

THE WILLIAM GRIER HOUSE



This report was written on February 1, 1978

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the William Grier House is located on Steele Creek Rd. opposite from its intersection with Shopton Rd. in the southwestern portion of Mecklenburg County.

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

The present owner of the property is:

Mrs. Agnes S. Byrum
RFD 3
Box 187
Charlotte, NC 28210

Telephone: (704) 588-0434

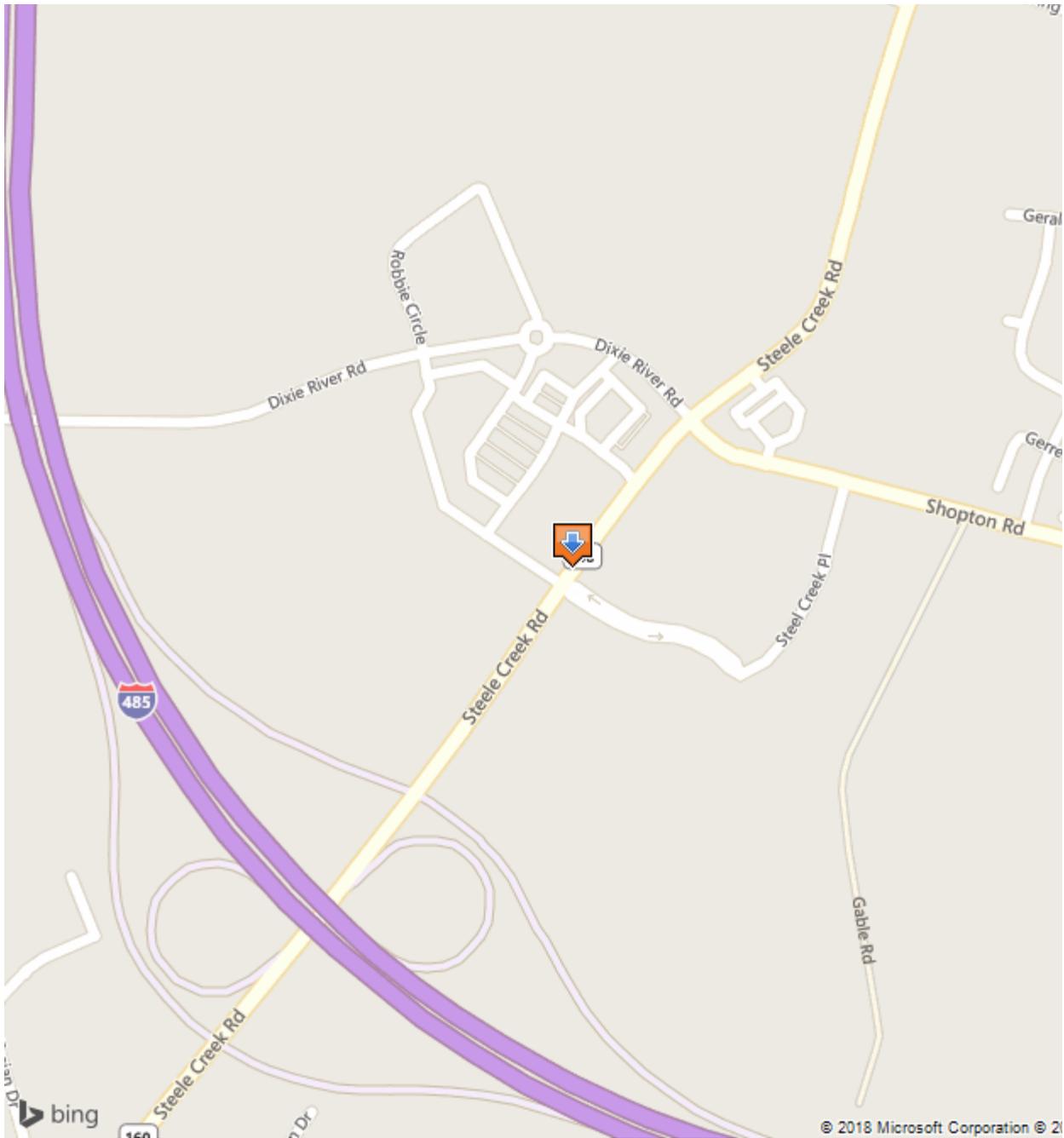
The present occupant of the property is:

