

THE E. B. GRESHAM HOUSE



This report was written on December 7, 1983

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the E. B. Gresham House is located at 724 Edgehill 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. Kwan Pang Lau and wife Myra C.

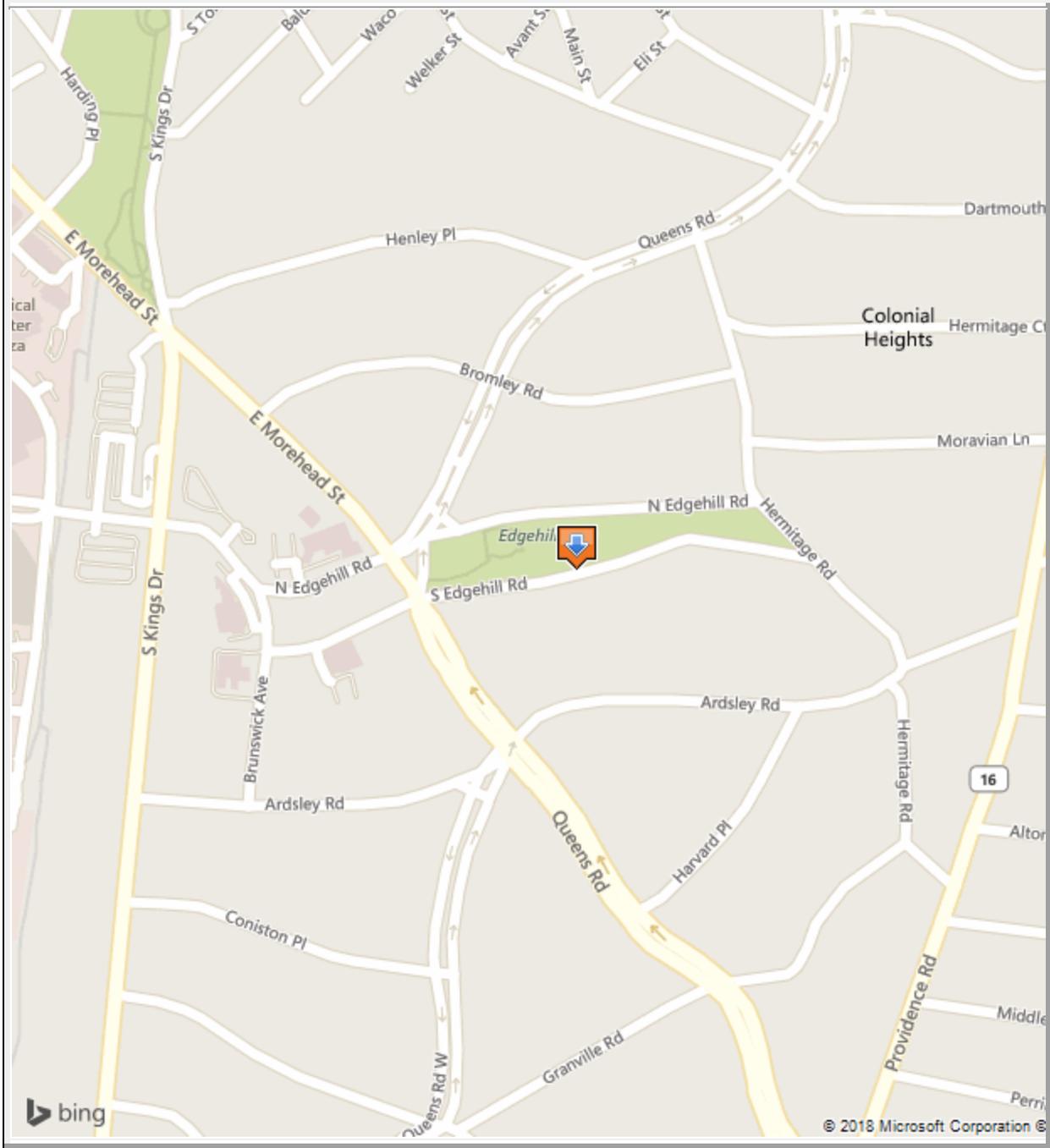
724 Edgehill Road

Charlotte, N. C. 28207

Telephone: (704) 377-9263

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 3952 at page 515. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 155-042-08.

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.

