



JOHN HUNTER HOUSE



This report was written on August 20, 1981

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the John Hunter House is located at 5607 Sardis Road, between Shasta Lane and Livingston Drive, Charlotte, North Carolina, 28211.

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

James P. Hammond and his wife, Ann A. Hammond
5607 Sardis Road
Charlotte, North Carolina, 28211

Telephone: 704/364-5804

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 3451 at page 449. The current tax parcel number of the property is 185-142-39.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property by Dr. William H. Huffman, Ph.D.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property by Mary Alice Dixon Hinson.

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 John Hunter House does possess special historic significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: (1) the house, erected c. 1869, is a wellpreserved example of a vernacular Greek Revival farmhouse and is one of the few remnants of the built environment of the old Sardis Township; and (2) the house was erected for Reverend John Hunter, a prominent and long-time pastor of Sardis A.R.P. Presbyterian Church, now Sardis Presbyterian Church.

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 John Hunter House meets the 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 unhistoric property." The current Ad Valorem tax appraisal on the John Hunter House is \$23,560.00. The current Ad Valorem tax appraisal on the .9 acres of land is \$8,500.00. The land is zoned R15.

Date of Preparation of this Report: August 20, 1981

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director
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3500 Shamrock Drive
Charlotte, North Carolina 28215

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Historical Overview

*Dr. William H. Huffman
July, 1981*

Following a fire in 1869 which burned an original Civil War deed to some of his property, the Reverend John Hunter constructed a new house in rural Sharon Township in Mecklenburg County.¹

John Hunter's grandfather, Henry Hunter (1751-1836), had emigrated from Ireland in the early 1770's, and volunteered for service in Capt. William Alexander's Company during the Revolutionary War, in which he helped defend Charlotte against the British. He was also a founder and longtime ruling elder of Prosperity A.R.P. Church in the county.²

John Hunter was born November 13, 1814, in Mecklenburg County, the second of ten children born to Henry and Martha Hunter. In 1841, he graduated from Jefferson College in Pennsylvania and began his theological studies in Divinity Hall, Due West, S.C., following which he was licensed by the First Presbytery on April 18, 1843. The following year he was ordained and installed as the minister of Back Creek, Prosperity and Gilead Churches in Mecklenburg County. In 1859, Rev. Hunter was installed at Sardis Presbyterian Church, a post he held for 27 years until overtaken by ill health in 1886.³

Two days after receiving his license, Rev. Hunter was married to Isabella Peoples of the county, with whom he had four children, Jane Eliza (1846-1863); Richard Brown (1848-1926); Margaret Alice (1850-1875); and Lester Walker (1853-1937).⁴ Following Isabella's death in 1859, the minister married Mrs. Martha Simonton Bell, of Fairfield Co., S.C. in 1861.⁵ The second Mrs. Hunter died in 1864, and Reverend Hunter subsequently was married a third time, to Mary Ann McDill of Chester, S.C. in 1866.⁶ In 1860 and during the Civil War, the Presbyterian minister acquired the property on Sardis Road for the homesite which would be his residence for the last twenty years of his life.⁷ (A description of the house and surrounding area may be found in an attached research paper by a former Queens College student, Rosa Wall Sanabury dated May, 1978.)

In 1886, illness forced his retirement, and almost four years later, Rev. Hunter died on May 16, 1890.⁸ The following day his funeral was held in the Sardis Church, which was attended by a large number of the minister's friends and relatives. In his will, John Hunter left the "Home Place" to his son, Lester Walker Hunter.¹⁰ Dr. Lester Hunter was a "venerable and longhoned physician of Mecklenburg County." He was educated at Erskine College, Due West, S.C., the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Baltimore and Bellvue Hospital, New York City. After graduating from the latter in March, 1875, Dr. Hunter settled in a house near his father's on Sardis Road, began his rural horseback practice of nearly sixty years, and married later that same year. He died in 1937 at the age of eighty-four, and was survived by ten children.¹¹

In 1898, Dr. Lester Hunter sold the Home Place as a parcel of 20.1 acres to his older brother, Richard Brown Hunter.¹²³ R. B. Hunter was also educated at Erskine College, served in the Civil War, and, in addition to farming the home place, became a longtime schoolteacher. In 1890 and 1891, he served as County Superintendent of Education, and was active in the civic affairs of the county. When he was sixty-seven, R. B. Hunter sold the homestead to his daughter, Eliza Isabella Hunter Alexander and her husband, Ellis U. Alexander in 1915.¹⁴ The Alexanders owned the house for thirty years, and it was during their ownership and that of R. B. Hunter that the house was modernized to its present appearance with plumbing and electricity added.¹⁵

¹ Deed Book 6, p. 89.

² William M. Hunter, *The Hunter Family* (Charlotte: The Observer Publishing House, 1920), pp 12-13.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 93; monument in Sardis Presbyterian Church cemetery.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 93-6.

⁵ Monument in Sardis Presbyterian Church cemetery.

Mr. Alexander died in 1934,¹⁶ but Mrs. Alexander continued to own the house until she sold it to her brother, Oscar Cannon Hunter (1870-1962), now with a lot size of 7.25 acres in 1945.¹⁷ O. C. Hunter, a farmer and lumberman of the Sardis area, resold a 4/5 interest in the house later that same year to another brother, John Lester Hunter (1876-1957) and kept 1/5 interest for himself.¹⁸ John Lester Hunter also graduated from Erskine, and spent many years working for the YMCA, including twenty years as YAM secretary for the state of Arkansas.¹⁹

Upon his death in 1957, the house was willed to John Lester Hunter's son, John Morton Hunter of Liken, S.C., who also purchased the remaining 1/5 interest from the son and heir of Oscar Cannon Hunter.²⁰ In 1964, J. M. Hunter sold the Sardis Road house to William and Olivia Sells²¹, and, in 1972, the former home of the rural Presbyterian minister was purchased by the present owners, James P. and Ann A. Hammond.²²

There is no question that the rich history surrounding the John Hunter house is indeed the history of the Sardis area of Mecklenburg County itself, and for that reason the dwelling and its environs eminently deserve designation as a historical site.

