During the Depression, Louis Lee, a carpenter and farmer, rented the two front rooms of the house to local school teachers, and the family continued to take in boarders through World War II. After Louis Lee's death, his widow remained in the house until 1984. From 1984 to 1988, the house was leased to tenants, but was vacant from 1988 to 1992 when the current owner bought the house. Rapid suburban growth since World War II has compromised many of the once rural communities of the county, and the Flow-Lee property, rezoned for business because of its location on one of the main streets of Mint Hill, was slated for demolition. The owner had the structure moved to its current site, approximately 1 mile south of its original location.

The Flow-Lee House was originally built near the center of this unincorporated market town, which served the surrounding cotton and corn farms. With a population of 100 in 1896, Mint Hill was not one of the larger rural villages in Mecklenburg County. The absence of rail connections undoubtedly limited the growth of the town. Indeed, the larger towns in the county, such as Davidson, Huntersville, Cowan's Ford, Matthews, and Pineville, all functioned as minor rail centers and, in many cases, supported textile mills which relied on rail access. Without such transportation facilities, Mint Hill remained an important, but smaller, rural market center. Local merchants or farmers, as represented by the Lees, often operated cotton gins where local farmers

would have their cotton ginned and baled for easier shipment to rail depots. In the case of Mint Hill, cotton was taken primarily to Matthews.

The Flow-Lee House was originally sited on the Matthews-Mint Hill Road, one of the principal routes connecting Mint Hill with Matthews to the south. This prominent location, and the attention to stylistic detailing found in this house, suggest that the Flows and Lees were fairly prosperous members of their community. In addition, the historic eleven acre site, which was too small to support farming, indicates that this house was a town house and associated with a mercantile family.

Conclusion

The Flow-Lee House has been moved from its historic location in the center of Mint Hill and therefore has lost its association with the historical and geographical development of the town. However, the house was never the centerpiece of a large farm operation so its current setting on a residential lot, still within the boundaries of Mint Hill, mitigates somewhat the loss of integrity of location. In addition, rapid suburban development in recent years has already compromised the historically rural character of Mint Hill, and despite being moved, the Flow-Lee House is one of the few late nineteenth century buildings to remain in Mint Hill.

The Flow-Lee House remains architecturally significant as a rare example of late nineteenth century domestic architecture in Mecklenburg County. In its substantial size and picturesque architectural elements, the house illustrates the general importance and prosperity of its owners, who had commercial as well as farming interests in this cotton-based agricultural community. The house retains its architectural integrity with few alterations since the 1930s and early 1940s. Since the move, the once-neglected house has undergone a largely sensitive restoration.

Bibliography

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Interview with Catherine B. Curlee, 17 September 1993.

Lefler, Hugh Talmadge and Albert Ray Newsome. *North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954.

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Letter to Mr. John N. Lee. Clarkson, Taliaferro, and Clarkson, Attorneys. 6 April 1920.

Files and Historic Photographs. Records of Catherine B. Curlee.