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 E. B. Gresham House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the E. B. Gresham House, built in 1924-25 by restaurateur E. B. Gresham and probably designed by Louis Asbury, noted Charlotte architect, is a distinctive example of the Bungalow style of architecture and contributes significantly to the architectural variety of Myers Park; 2) the E. B. Gresham House exhibits an interesting and rare effort in Charlotte-Mecklenburg to integrate country cottage features into a bungalow; and 3) the E. B. Gresham House has experienced minimal alterations over the years.

b. Integrity of design setting workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the attached architectural description by Miss Lisa A. Stamper demonstrates that the E. B. Gresham 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 .494 acres of land is \$22,000. The current appraised value of the improvements is \$147,190. The total current appraised value is \$169,190. The property is zoned R12.

Date of Preparation of this Report: December 7, 1983

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
1225 South Caldwell Street, Box D
Charlotte, North Carolina 28203

Telephone: 704/376-9115

Historical Overview

Dr. William H. Huffman
August, 1983

The E. B. Gresham house on Edgehill Road in Myers Park is unquestionably one of the more unusual houses of its style in Charlotte. Built by Edwin Beverly Gresham (1878-1968) and his wife, Nettle Dowd Gresham (1880-1945), in 1924-5, its setting overlooking Edgehill Park reflects a comfortable style of suburban living of the 1920's, and the unique architectural features of its stonework and imitation thatched roof suggest owners who wished to combine solidity in a contemporary home with a taste for the out-of-the-ordinary. E. B. Gresham, who was a Virginia native, married Nettle Dowd, the daughter of Capt. J. C. and Henrietta Rives Dowd of Charlotte, on October 17, 1899, when he was twenty-two and she nineteen.¹ By the early 1920's, E. B. Gresham, a graduate of Wake Forest, had become a department manager for the J. B. Ivey Company. The couple, with their son E. B. Gresham, Jr., who was studying for a career in law, lived on East Boulevard in Dilworth until about 1924, when they temporarily took up residence at 611 Hermitage Road in Myers Park.² The latter address, at the corner of Hermitage and Ardsley Roads and one short block south of Edgehill, had previously been the home of John H. Cutter, a prominent real estate investor-developer and cotton broker.³

Myers Park, one of Charlotte's early streetcar suburbs, was originally developed by businessman George Stephens, whose father-in-law, John Springs Myers, provided his 1200-acre farm for the Stephens Company project. From 1912, when the streetcar line was opened down Providence and Queens Roads to Queens College, through the Teens and Twenties, a number of homes were built in Myers Park, which was laid out by landscape architects John Nolen and Earl S. Draper.⁴ Some of these homes, such as the H. M. Wade house (1928-31) at 530 Hermitage Road and the Duke mansion just down the street, are among the grandest ever built in Charlotte, but around nearby Edgehill Park, the homes are those of middle class professionals, managers and small business owners of the time.⁵ Next door to the Greshams on Hermitage lived Adolph C. Thies, the brother of Oscar J. Thies, who was the president of the Thies-Smith Realty Company and a real estate developer-investor.⁶ Perhaps it was the Greshams' neighbor who put them in touch with Thies-Smith, for in July, 1924, the company took out a building permit to construct a seven-room house for them on Edgehill Road.⁷ The estimated cost of the dwelling, \$15,000, was unusually high for a one-story house of the time, but, considering its many special features which required both non-standard materials and the skilled craftsmanship to shape and fit the

stone and roofwork, it is understandable. The Greshams had purchased the half-acre lot on May 7, 1924 for \$6,500, and six days later Mr. Gresham applied for a permit for a water connection.⁸

The property had originally been sold by the Stephens Company to Mary A. Allen, the wife of Paul H. Allen, for \$1500 in 1912, but had not been built on. In January, 1924, M. G. and Myrtle Knox bought the tract for \$6000, but sold it the next month to J. J. and Nancy Akers for the same price. Less than three months later, it was owned by the Greshams.⁹ Although the delay of two months between the purchase of the land and the taking out of a building permit is not altogether unusual, it may help shed some light on the possible identity of the architect. When Thies-Smith was chosen as the builder of the house and applied for a building permit, no architect was listed on the application. A checkmark appears in the space provided for that information, which suggests that one had not yet been chosen. Thies-Smith used several Charlotte architects for the houses they built, including Louis Asbury, William Peeps, Fred Bonfoey and Franklin Gordon.¹⁰ While it has not been possible to determine the architect with complete certainty, there is an entry in Louis Asbury's job book for March, 1925 which notes that he designed a bungalow for Thies-Smith.¹¹ Of the over twelve hundred structures, great and small, designed by Louis Asbury in his nearly fifty-year career in Charlotte, only nine are listed as bungalows, and two of those were for Thies-Smith.¹² Thus it was unusual for him to design that style of house, but he would have been a good choice if one wanted something unique.

