



Survey and Research Report

on

Holly Bend





Architectural Essay

Holly Bend is a large frame plantation house set in a grove of holly trees on a neck of land jutting into the Catawba River. The two-story gable-roof structure, five bays wide and two bays deep, is finished quite plainly on the exterior with molded weatherboards. The interior contains, however, a great deal of remarkable vernacular trim.

The two exterior end brick chimneys, laid in Flemish bond, have stepped bases, single shoulders and molded caps. The west chimney has a stone base, a continuation of the random stone foundation of the house. The original wooden roof shakes are covered by new composition shingles. A molded cornice and frieze adorned with triglyphs occurs beneath the overhanging eaves on both the front and rear. Flanking the central entrance of the main (south) facade are fluted pilasters with distinctive console caps accented by gouge work and applied ornament. A heavy molded architrave enframes the flat-paneled door and four-light transom. The lintel features a band of incised lozenges. In the rear is a similar but less elaborate central entrance.

The windows at the first level have molded architraves and sills and flat-paneled shutters. In most of these windows the upper sash has nine panes; the lower, a single

replacement glass pane. Some of the windows, however, still have the original nine-over-nine sash. The second level repeats this arrangement except for the diminution of fenestration and the use of louvered shutters. Flanking each chimney in the gables are small four-over-four sash windows with solid shutters.

Across the first story of the main facade is a hip-roof porch, a later addition, supported on plain square posts. Flush boards cover the sheltered wall, indicating the existence of a much earlier porch. Rear ells have been added in several stages; that on the northeast, formerly two stories high but later lowered to a single story, contains the kitchen. The earlier kitchen, now demolished, was in a separate structure in the west side yard.

The plan of the first floor features a large parlor on either side of the central hall. The walls throughout the house are finished with wide horizontal sheathing accented by delicate molded cornices, chair rails, and baseboards. Both the front and rear entrance doors, hung on strap hinges, are flat-paneled on one side and nearly flush-paneled on the other. An open-string stair, which rises in two flights with an intervening quarter turn, is located at the rear of the hall against the right wall and is distinctly Georgian in feeling. It features a heavy molded handrail, well-turned balusters terminating in a square newel with a molded cap, and interesting curvilinear brackets below each tread.

The Federal ornament of the (main) west parlor is unusually lavish. Dominating the room is the large mantel which is distinguished by an abundance of extremely vernacular Adamesque ornament. The rectangular opening is bordered by a molded architrave edged with a tiny reeded band flanked by unacademic pilasters surmounted by fluted consoles. Below each console on the pilaster is an incised U-shaped design. The consoles support a heavy cornice shelf which breaks above the consoles and over a central tablet adorned with a quarter rosette in each corner. The cornice features bands of pierced horizontal lozenges and vertical reeding. Above the shelf are two large rectangular panels formed by applied bands of rope molding and reeding. These are surmounted at each end by delicately fluted end blocks with reeded caps. Molded bands extend from each cap to form a broken ogee scroll pediment ending in crude rosettes. Rising between the rosettes, above the inner corners of the panels, is a fluted console topped by a rosette and terminating in a molded cap. This central console is connected to the rosettes of the ogee pediment by swag-like rope moldings.

Facing the overmantel in the opposite wall is an overdoor consisting of a similar broken ogee pediment, but the central focus is a bas-relief urn with incised fluting and foliate designs. Each window, including those flanking the mantel, is topped by a full

entablature with end blocks and consoles similar to those on the exterior of the main entrance. The entablatures that formerly crowned the two rear windows have been pieced together and serve as a lintel above the French doors which now connect the west room with its rear additions.

The east room ornamentation is much simpler. The tall Federal mantel has a plain frieze; the pilaster caps and end blocks contain fan, scroll and rosette motifs. The overmantel, applied directly to the wall surface, as in the west room, consists of two thin moldings which form a single large square crosssetted panel. The second story is now divided into four rooms, although the partition separating the two west rooms is perhaps a later addition. The only mantel at this level is the small Federal mantel in the larger front west room. The right rooms have no fireplace openings. Several changes at this level have occurred, for several types of molded window architraves are present. The passage to the no longer existing second story of the east rear ell was formerly through the east rear bedroom, and the flat paneled double door still covers this opening.

Robert Davidson built Holly Bend (called Hollywood in the twentieth century) between 1795 and 1800 on 420 acres which his father, John Davidson (early settler and revolutionary war figure of Mecklenburg County), gave him in 1795. The house, which was built in a bend of the Catawba River and is reputed to have been named for the holly trees which grow in great abundance in that area, was completed before Robert married Margaret Osborne on January 1, 1801. Robert Davidson, who is said to have been the wealthiest planter in Mecklenburg County, was listed in the 1850 census as having 2,803 acres (1,000 acres of which was improved land) and 109 slaves. Robert and Margaret lived in the house until they died, he in 1853 and she in 1864.

Her husband had provided Margaret a life estate in the home tract of 430 acres, after which Robert F. Davidson, a nephew, was to receive Holly Bend since the couple had no children. In 1863, a year before his aunt's death, Robert F. Davidson sold James N.

Osborne several tracts of land including Holly Bend, "after the expiration [of Mrs. Davidson's] life estate." In 1871 the James W. Osborne estate, with Thomas Moore as executor, completed a contract with John L. Parks for 942 acres "formerly owned by Robert Davidson." John Parks died in 1905, and his homeplace was divided equally between Mrs. Mary Allison, Mrs. Jennie Eddleman, Mrs. Alice Parks, and Sallie K. Dixon. Mrs. Alice Parks, who was the owner of the 221 acres of the John L. Parks estate containing Holly Bend, sold the property in 1920 to J. Lindsey Parks. Parks lost the property through a foreclosure in 1930. Holly Bend returned to private ownership

in 1941 when Wachovia Bank and Trust Company sold the 221-acre tract to A. C. Newson and his wife. In 1970, Newson sold the property to its present owners, Mr. and Mrs. L. Gardner Eakes.