Mrs. Marion Starnes
RFD 4
Box 467
Charlotte, N.C. 28208

Telephone: (704) 588-0673

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 depicting the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent reference to this property is found in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 3753 at page 974. The Parcel Number of the property is 1411210. This report contains a complete chain of title for the William Grier House.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property:

Among the early Scotch Irish settlers of the Steele Creek Community was James Grier, who died on June 29, 1784, at the age of seventy. In the mid-1740's Mr. Grier and his wife, Margaret, conceived and gave birth to a son whom they named Thomas. Thomas Grier, who lived until

January 29, 1828, married twice. By his first wife, Hannah Alexander, he had four children who attained adulthood. Susannah Grier, daughter of James and Catherine Spratt, was his second wife, by whom Thomas Grier had nine children. Among the sons produced by this union was William M. Grier, born August 20, 1804.¹ It is clear that Thomas Grier was a farmer of considerable prominence in the Steele Creek Community in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Indicative of his economic prowess is the fact that in 1820 he owned twenty-nine slaves, a large number for a Mecklenburg planter of that era.² The *Catawba Journal* of February 5, 1828, characterized Thomas Grier as a "highly respectable and most valuable citizen."³ One can logically infer that he possessed the economic means to erect the house which still stands on Steele Creek Rd. Thomas Grier's Last Will and Testament, dated January 23, 1828, contains a codicil which proves that the structure was being built for William M. Grier at that time. It reads as follows:

"It is my will that the frame of a house now on hand for my son William M. Grier be put up and raised on the cite (sic) now chosen by the said William and that he be assisted out of my estate to complete said house and finish it...."⁴

William M. Grier married twice. His first wife was Minerva W. Grier, daughter of John Hayes of Lincoln County. She died on May 29, 1837, at the age of twenty-seven.⁵ Their only child, Minerva William Susan Grier, died on August 19, 1838.⁶ The second wife of William M. Grier, who was to outlive her husband, was Ferriby C. Grier.⁷ The most notable child of this union was Calvin E. Grier, a soldier in the army of the Confederate States of America who later moved to Charlotte and became one of the "brightest lawyers" in this community.⁸ William M. Grier died on May 30, 1870, having been "afflicted for the last (sic) six months with paralysis."⁹ Ferriby C. Grier lived until September 27, 1878, when she expired at the age of sixty-nine.¹⁰ In 1867 William M. Grier had sold his homeplace to Margaret Jane Lewis, a daughter of his half-sister, Susan Grier White.¹¹ Included in the inventory of items purchased by Margaret Jane Lewis were "900 pounds of bacon, an old carriage and harness, and seven spittoons."¹² Mrs. Lewis retained the property until January 12, 1888, when she sold all but a ten acre tract to Robert Franklin Byrum.¹³ Mr. Byrum, born on June 9, 1862, "was a successful farmer and enterprising citizen of the community." He and his wife, Janie Porter Byrum, had six children, three sons and three daughters. He died on June 1, 1925,¹⁴ having made provisions for the division of his estate whereby his son, Fred K. Byrum, acquired the house.¹⁵ Fred K. Byrum served in the United States Army during World War I and was thereafter associated with the C. W. Upchurch Motor Co., a local Studebaker dealer on W. Trade St. He died of a heart attack on January 29, 1936, at the age of forty-eight.¹⁶ The three children of Fred K. Byrum and his wife, Margaret Rudisill Byrum, retained joint ownership of their father's estate until May 12, 1969, when they divided the property among themselves and gave ownership of the house to Robert Franklin Byrum,¹⁷ who was an associate of his uncle, W. Lester Byrum, in operating Byrum's General Store.¹⁸ Robert Franklin Byrum died on February 7, 1973¹⁹ and his widow, Agnes S. Byrum, has owned the house since that time.²⁰ She continues the practice of her husband in operating the structure as rental property.