The son of Charlotte home builder S. J. and Martha Moody Asbury, Louis (1877-1975) graduated from Trinity College (now Duke University) in 1900, and then studied architecture at MIT. When he returned, he became the first Charlotte native to be a professionally-trained architect. Among the important designs in Charlotte to come from his office are the J. P. Carr house (1909), the old County Court House (1928), the First National Bank Building (1915), the Law Building (1926), Myers Park Methodist Church (1928), the old Eferds Department Store (1922), the Garibaldi and Bruns store (1909), and the residences of Charles Moody (1913), J. B. Ivey (1914), O. J. Thies (1921) and many others. Altogether, Asbury executed twenty-two commissions for Thies-Smith between 1917 and 1928.¹³ Clearly, he was an architect of great versatility and skill.

The Gresham house incorporates some distinct design features which make it one-of-a-kind in the neighborhood. The exterior walls and porch columns are eighteen inches thick and made from granite cut to fit on the site. Facing the house, one sees the large, open front porch offset to the right, and on the left is the gracefully curved front corner of the living room, which has a continuous span of leaded glass windows hand-crafted to fit the rounded space. For added strength, 4 x 10 inch sill (wall) girders were employed in the construction.¹⁴ In addition to the handsome marble mantelpiece in the living room, the other striking feature of the house is the shape of the roof, for which special framing techniques had to be used to achieve the rounded look of a thatched roof. About the time the house was being built in 1925, E. B. Gresham went into business for himself and opened a cafe on Statesville Avenue.¹⁵ Four years later, in November, 1929, the Greshams sold the stone bungalow to George B. and Lily Wray Cabaniss,¹⁶ and moved to Greensboro, where Mr. Gresham again went into the restaurant business. Nettle and E. B. Gresham remained in Greensboro, she passing away there in 1945 and he in 1968 at the age of 90.¹⁷ George Cabaniss (1866-1937) and his wife Lily (d. 1940), who had

a women's clothing business on West Trade Street and lived on Hawthorne Lane, never lived in the house, but rented it to various tenants from 1929 to 1937.¹⁸

In the latter year, the Cabanisses gave the house to their daughter Martha (1909-1977) on March 25, which was the day of her wedding to Ernest F. Young, Jr. (1904-1975). Ernest Young, who was head of the insurance firm he co-founded, Davis and Young, Inc., and Martha lived in the house and raised their two sons, Ernest and Barnett, there for forty-some years until they passed away. About twenty five years ago, they added on a large panelled room with bath to the rear of the house.¹⁹ In the mid-seventies, Kwan Pang Lau, a native of mainland China and then Taiwan after the communist takeover in 1949 and now an engineer for Duke Power Co., used to ride his bicycle by the stone bungalow on Edgehill, but could not see it because of the overgrowth of shrubbery. On one occasion, he stopped to see a friend who had bought and was refurbishing the house next door, and for the first time he saw that it was a stone house with unusual design. Thus when he saw it advertised for sale in 1977 following the death of Martha Young, he eagerly rushed to put down a deposit to buy the house he had admired earlier. The present owners, Kwan Pang Lau and his wife, Myra Clontz Lau, a native Carolinian, have spent many hours carefully reconditioning the house to restore and preserve its main features while modernizing where necessary, including landscaping. Thus will a sturdy house of unusual design be kept as part of Charlotte's architectural heritage, a house which stems from and reflects the solidity of the growth and prosperity of the Twenties and thereby became a landmark of Myers Park.²⁰

NOTES

¹ Mecklenburg County Record of Marriages, 1899.

² Charlotte City Directories, 1922-24; *Greensboro Daily News*, Aug. 16, 1968, p. 4D.

³ Interview with John H. Cutter III, 15 Feb. 1983.

⁴ "The New South Neighborhoods: Myers Park," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, May, 1981.

