

# Survey and Research Report

## The Lawing House



- 1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Lawing House is located at 6100 Neck Road, Huntersville, N.C.
- 2. Name, address, and telephone number of the current owner of the property:**  
  
Mont Olive Baptist Church  
6101 Neck Road  
Huntersville NC 28078
- 3. Representative photographs of the property:** This report contains representative photographs of the property.
- 4. A map depicting the location of the property:** UTM coordinates 17 506711.4E 3914941.0N



**5. Current Tax Parcel Reference and Deed to the property:** The tax parcel number of the property is 02302229. The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 06652 page 535 (9/5/1991).



6. **A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by William Jeffers.

7. **A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural description prepared by Stewart Gray.

8. **Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S 160A-400.5.**

a. **Special significance in terms of its history, architecture and/or cultural importance:** The Commission judges that the property known as the Lawing House possesses special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1) **The Harry C. Lawing House is important because it is a well preserved example of an early twentieth-century rural Mecklenburg County farmhouse. Houses such as the Harry C. Lawing House are becoming**

increasingly rare as once rural land in Mecklenburg County gives way to urbanization.

2) The Harry C. Lawing House is important because it is an early twentieth century rural farmhouse that still retains a good degree of its original integrity.

3) The Harry C. Lawing House is important because the Lawing family is one that has a long and contributing history in the Hopewell section of Mecklenburg County.

4) The Harry C. Lawing house is important because it is a good example of the type of home available to small yeoman farmers in Mecklenburg County in the early twentieth century.

5) The Harry C. Lawing House represents the economic development of the Hopewell section of Mecklenburg County after the Civil War, development that was largely a result of innovations in the agrarian enterprise of cotton farming.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:** The Commission contends that the architectural description prepared by Stewart Gray demonstrates that the property known as the Caldwell Station School 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 a "historic landmark." The current appraised value of the house is \$80,600. The current appraised value of the 1 acre of land is \$40,600. The property is zoned R. The property is exempt from the payment of Ad Valorem Taxes.

**10. Portion of the Property Recommended for Designation.** The interior and exterior of the house and the 1 acre of land associated with tax parcel number 02302229.

## **A Brief History of the Harry Campbell Lawing House**

Mecklenburg County, North Carolina in the early twentieth century was predominately a collection of rural farms clustered around small townships or community churches. While manufacturing and heavy industry was located more centrally in urban Charlotte, the rest of the county was dotted with yeoman farmers engaged in the agrarian enterprise of farming. Since the end of the Antebellum era, “most Mecklenburg County farmers had been small landowners or tenant farmers using mules, plows, wagons, hoes, sacks for picking, and scales for their cotton production.”<sup>[1]</sup> The years after the Civil War were a boom time for small Mecklenburg County farmers and “between 1860 and 1910, Mecklenburg County’s agricultural economy experienced a prolonged period of prosperity that would ultimately be its last.”<sup>[2]</sup> Since this area was never saturated with the large cash crop plantations often associated with the Antebellum South the farmers of the area were not dependant on slave labor. Therefore, “after Civil War, the majority of Mecklenburg County farmers were able to replant and recover quickly.”<sup>[3]</sup> New innovations in the cotton growing industry which allowed for easier growing for small farmers coupled with easy access to Charlotte with its cotton mills and transportation facilities, “gave farmers easy access to a far reaching market for their cotton crops. The impact of these developments was reflected in the rapid increase in the production of cotton in Mecklenburg County – between 1860 and 1880, the number of cotton bales produced in the county tripled, from 6,112 bales to 19,129 bales.”<sup>[4]</sup>

The cotton boom continued well into the twentieth century but changes loomed on the horizon. “By the mid-to-late 1920’s, the cotton market in

Mecklenburg County and across the South was faltering.”[\[5\]](#) As cotton prices dropped precipitously, the arrival of the boll weevil wrecked havoc on cotton fields throughout the South and made life especially difficult for the small farmers of Mecklenburg County who could not afford the pesticides and equipment necessary to raise the cash crop and make a profit.

Mecklenburg County farmers also faced another emerging threat to their way of life: urbanism. Manufacturing and industry in Charlotte was already causing the city to expand past its original four wards at the turn of the century. By 1910, “Mecklenburg County’s urban population surpassed its rural population for the first time in the County’s history.”[\[6\]](#) Furthermore, the establishment of Camp Greene, a United States Army training base, on the city’s Westside in 1917 would effectively double the city’s population almost overnight. The post World War era, “was a time of maturation and exponential growth as new industries flocked to the city. By 1930, Charlotte had surpassed Charleston as the largest city in the Carolinas.”[\[7\]](#) This urban expansion began to put a significant dent into the rural lifestyle of Mecklenburg County farmers. As a result, these farmers began to abandon the farm for opportunities in the city, primarily as workers in the cotton mills that they had once supplied with their crop. “The 1920s witnessed the beginning of the decline in the number of Mecklenburg County farms. In 1900, Mecklenburg had been 32.7 percent urban and 62.3 percent rural. By 1910, the urban population was 50.7 percent. And in 1920, Mecklenburg’s urban population had grown to 57.4 percent, and farm production declined for the first time.”[\[8\]](#) The Great Depression further exacerbated this trend and between “1930 and 1940, the number of farms in Mecklenburg County dropped from 3,723 to 3,223.”[\[9\]](#)