Making History: The William Grier House



Location: On Steele Creek Road opposite from its intersection with Shopton Road.

Built: In 1828, according to instructions left in the will of James Grier, an early Scotch-Irish settler. The house was specifically intended for William Grier, his son from his second marriage.

Architecture: The Federal-style plantation is a two-story frame house. A rear 1½-story frame wing contains a transitional Federal-Greek revival trim and was apparently added around 1840.

History: William Grier married twice. His first wife was Minerva Grier, who died on May 23, 1827, at the age of 27. Their only

child, Minerva Susan Grier, died Aug. 19, 1838. Grier's second wife, Ferriby Grier, outlived her husband. From this marriage came Calvin Grier, a soldier in the Confederate Army who later moved to Charlotte and became one of the brightest lawyers in the community. William Grier died May 30, 1870, having been afflicted for the last six months of his life with paralysis. Ferriby Grier died in 1878 at the age of 69.

SOURCE: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission Survey and Research Report. Historic report by Dr. Dan Morrill. Architectural report by Ruth Little-Stokes. Com-

Footnotes

¹ Mrs. Robert McDowell, *A List of those Buried in Historic Steele Creek Burying Grounds* (Charlotte: 1953), pp. 36-37. Hereafter cited as *List*.

² The United States Census (1820), p. 178.

³ *Catawba Journal* (February 5, 1828) p.3.

⁴ Mecklenburg County Will Book A, p. 163.

⁵ *Charlotte Journal* (June 2, 1837) p. 3.

⁶ *Charlotte Journal* (August 24, 1838) p. 3.

⁷ *Daily Charlotte Observer* (September 28, 1878) p. 3.

⁸ *The Daily News* (May 2, 1889) p. 1.

⁹ *The Western Democrat* (June 7, 1870) p. 3.

¹⁰ *Daily Charlotte Observer* (September 28, 1878) p. 3.

¹¹ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 7, p. 268.

¹² Mecklenburg County Deed Book 5, p. 170.

¹³ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 57, p. 513.

¹⁴ *The Charlotte Observer* (June 2, 1925).

¹⁵ Mecklenburg County Will Book U, p. 9.

¹⁶ *The Charlotte Observer* (January 30, 1936) sec. 1, p. 14.

¹⁷ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 3114, p. 35.

¹⁸ Mecklenburg County Will Book 10, p. 16.

¹⁹ *The Charlotte Observer* (February 9, 1973) p. 2C.

²⁰ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 3753, p. 974.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains an architectural description prepared by Ms. Ruth Little-Stokes, architectural historian.

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

a. Historical and cultural significance: The historical and cultural significance of the property known as the William Grier House rests upon three factors. First, the structure formed the focal point of an antebellum plantation in Mecklenburg County. Second, the structure is one of the few Federal style plantation houses which survives in Mecklenburg County. Third, individuals of local prominence have inhabited the structure.

b. Suitability for preservation and restoration: There is reason to believe that the structure might be so structurally unsound as to render its preservation and restoration infeasible. However, every effort should be made to retain the structure. Moreover, existing documentation would provide ample information to guide the preservation and restoration of the structure.

c. Educational value: The William Grier House has educational value because of the historical and cultural significance of the property.

d. Cost of acquisition, restoration, maintenance or repair: At present, the Commission has no intention of purchasing the fee simple or any lesser included interest in this property. The Commission presently assumes that all costs associated with renovating and maintaining the structure will be paid by the owner or subsequent owner of the property.

e. Possibilities for adaptive or alternative use of the property: The property, presently zoned for residential use, is not suitable for a commercial adaptive use. The house could be converted into a house museum.

f. Appraised value: The current tax appraisal of the improvements on the property is \$630. The current tax appraisal of the 6.02 acres of land is \$45,690. The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for a deferral of 50% of the rate upon which Ad Valorem taxes are calculated.

g. The administrative and financial responsibility of any person or organization willing to underwrite all or a portion of such costs: As stated earlier, the Commission has no intention of purchasing the fee simple or any lesser included interest in this property. Furthermore, the Commission presently assumes that all costs associated with the property will be paid by the present or subsequent owners of the property.