⁵ Charlotte City Directory, 1923/4, p. 1048.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Building Permit No. 5323, 3 July 1924.

⁸ Deed Book 533, p. 532, 7 May 1924.

⁹ Deed Book 409, p. 40, 25 June 1919; Deed Book 525, p. 220, 29 Jan. 1924; Deed Book 518, p. 599, 12 Feb. 1924.

¹⁰ Interview with Frank Thies, Charlotte, N.C., 2 August 1983.

¹¹ Louis Asbury Papers #4237, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; Job no. 605, 26 March 1925.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.; information on file at Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission.

¹⁴ See note 7.

¹⁵ Charlotte City Directory, 1925, p. 422.

¹⁶ Deed Book 760, p. 173, 12 Nov. 1929.

¹⁷ *Greensboro Daily News*, Aug. 16, 1968, p. 4D; *Charlotte News*, Oct. 17, 1945, p. 3A.

¹⁸ Charlotte City Directories, 1929-37.

¹⁹ Deed Book 912, p. 184, 25 March 1937; interview with Ernest F. Young, Jr., Charlotte, N.C. 5 August 1983.

²⁰ Interview with Kwan Pang Lau and Myra Clontz Lau, Charlotte, N.C. 30 July 1983.

Architectural Description

By Lisa Stamper

Overlooking the serene Edgehill Park in the prestigious Myers Park neighborhood, the E.B. Gresham House is a very unique stone home in an area characterized by large, formal Tudor Revival residences. Not only is the home's Bungalow Style unusual to the area, but it is also a unique variation of the style itself. Built in 1924-25, possibly by a prominent architect in the area. Louis Asbury (see Dr. William Huffman's historical sketch), the E.B. Gresham House is today very much like its original interior and exterior condition. This charming home is one-story high, with a half-basement and full attic. A covered front porch is located on its southeastern corner. A rear, one-story rectangular clapboard addition with a flat roof has been built on the northeastern corner of the house. The addition is not obviously visible from the

street and changes little of the historic character of the dwelling. The interior plan is almost unaltered from the original.

The original portion of the house contains nine rooms: one kitchen, two bedrooms with connecting baths, and one master bedroom with bath. One foyer, the dining room, and the sunroom all are located at the front of the home. The other rooms are located on either side of a central hall which leads from the living room to the rear addition. The only alterations have been the removal of a wall between the kitchen of the master bath, and the creation of the kitchen, the remodeling of the master bath, and the creation of the foyer beside the kitchen. Also, an addition was connected to the rear of the house which extended the hall and added a den with bath. A simple wooden central stair is located to the eastern front side of the central hall. The stair leads up to the attic and down to the basement. The railing is simply constructed with only slight decoration of straight lines.

The interior seems delicate compared to the massiveness of the exterior. Almost all original doors and their fixtures are intact along with original doors and original light fixtures. A unique lighting fixture of this building is that the closets have individual light fixtures which automatically turn on the closet light when one opens the door. Most of the original simple molding is present well as the wainscoting, except one in one bedroom which was painted after a fire gutted it. The living room contains a delicate light and dark colored marble mantle. Many of the original bathroom fixtures are still used. The kitchen still contains original cabinets in what was once the breakfast room. Wooden floors are still intact. The attic is made of pine flooring, ceiling and paneled walls. The structure of the roof is hidden behind the simple pine wood paneling. A cedar closet was most probably used to store clothing, etc. The door to the closet contained five horizontal panels. A small trap door with a simple wooden ladder allows one to climb onto the roof. The half-basement shows that the foundation is made of brick. It has a concrete floor. Several brick walls create small spaces which might have been used as servants' rooms or storage of some sort. An original toilet and large concrete on metal legs double-sink which was used by the servants have not been removed from the basement. An arched opening leads to the stairs that rise to the exterior. Originally, the E.B. Gresham House was heated by a coal burning boiler located in the basement. It was removed when a central air unit was installed. The radiator in the kitchen is still intact, but the others were removed. Most of their decorative metal coverings are stored in the basement.

