



THE GAUTIER-GILCHRIST HOUSE



This report was written on January 7, 1981.

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Gautier-Gilchrist House is located at 320 E. Park Ave. in Charlotte, N.C.

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

John B. Bloom & wife, Pamela Everhardt Bloom
320 E. Park Ave.
Charlotte, NC. 28203

Telephone: (704) 374-0328

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 listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 4142 at Page 568. The current tax parcel number of the property is 123-076-11.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property:

Dilworth, Charlotte's initial streetcar suburb, opened on May 20, 1891, when the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company, locally known as the Four Cs, began selling lots there.¹ Among the early residents of Dilworth was Mrs. A. R. Gautier, a wealthy widow in her 40's who moved from New York City to Charlotte in September 1895.² Her son, T. B. Gautier, had recently located in Charlotte and also lived in Dilworth with his family.³ A refined and sophisticated woman, Mrs. Gautier signed a contract in January 1896 to erect an imposing Colonial Revival style home on Park Avenue in Dilworth.⁴ After briefly living there, however, she sold the house in June 1896 and began arrangements to build another Colonial Revival style dwelling next door. Construction of the second house began in November 1896 and ended in early 1897.⁵ Now known as the Gautier-Gilchrist House, this structure is the only one of Mrs. Gautier's homes which survives in Dilworth.

The architect of the Gautier-Gilchrist House was Charles Christian Hook (1870-1932), a native of Wheeling, W. Va., and graduate of Washington University in St. Louis, Mo. Hook had come to Charlotte in 1891 to teach mechanical drawing in the Charlotte Graded School, which was situated in the building at the northern edge of Dilworth that had formerly housed the North Carolina Military Institute. By 1892, Hook had entered private practice as an architect.⁷ Most of his early commissions were for houses in Dilworth. On September 19, 1894, the *Charlotte Observer* reported that Hook had developed a specialty in the Colonial Revival style. It was this motif that C. C. Hook introduced into the built environment of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, in such imposing dwellings as the Villalonga-Alexander House, the Walter Brem House and, most notably, in the James B. Duke Mansion, also known as Lynnwood or White Oaks.⁸ But the Gautier-Gilchrist House is the oldest extant Colonial Revival style house that one can definitively attribute to C. C. Hook in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. Consequently, the structure occupies a position of great importance in the architectural history of this community.⁹

The life style which Mrs. Gautier maintained in Dilworth was elegant and tasteful. She was a gracious Victorian hostess. For example, she held exquisite teas in her home and superintended a luncheon there every Thursday.¹⁰ Mrs. Gautier was also active in the world of business. In January 1897, she purchased the Cherokee Inn, a hotel in Blacksburg, SC.¹¹ In March 1897, she bought the Mecklenburg Flouring Mill, which had opened in November 1895 on South Boulevard in Dilworth.¹²

When Mrs. Gautier purchased the Cherokee Inn in Blacksburg, SC, she met and became friends with Peter Spence Gilchrist (1861-1947) and his wife, Ethel B. Porter Gilchrist (1868-1954). Gilchrist, a native of Manchester, England, and a chemical engineer, had moved to Blacksburg in 1895 to become superintendent of a gold mine. He lived in the Cherokee Inn.¹³ Gilchrist was familiar with Charlotte having designed the plant in 1886 of the Charlotte Oil and Fertilizer Company.¹⁴ No doubt Mrs. Gautier also talked about her home

town during her visits to Blacksburg. On January 1, 1898, the *Charlotte Observer* noted that Mr. and Mrs. Gilchrist would move to Charlotte "in the course of a week or ten days."¹⁵ He, his wife and his son, John, moved into a home in Dilworth, and Mr. Gilchrist rent about the task of establishing himself as a consultant for the sulfuric acid industry. Soon thereafter, Gilchrist learned that his father, John Gilchrist, was coming from England for a visit. Gilchrist decided that he would have to build a grand home in Charlotte so that could entertain his father in proper opulence. His friend Mrs. Gautier, however, persuaded Gilchrist to buy her house on Park Avenue instead.¹⁶ "The most interesting realty transaction that has taken place lately was the sale by Mrs. A. R. Gautier of her elegant house at Dilworth to Mr. P. S. Gilchrist", the *Charlotte Observer* stated on March 3, 1898.¹⁷ The price was \$7500 - a substantial sum for a house at that time.¹⁸ The Gilchrists moved into the house in late March 1898. Mrs. Gautier rented a room in her former home until shortly after 1900, when she left Charlotte, probably to return to New York City.¹⁹ Mr. Gilchrist died in the home on December 31, 1947.²⁰ Soon thereafter, Mrs. Gilchrist sold the house but continued to reside in Charlotte until her death on September 6, 1954.²¹