The significance of Holly Bend lies not in its exterior appearance, but in the treatment of the interior. Equally elaborate interior finish may be found in a number of elegant houses built in North Carolina during the Federal period, but the use of such lavish interior trim in an outwardly unexceptional house, together with the exuberantly vernacular handling of forms, makes Holly Bend unique. Although the Adamesque elements are certainly derivative, the lively creativity of the carpenter-interpreter transformed the standard compositions into a purely local expression of Federal Neo-Classicism.

Historical Background

Holly Bend Historical Background

- 1794 Major John Davidson deeded this land to his oldest son, Robert. Deed called for land and improvements thereon. At one time Robert owned this whole neck. As nearly as we can figure, Holly Bend was completed around 1800.
- Robert, called Robin, married Peggy Osborne in 1801. They never had any children of their own but are said to have helped raise a number of nieces and nephews.
- 1850 Robin Davidson was listed as having 109 slaves and also plantations in Alabama. When he died in
- 1853 at the age of 84 he is thought to have been one of the richest men in the county.
- 1864 Peggy Davidson died at the age of 88.
- 1868 Peggy's family sold her portion of the estate to J. L. Parks from Cabarrus County. He had been a sutler, sold salt to the Confederate Army. Survey and map dated 1872 showed that the estate consisted of about 900 acres. In 1873 he bought and additional 300 acres from the Robert Davidson estate which means that he owned the whole neck.
- 1908 J. L. Parks died, left estate to son, W. B. Parks and two daughters.
- 1921 W. B. Parks left the title to the place to son J. L.
- 1930 Charlotte National Bank acquired title when J. L. Parks defaulted on a loan.
- 1936 This bank went bankrupt and was acquired by Wachovia.
- 1942 Amos Newson bought the place from the bank.
- 1970 Purchased by L. Garner Eakes.

Ownership

- 1794-1868 - Robert Davidson and his estate
1868-1930 - Parks family (three generations)
1930-1942 - belonged to two banks
1942-1970 - Amos Newson
1970- - L. Garner Eakes

Holly Bend - Architect Abraham Highsmith
Points of Interest

Front - carving around the front door.

Downstairs hall

1. Doors
 - a. Herringbone design
 - b. Locks shipped from England
 - c. Handwrought iron straps
2. Worn spots on floor
3. Staircase
 - a. Fine example of early North Carolina architecture
 - b. Carving said to have been done by Hessian soldiers who stayed in the vicinity after the Battle of Kings Mountain.
 - c. Typical of Georgian Colonial, built for sturdiness rather than grace.
4. Living room
 - a. Overmantel and cornices handcarved .
 - b. Fireplace
 1. Very efficient
 2. Trap door that could be raised. Has a chute running to basement that provides air to fan the fire.
 3. Pine wall boards were hand planed.
5. Moose room
 - a. Overmantel less ornate than living room
 - b. Random width boards in the floor (which are throughout the house) each of which had to be saved where it crossed each hand-hewn joist, evidence of painstaking workmanship.
6. Kitchen
 - A. This wing of the house was added in 1868. It originally was two stories. The second story was taken off in 1921.
 - b. Kitchen and bedroom behind have been remodeled in recent years. Bedroom was once a kitchen. Fireplace (now covered) has a hook in it to hold cooking pots.
 - c. There was a fireplace in the present kitchen but it was bricked up in years past.

Points of Interest
upstairs

Big bedroom

- a. Said to be original dining room
- b. Stained walls could be what the whole house originally looked like. Walls are amazingly smooth to have been finished without the benefit of modern machinery.
- c. Rear wall could have been added later
 1. Boards run perpendicular
 2. " are beaded where the other walls are not.

Front blue bedroom

1. Original lock and key. Lock has a dolly to shield the keyhole.
2. Rear wall like the one in the big bedroom could have been added.
3. Windows have old glass

Back yellow bedroom

1. Original lock and key.
2. Original windows with nine panes
3. Window on rear wall has been moved to make way for second story that was there at one time.
4. Door to former second story which still has old fireplace. Door was made from blinds like the ones on the front of the house.

Bathroom

1. Said to have been butler's pantry
2. Cabinet made from unusually wide boards.

History of House and Construction

Original house faced north with the kitchen in the yard.

After 1868, J. L. Parks added two story addition consisting of four rooms, changed the rear door, making it the front door. Kitchen was downstairs in the rear.

1921, John Lindsey Parks added two rooms to the northwest corner, the rear room the kitchen the other the dining room. He cut down top story of the addition, made it one story, removed original front porch and put it on his sister's house in the Hopewell community. He put on the present porch.

He also put in Delco wiring system. The well house was for this system. He put in a plumbing system. He had a water tower in the back for this system.

The log corn crib in the back yard was built from a log cotton gin across the road.

1942 Amos Newson removed the kitchen and made the present kitchen. He had the slate roof put on the house. He tore down the water tower and made some changes to the front porch.

Major Bibliographical References

Ashe, Samuel A., ed. *Biographical History of North Carolina from Colonial Times to the Present*. Greensboro, North Carolina: Charles L. Van Noppen, 1907.

Dixon, Elizabeth Williamson. "The Davidson and Allied Families Originating in North Carolina," 1956. unpublished manuscript in the North Carolina State Library, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Mecklenburg County Records, Mecklenburg County Courthouse, Charlotte, North Carolina, Office of Register of Deeds. (Subgroups: Deeds, Wills).