This Bungalow Style home was meant to look like an informal, quaint, cottage that one might stumble across in the European countryside. This theme is expressed through the overall irregular shape of the building, which is very "organic" looking. The roof-line is the dominant feature that creates the organic, natural appearance. It expresses this theme both in its shape and materials. Moreover, it shows uninhibited creativity of the architect and excellent craftsmanship of the builder. The roof contains an attic and covers the whole of the original dwelling, including the front porch. The middle of the roof is flat with an irregular shape which corresponds with the plan, but this is not apparent from street level. The roof curves in a convex manner down from its flat part over the wide eaves, hiding the gutters. Not only does the roof curve in a somewhat vertical direction, but it also curves horizontally to conform to the irregular shape of the building. Also, the wide eaves of the front facade allow warming sunlight into the interior through the leaded glass windows in the winter, while shading the windows from the high, hot

sun during the summer months. In the center of the front of the roof, four adjacent windows were created to allow light into the attic. Each window has six panes of glass. A curved, wooden framed opening in the roof surrounds and decorates these windows. On the southwestern part of the roof, an enclosed granite chimney breaks through the organic roofline. The chimney is rectangular and tapered to be smaller at the top than at the bottom.

The roof shape was created by placing convex curved pieces of wood on top of 4" x 10" beams radiating diagonally from the corners this structure forming irregular, horizontal bands which emphasized the natural curves. The cedar was painted a dark green color, probably to simulate moss. This gave the home the romantic ambiance of a "moss covered stone" European dwelling. Today, black tarred shingles cover the cedar shingles. It is not certain how many layers of roofing material lay in between: maybe one or two. Even though the newer covering changes the color and texture of the original roof, it does not alter the shape. The Bungalow Style building is characterized by the use of natural materials. In this case, granite was used to construct the main portion of the house. The granite, probably from a quarry in Winnsboro, S.C., was cut on the site into massive, irregular-shaped eighteen inch thick blocks. The front facade seems to be composed of three sections: the covered irregular shaped porch to the southeast, the curved middle section, and the rectangular southwest corner. Sandstone steps lead up to either side of the quarry tiled porch floor from the driveway and the front walk. Three massive granite piers, squarish and tapered like the chimney, support the attic and roof above the porch. Decorative but simple woodwork with brackets embellish the porch's roofline.

Also, simple wooden balustrade around the perimeter of the porch is complementary to the design but is not original. Two doors lead from the porch to the interior. A double-door allows one to enter into the dining room and a single door leads one into a window. The porch and southwest portion of the house is connected by a curved wall. This wall contains seven rectangular leaded glass windows which open vertically by a brass interior crank on the curve of the wall, but they all appear to be of the same dimensions. The rectangular southwestern section contains a double door which enters into a small studio/sunroom. Steps lead from the ground level to a small platform in front of the door. The roof provides a connecting element for these three different sections of facade which is aesthetically pleasing to the eye. The western facade contains four wooden framed windows, and one metal framed window. The wooden framed windows are original. They are double-sashed windows which have six-over-one lights. The other has one-over-one light. The eastern facade has five windows with one-over-one lights. Although these windows have metal frames and are newer, they are patterned after the original wooden framed windows at the rear. Two of the adjacent windows are smaller than the others because they let light in above the sink in the kitchen. Near the rear, a couple of steps lead up to a door which enters into a foyer beside the kitchen. An original set of metal benches connected by a round arched trellis sits outside the doorway. To the north of this door is a set of stairs which lead down to the half-basement. Presently the opening to these stairs is covered with plywood boards. The rear of the house is halfway covered by a one-story mid-1950's addition. The northeast half has two-double-sashed one-over-one light windows. One window is original and the other has been replaced to match.

Although the building has had a few alterations over the years, the surrounding site has had many. The back portion of the property is now fenced. The driveway used to run from the road,

by the eastern side of the home, and around to the back where a two-story, two-car garage was located. According to the present owners, the garage had apartments in its second-story, possible for servants. The rear portion of the drive has been altered, but almost all of the foundation plantings are original. The bushes in front of the curved part of the front facade have been removed along with the bushes which lined the front wall. The E.B. Gresham House is still in its original location, in basically its original condition, and in the surroundings for which it was designed. It is an excellent example of how an older building can be comfortably adapted to modern living without destroying its historic significance. It is a very unique and well-thought out product of the mid-1920's and 1930's innovative architectural thought. Charlotte cannot afford to lose nor ignore this home because of these beneficial traits. This dwelling's excellent construction, its unique qualities, and its rare form add a refreshing contrast to the formal atmosphere of its Myers Park neighborhood.