9. Documentation of why and in why ways the property meets the criteria established for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places: The Commission judges that the property known as the William Grier House does meet the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places. Basic to the Commission's judgment is its knowledge that the National Register of Historic Places, established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, represents the decision of the Federal Government to expand its recognition of historic properties to include those of local, regional, and State significance. The Commission believes that the investigation of the William Grier House contained herein demonstrates that the property is of local importance. Consequently, the Commission judges the property known as the William Grier House does meet the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places.

10. Documentation of why and in what ways the property is of historical importance to Charlotte and/or Mecklenburg County: The property known as the William Grier House is historically important to Mecklenburg County for three reasons. First, the structure formed the focal point of an antebellum plantation in Mecklenburg County. Second, the structure is one of the few Federal style plantation houses which survives in Mecklenburg County. Third, individuals of local prominence inhabited the structure.

Chain of Title

1. Deed Book 3753, p.974 (July 22, 1974).

Grantor: Carol Byrum Simpson & husband, Danny W. Simpson Patricia Byrum & husband, C. Daryl Byrum

Grantees: Agnes S. Byrum, widow

2. Deed Book 3114, P Re 35 (May 12, 1969)

Grantors: Nancy Jane Byrum Jackson & husband, W. N. Jackson William Albert Byrum & wife, Shirley White Byron

Grantees: Robert Franklin Byrum

3. Will Book U. p. 9 (April 15, 1927).

Devisor: R. F. Byrum

Devisee: John E. Byrum, Fred K. Byrum, W. Lester Byrum, Kate Alice Knox, Irene Youngblood, Frankie Byrum

4. Deed Book 57, page 513 (January 12, 1888)

Grantor: Mrs. M. J. Lewis of Chester Co., SC

Grantee: R. F. P. Byrum

5. Deed Book 7, page 268 (May 11, 1871).

Grantor: William M. Grier

Grantee: Margaret Jane Lewis

6. Deed Book 5, p. 170 (March 26, 1867).

Grantor: William M. Grier

Grantee: Margaret Jane Lewis

7. Will Book I, p. 225 (March 29, 1850).

Devisor: Susannah Grier

Devisee: Andrew Grier, William M. Grier, Zenas A. Grier, Margaret Jane White

8. Will Book A, p. 161 (February 4, 1825).

Devisor: Thomas Grier

Devisee: James Grier, Thomas L. Grier, Alexander Grier, Andrew Grier, William M. Grier, Zenas Grier

Bibliography

An Inventory of Older Buildings in Mecklenburg County and Charlotte for the Historic Properties Commission.

Catawba Journal

Charlotte City Directories

Charlotte Journal

Daily Charlotte Observer

Mrs. Robert McDowell, *A List of those Buried in Historic Steele Creek Burying Grounds* (Charlotte: 1953).

Mecklenburg County Estate Records

Records of the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office

The Charlotte Observer

The Western Democrat

United States Census Records

Vital Statistics of Mecklenburg County

Date of Preparation of this Report: February 1, 1978

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
139 Middleton Dr.
Charlotte, NC 28207

Telephone: (704) 332-2726

Architectural Description

Summary of Significance

The William Grier House, a two-story frame house site, faces Steele Creek Rd. on the outskirts of the settlement of Shopton in southern Mecklenburg County. The main block, three bays wide and two bays deep, was constructed in 1828, and contains ornate woodwork in the mature Federal style. The rear one and one-half story frame wing contains traditional Federal-Greek Revival trim, and was apparently added ca. 1840. The house retains a substantial portion of its original design, although various interior partition walls have been added, the eaves and chimneys of the main block have been reworked, and the present wrap-around front porch is an early twentieth century replacement of the original porch. The William Grier House is an important vestige of early Mecklenburg County, for its finely crafted ornate Federal trim and interesting Flemish bond chimney are a precious remnant of an era when quality was assured by hand craftsmanship. The framework of the house is in a dangerous state of deterioration, and if the house is to be preserved it needs immediate attention.