Despite this trend toward urbanization much of Mecklenburg County still clung to its rural roots. The small hamlets and localities sprinkled throughout the county with names like Croft, Paw Creek, Thrift, Derita, Deweese, and Long Creek to name a few continued to operate as the focal points of their particular area serving the needs of the yeoman farmers that clustered around them. One of these communities, Hopewell, was centered around the Hopewell Presbyterian Church. According to United States Census Records, “the church was established in 1762. In 1765, John McKnitt Alexander, then 32 years old, donated 21 acres of land for the building site and graveyard. He is proclaimed as a signer of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence as he was the Secretary of the Convention held at Charlotte may 20, 1775.”[\[10\]](#)

Initially comprised of Scotch-Irish descent, the members of the Hopewell community have long considered themselves of the independent mindset and nowhere is this more obvious then in an early story about the community dating from the Revolutionary War.

During the war, ‘ . . . it had frequently been mentioned to the King’s Officers that Mecklenburg and Rowan Counties were more hostile to England than any other in America.”[\[11\]](#) Anti-British sentiment was indeed high in Mecklenburg County, and in the Hopewell community this sentiment was delivered to the British in the form of armed aggression and gunfire at the Battle of McIntyre’s Farm. British General Cornwallis, “dispatched a foraging party, comprised of several hundred men, toward Hopewell Church in search of supplies. At the McIntyre Farm they were fired upon from the nearby woods by a group of some dozen young farmers of the neighborhood, and were severely defeated.”[\[12\]](#) The large British contingent, routed by a relatively small rebel

force, gave credence to the notion that Mecklenburg County was a veritable “hornets’ nest” of rebellion during the war.

While the Battle of McIntyre’s Farm highlights the community’s patriotic zeal and their willingness to fight for their rights they were, at their core, farmers. The community continued to make farming their chief enterprise and would continue to do so well into the twentieth century.

One of Hopewell’s residents, Harry Campbell Lawing (April 23, 1899 - March 20, 1973)<sup>[13]</sup> illustrates this ideal. While his story may be viewed by some as typical of a yeoman farmer during the era in which he lived, the story of his family and home are vital to the historic context of quickly disappearing rural Mecklenburg County.

According to family history, the Lawing’s first came to the United States from Wales in the early 1700’s.<sup>[14]</sup> The earliest Lawing in the area was James Middleton Lawing (1826 - 1869) who was married to Violet Isabella Dunn Lawing (1828 - 1906). Their son, James Lafayette Lawing (1858-1934) married Margaret Jane Dunn in 1884.<sup>[15]</sup> Originally, James L. Lawing lived in the Paw Creek section of Mecklenburg County. However, he “moved from Paw Creek to the Hopewell section January 1, 1909 and moved his membership from Cooks Memorial, where he had belonged for about 19 years.”<sup>[16]</sup> The Lawing’s had six children. There were two girls: Ada Dunn Lawing (1884 - 1973)<sup>[17]</sup> and Violet Isabella Lawing (1890 - 1971)<sup>[18]</sup>, and four boys: John Blair Lawing (1886 - 1957)<sup>[19]</sup>, Graham Lafayette Lawing (1888 - 1954)<sup>[20]</sup>, William Franklin Lawing (1896 - ?)<sup>[21]</sup>, and Harry Campbell Lawing. The Lawing family settled and grew along Neck Rd., not far from Beatties Ford Rd. and Hopewell Presbyterian Church. *The History of*



*Hopewell Presbyterian Church*, first published in 1939, lists three Lawing names at that time as property owners along the road: Ada (who also shared a home with her sister Isabella [Belle]), John, and Harry.