NOTES

⁶ The Hunter Family, p. 97.

⁷ Deed Book 4, p. 514; Deed Book 6, p. 89.

⁸ The Hunter Family, p. 93.

⁹ *The Charlotte Chronicle*, May 18, 1890, p. 6.

¹⁰ Will Book 1, p. 502.

¹¹ *Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 28, 1937, p. 1; The Hunter Family, p. 96.

¹² Deed Book 156, p. 87, 14 Dec. 1898.

¹³ *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 8, 1926; The Hunter Family, pp. 93-4.

¹⁴ Deed Book 340, p. 258, 17 Aug. 1915.

¹⁵ Interview with Catherine Deimer, Aiken, S.C., by Rosa Wall Sansbury 22 March 1978.

¹⁶ Monument in Sardis Presbyterian Church cemetery.

¹⁷ Deed Book 1135, p. 629, 22 Mar. 1945.

¹⁸ Deed Book 1157, p. 270, 23 Aug. 1945.

¹⁹ *Charlotte Observer*, April 24, 1957, p. 7B.

²⁰ Will Book 14, p. 415.

²¹ Deed Book 2504, p. 510, 28 Feb. 1964.

²² Deed Book 3451, p. 449, 5 July 1972.

Architectural Description

The Hunter-Hammond House is a vernacular Greek Revival farmhouse standing on a .98-acre site surrounded by a low-density suburban neighborhood. The building is an exceptionally well-preserved example of the unpretentious genre of weatherboarded frame construction that flourished in the rural Piedmont during the middle of the 19th century. Although the Hunter-Hammond House was built about 1869, its framing and modest wooden ornamentation continue traditions popular in the vicinity for several decades before the Civil War.

The house is a weatherboarded frame structure standing on a raised brick foundation. The house is organized as an L-plan with a two-and-a-half story main block, three bays wide and two deep, and a one-story rear wing, two bays wide and five deep. The main block is covered by a transverse gable roof. Two gables faced with imbricated shake shingles pierce the attic roof line along the main (south) facade. Molded cornice returns frame single-shoulder exterior end chimneys along the eastern and western side elevations. The chimneys, built of brick laid in 1:5 common bond, have slightly corbeled caps which intersect the apex of the molded gable end at either side.

Fenestration consists primarily of six-over-six sash windows, flanked, along the main facade, by louvered shutters. Beaded corner-posts articulate the facade edges and frame a one-story shed porch extending almost the full length of the facade. Chamfered posts and beaded pilasters carry the porch roof. A slender balustrade links posts and pilasters. The inner porch wall is sheathed with flush beaded horizontal siding. The central entrance is a single-leaf door carrying four flat panels in two vertical tiers. A six-light transom surmounts the door; to either side stand three engaged columns enclosing five-light sidelights. Flat-paneled aprons beneath the sidelights are in proportion to the porch pilasters and facade corner posts.

The rear wing, built along the northwest corner of the main block, is covered by a gable set at a right angle to the main roof. The rear (kitchen) chimney is built of brick laid in running bond

and terminates in a slightly corbeled cap. In the second quarter of the 20th century a demi-hexagonal bay was added to the western elevation of the rear wing. The bay contains two six-over-six sash and one eight-over-eight sash. Other rear additions include an enclosed porch and two bathes a second-story bath, one bay square, is attached to the center rear bay and a first-story bath, one bay deep and two bays long, runs beneath it. Each of these additions is weatherboarded (except for the enclosed porch) and covered by a shed roof. The additions are relatively unobtrusive and consonant with the typical front-to-back growth patterns of the typical Greek Revival Piedmont farmhouse.

The interior of the main block features a center hall plan one room deep. The center hall, faced with flush siding, contains an open string two-run stair with a half-turn landing. The lower run stair is anchored by two turned newel posts, each capped by a ball on a chamfered plinth; the upper run is anchored by chamfered newels capped by truncated pyramidal knobs. Rectangular-in-section balusters support a molded handrail.

The house contains five wooden mantels; four in the main block and one in the kitchen. All of the mantels, except the utilitarian kitchen mantel, are decorated with simple geometric inventions. The mantel in the first story eastern room has engaged colonettes and a blank frieze flanked by end blocks surmounted by a mantel shelf. An unusual band of dog's teeth molding underlines the frieze. The mantel in the room above has plain uprights supporting a molded bracket shelf above a blank frieze. A band of notched molding runs along the lower border of the frieze. The mantel in the first story western room has plain uprights above flat-paneled beaded plinths. The frieze features three semi-circular cut-out reliefs terminated in flattened angular drops. The mantel in the room above has chamfered engaged posts standing on blank plinths. The frieze is ornamented with a double-curve cut-out beneath a boldly rounded mantel shelf.

Trim throughout the house is simple. Molded cornices, base-boards, and chair rails enclose the ground story rooms of the main block. Ceilings are laid in flush siding. Second story trim is similar but plainer and omits the molded chair rail. Doors and windows, except in the remodeled rear wing, are set within plain surrounds. Most of the interior doors carry two rectangular flat panels.