Peter Spence Gilchrist established an international reputation as a chemical engineer. Indeed, in the opinion of the *Charlotte Observer*, his career was "perhaps unparalleled by that of any other Charlotte citizen."²² He was a pioneer in the development of the phosphate industry in the Southeastern United States; he designed and oversaw the installation of hundreds of sulfuric acid plants, both in this country and abroad, including Japan. "He furthered ideas which have become standard whereon sulfuric acid plants are built," the *Charlotte Observer* contended.²³ In 1914, he met with I. Heckenbleikner, T. C. Oliver and A. M. Webb in his office in his home to form the Chemical Construction Company, of which he was president until the firm was sold in 1932 to American Cyanamid. Gilchrist was vice-president of the Charlotte Chemical Laboratories, which was established in 1911. Moreover, Peter Gilchrist was active in civic and church affairs. For example, he was instrumental in the creation of Dilworth School. He was a charter member and a founder of Westminster Presbyterian Church. He served on the official boards of Queens College and the Presbyterian Foundation and was president of the Charlotte Y.M.C.A.²⁴

After Mrs. Gilchrist sold the house, it became a rooming house. Happily, However, in the late 1970's, Mr. and Mrs. Bloom purchased the house and have begun the process of restoring the house to its earlier grandeur.

Notes

¹ *Charlotte News* (May 20, 1891), p. 1.

² United States Census (1900). *Charlotte Observer* (September 26, 1895), p. 4.

- ³ Mr. Gautier lived in a home in Dilworth which belonged to Mr. John McDowell.
- ⁴ *Charlotte Observer* (January 18, 1896), p. 4.
- ⁵ *Charlotte Observer* (June 14, 1896) , p. 6. *Charlotte Observer* (November 27, 1896), p. 1. *Charlotte Observer* (February 9, 1897), p. 4
- ⁶ *Charlotte Observer* (November 27, 1896), p. 1.
- ⁷ *Charlotte News* (September 17, 1938), p. 12.
- ⁸ *Charlotte Observer* (September 19, 1894), p. 4. For detailed descriptions of the structures which Hook designed in Charlotte, see the various Survey and Research Reports which the Commission has deposited in the Carolina Room of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library on N. Tryon St. in Charlotte.
- ⁹ This writer believes that the Jones-Garibaldi House (1894) on E. Park Ave. is the oldest extant Colonial Revival design of Hook's in Charlotte. But no conclusive evidence has been found.
- ¹⁰ *Charlotte Observer* (September 25, 1897), p. 5. *Charlotte Observer* (October 12, 1897), p. 6.
- ¹¹ *Charlotte Observer* (January 22, 1897), p. 4.
- ¹² *Charlotte Observer* (March 14. 1897). p. 2. *Charlotte Observer* (November 26, 1895),
- ¹³ Graves in Elmwood Cemetery of Mr. and Mrs. Gilchrist. Peter Spence Gilchrist, Jr., *My Father Peter Spence Gilchrist* (Charlotte, N.C., 1943) p. 23. Hereafter cited as *Gilchrist*.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- ¹⁵ *Charlotte Observer* (January 1, 1898), p. 5.
- ¹⁶ *Gilchrist*, p. 25.
- ¹⁷ *Charlotte Observer* (March 3, 1898), p. 6.
- ¹⁸ *Charlotte Observer* (March 9, 1898), p. 5.
- ¹⁹ United States Census (1900). Charlotte City Directory (1901). *Gilchrist*, p. 25.
- ²⁰ *Charlotte Observer* (January 1, 1948), Sec. 2, pp. 1-5.
- ²¹ *Charlotte Observer* (September 7, 1954), Sec. B, p. 1.

²² *Charlotte Observer* (January 2, 1948), p. 14A.

²³ *Charlotte Observer* (January 1, 1948), Sec. 2, pp. 1 & 5.

²⁴ *Gilchrist*, pp. 28-29.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Caroline I. Mesrobian, Architectural Historian.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria set forth in NCGS 160A-399.4:

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture and/or importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Gautier-Gilchrist House does possess special historic significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) it is the oldest extant Colonial Revival style house that one can definitively attribute to C. C. Hook in Charlotte-Mecklenburg; 2) Charles Christian Hook was an architect of considerable local and regional importance; and 3) Peter Spence Gilchrist was a figure of great importance in this community and elsewhere.

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 Gautier-Gilchrist House meets this criterion.

9. 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 appraisal on the Gautier-Gilchrist House is \$7500. The current Ad Valorem appraisal on the .402 acres of land is \$6250. The most recent Ad Valorem tax bill on the house and land was \$248.61. The property is zoned R6.