Detailed Description

The most striking feature of the main facade is its asymmetry. The center front door is located slightly west of center, and the center second story window is located slightly east of center. The east bay windows are much closer to the facade corner than the west bay windows. This inharmonious spacing is probably the result of the pragmatic approach of the builder and the disregard of both builder and owner to then-fashionable standards of asymmetry. The position of the front door equalizes the size of the hall and parlor. The position of the second story window accommodates the attic stair in the west room. The result of this functional approach to openings is comical when viewed with the present-day porch, whose cross-gable entrance is exactly centered. The exterior fabric of the main block consists of replacement lapped siding, small sash windows (nine-over-nine lights on the first story, nine-over-six on the second) with molded surrounds, and small gable end windows which probably originally contained six pane casements and now have replacement sash. The front door is a twentieth century replacement but retains its original four pane transom and molded surround. The rear doorway transom and surround are identical to those at the front of the house, but the original six raised panel door remains at the rear. The additional rear door in the east room has a six flat paneled door and transom, and was probably added during construction of the rear wing. A window in the rear wall of the east room is now closed up, and is another indication that the wing is an addition. The first story of the main facade is covered with hand-planed flush sheathing, indicative of the original presence of a one-story porch.

The gable roof has boxed, molded eaves with large pattern boards. These appear to have been rebuilt, for the gable end fascia board cuts off a corner of the gable end window. Federal houses in this geographic region customarily have flush raking cornices ornamenting the gable ends. The single stepped shoulder exterior end chimneys have stone bases, and are laid in random common bond brick. These are probably late nineteenth century replacements, for Federal chimneys are usually laid in Flemish bond or a regular pattern of common bond. The house rests on a fieldstone pier foundation, infilled at a later date with brick. The only portion of

the frame which is visible to the attic construction. This consists of hand-hewn rafters with pegged peaks. Early machine-made square head nails were found in the rafters. The rear wing has lapped siding, nine-over-six sash with molded surrounds (some in pairs), and four-over-four sash in the rear gable end. The wing was apparently built in a one room wide form, with a single exterior end chimney at the rear, and was enlarged in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century to its present two-room width. At this time the room line was altered, and additional sash and a small rear brick chimney were added. The original rear chimney is laid in Flemish bond, with a single stopped shoulder. The chimney is one of the most interesting feature of the house, for the handmade brick are unusually large. The interior of the main block was originally a hall-and-parlor plan on both floors. The front entrance originally opened into the west room, the hall. The only alterations to this plan were the addition of partition walls creating narrow center halls on both floors, and the removal of the original stair from the first to second floors. The original stair was probably a corner stair in a rear corner of the west room. Because the ceiling and floor are covered with newer materials, no trace of the stair opening was found. The original interior trim of the main block consists of wainscots, plaster walls, molded surrounds, ornate mantels, and paneled and batten doors. The main parlor contains a large tripartite mantel with delicate, paired fluted colonnettes supporting corner blocks, a deep reeded and molded cornice, and a shelf. The corner blocks and center tablet contain sunbursts, and an unusual beehive ornament adorns the center of the tablet. The fireplace surround is reeded, with sunburst corner blocks. The flat-paneled wainscot and molded chain rail are of mahogany, a very unusual feature. The hall has a similar but less ornate mantel and a flush-sheathed wainscot. On the second floor, the east room has a delicately reeded Federal mantel, while the mantel in the west room has been removed. Both rooms have flush sheathed wainscots and batten doors with unusual tapering ledges (horizontal braces). The rear wing, probably constructed as kitchen and dining room, has been substantially altered on the interior, but retains a late Federal mantel in the southeast room. The only stair from the first to the second floor is located in the wing, adjacent to the main block. The open-string stair rises in two flights, with a landing, and must be original to the wing, for the design of the stair railing is late Federal. The surrounding open space has been considerably whittled down by highway construction, and no original outbuildings are standing on the property.