Bibliography

Charlotte City Directory (1901).

Charlotte News.

Charlotte Observer.

Peter Spence Gilchrist, Jr., *My Father Peter Spence Gilchrist* (Charlotte, N.C., 1943).

Records of Elmwood Cemetery.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office.

Some Designs by Hook & Sawyer, Architects Charlotte, NC, 1892-1902. (Queen City Printing & Paper Co., Charlotte, N.C.).

United States Census (1900).

Date of Preparation of this Report: January 7, 1981.

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
3500 Shamrock Dr.
Charlotte, N.C. 28215

Telephone: (704) 332-2726

Architectural Description

The Gautier-Gilchrist House, built during 1896-97 from a design by Charles C. Hook, is one of the largest residences in Dilworth. The magnificent Colonial Revival style, two and one half story frame house stands five bays wide and three bays deep. The design, which originally had a T shape plan, has withstood a number of alterations over the years; these have substantially changed the orderly nature of the house.

The symmetrical facade has a center recessed entrance on both levels. The main entrance features double doors with sidelights and transom. This recess was enclosed around 1899, when Peter Gilchrist, a chemical engineer from Manchester, England, bought the house from Mrs. Gautier and converted the northwest wing into his offices; the entrance was enclosed to provide a separate entry to his business. Two double hung, 1/1, symmetrically placed windows flank the central entrance on both stories. The gabled slate roof with modillion cornice and inside end chimneys contains two large dormer windows with arched sash. A balustrade originally connected these windows. Old photographs show that a very

wide porch with balustrade originally wrapped around the front and sides of the main block on both levels. Slender classical columns on pedestals, which are still extant, supported the second story balcony. The house was reached originally by a semi-circular walk which led to a central staircase with flights located to the sides and a front balustrade.

The right elevation (northwest) features a small, single story addition; located directly behind the side porch, it contains a double hung, 1/1 window and a doorway. Sanborn Insurance maps show that this wing was added at some point between the 1911 and 1929 map issuance; it was used as part of Mr. Gilchrist's office. The second story of the house's main block contains two double hung, 1/1 windows, while a Palladian window is set into the gable end of the roof.

The rear elevation (southwest) is comprised of a central projecting block which does not appear to be original to the house but which is shown on the 1911 Sanborn Insurance map. Two double hung, 1/1 windows at one time pierced each story; the lower left window has been converted into an entrance. The gable of the roof contains a small Palladian window, and the cornice bears dentil work which runs around the main block of the rear elevation. Interior end chimneys rise from the main block. A small, single story addition with louver windows was added to the left of the central projecting block, perhaps during the early 1950s.

The first story porch was enclosed on the left elevation (south-east side) before the 1929 Sanborn Insurance map inventory was taken; it is now pierced by a four-part window. The second story features a later, enclosed sleeping porch. The attic story, in order to maintain the original symmetrical nature of the design, contains a Palladian window in the gable.

The Colonial Revival style used for the exterior design was not employed for the interior. Instead, the house is thoroughly Victorian and features a circular, flowing arrangement of space, darkly stained woods, and symmetrically molded door and window trim with corner blocks found throughout the house. The unusually large front entrance hall is highlighted by a three bay arcade of stained pine which is supported by classical columns and wall pilasters on paneled pedestals. A wide, classical staircase with finialed newel posts rise behind the arcade along the rear wall in two flights with a landing.

The function of a number of the remaining rooms on the first floor (ceiling height 11 feet) was changed when the Gilchrist family purchased the house. The northwest, front parlor and the kitchen area behind it were converted into Mr. Gilchrist's offices. The kitchen was then moved to the central rear section of the house, with the dining room located in the southeast rear room. The latter two areas are now two small apartments.

The most refined and relatively unaltered room is the northwest parlor which features a neo-classical mantel and overmantel with oval mirror, both of unpainted curly maple. Decoration includes carved rosettes, swags, and fluted columns which support shelves. The room's molded door and window surrounds are also of curly maple. A brass picture cornice surrounds the room, while an original brass combination gas and electric chandelier, which retains most of the frosted glass globes, is suspended from the center of the ceiling.

The second floor (ceiling height 10 feet) has five large rooms which are reached from a spacious center hall. Four of these bedrooms contain fireplaces with classical mantels. An enclosed sleeping porch joins the southeast rear bedroom. The northwest rear room was probably used originally as the servant's quarters. This floor is also distinguished by a number of large closets and storage areas, many with beautiful built-in shelves and drawers.

Sanborn Insurance maps show that there were two outlying structures located at the rear of the property. The large, one and one half story frame building with two double doors, located on the south corner of the lot, is still extant. Once a stable, it was later converted into a garage.