Harry had his house built on a parcel of family land along Neck Rd. between his sisters and brother. Mike Lawing, Harry's grandson, stated that Harry's cousin, Frank Lawing built the house around 1924<sup>[22]</sup>. This is an interesting footnote to the history of this particular property because it has also been asserted that Frank Lawing also constructed several houses of the same style in the Derita community.<sup>[23]</sup> Frank Lawing wasn't the only person who helped build the house though. Longtime Neck Rd. resident Mr. Samuel Carr remembered that his father had "built the chimneys in that house."<sup>[24]</sup>

It is asserted that at one time, the Lawing family had about 3000 total acres stretching from Neck Road all the way back to N.C. Hwy 16 (Brookshire Blvd.) but as the family grew and moved away from the area that total dropped considerably<sup>[25]</sup>. Harry, like many others in the area had a small farm where he raised cotton and corn. As Mike Lawing would relate, his grandfather had, "15 acres of cotton and he raised and slaughtered pigs."<sup>[26]</sup> Cotton farming wasn't Harry's only endeavor; he also sold food. He would, "carry eggs to Charlotte and sell them."<sup>[27]</sup> According to his grandson, Harry worked, "in food sales for about 35 years."<sup>[28]</sup>

The Lawing's also rented out some of the land they didn't farm to sharecroppers. Samuel Carr's father was one such person. As he related his father, "grew corn and cotton and raised hay (West Virginia and Alfalfa hay) for the livestock."<sup>[29]</sup>

Initially, the home was built without electricity. Mike Lawing related a funny anecdote about how his father Harry Jr. (1923 - 2000<sup>[30]</sup>) went off to war in 1942 and there was no electricity. However, three years later, “when he came back there was electricity.”<sup>[31]</sup> Soon after he left for war, electricity finally made its way down Neck Rd. and one can only imagine his surprise after returning home and seeing the modern miracle of electricity in a home that had never known it.

Other longtime Neck Rd. residents helped shed light on the Lawing family and their home. Ms. Louise Conner remembered that the Lawing’s “had a good relationship with the church.”<sup>[32]</sup> The church she was referring to was Mt. Olive Baptist Church, a local African-American church situated directly across the road from the Lawing homestead. Apparently the church was also a favorite of Harry Lawing’s two bulldogs because, as Ms. Conner relates, “they liked to lay on the church steps and Mr. Lawing had to call them back so they could go clean the church on Saturday.”<sup>[33]</sup> Mrs. Cornelia Henderson, another long time Neck Rd. resident, remembered the Lawing family, especially Harry’s wife, Mary Esther, who she remembered as being “really sweet.”<sup>[34]</sup> Mrs. Lawing’s cooking skills were held in high esteem because, as Mrs. Henderson related, “we always liked to go up there because she always had good food.”<sup>[35]</sup> Mrs. Lawing was real nice to the neighborhood children too. “She would always give my kids a quarter at Halloween,” stated Mrs. Henderson.<sup>[36]</sup> She added that even though Jim Crow segregation was the law of the land at the time, the color line was blurred somewhat up on Neck Rd., because “even though it was segregated, we always had a good time with them.”<sup>[37]</sup>

The Harry Campbell Lawing House serves as a reminder of days gone by. A time when Mecklenburg County was more rural and pastoral, and things moved at a much slower pace. As the farmland and forest around the Lawing homestead gave way to highways, subdivisions, and retail stores, this house offers a unique glimpse into a time, not so long ago, when people did more with their land than simply live on it. The Lawings, like many other small Mecklenburg County farmers, utilized their land for a myriad of purposes so as to diversify the amount of income they took in. While life wasn't a constant struggle to survive, it most assuredly was not a bed of roses. Mecklenburg County's rural farmers faced many obstacles including (but not limited to) poor soil, sick crops, and falling crop prices. As the twentieth century progressed and Charlotte expanded, these farmers found themselves now under attack from land developers and suburban sprawl. As the municipal line of Charlotte stretched further and further away from the city center, these small farms and the stories they held began to quickly and quietly disappear into the pages of history. It is though the Harry Campbell Lawing House that one can still get a glimpse into the not so incredibly distant, yet quickly fading history of rural Mecklenburg County.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Sherry J. Joines and Dr. Dan L. Morrill, *Historic Rural Resources in Rural Mecklenburg County, North Carolina*, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, no date, <http://cmhpf.org/surveyruralcontext.htm>, (Accessed August 8, 2010).

<sup>[2]</sup> Emily Ramsey and Laura Ramsey, *Survey and Research Report on the Jesse and Mary K. Washam Farm*, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, January 30, 2002, <http://cmhpf.org/Surveys&rwashamfarm.htm>, (Accessed August 8, 2010).

<sup>[3]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[4]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[5]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[6]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[7]</sup> Sherry J. Joines and Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

<sup>[8]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[9]</sup> Emily Ramsey and Laura Ramsey.

<sup>[10]</sup> Jennifer A Schmidt, ed., *1850 Census of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina (Including the Mortality and Slave Schedules)*, (Spartanburg, S.C.: The Reprint Company, Publishers, no date), p.54.

<sup>[11]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[12]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[13]</sup> Mecklenburg County Death Certificate # 1973000733

<sup>[14]</sup> Interview of James Michael Lawing by Bill Jeffers (August 21, 2010).

<sup>[15]</sup> Reverend Charles Wilson Sommerville, *The History of Hopewell Presbyterian Church: For 175 Years from the Assigned Date of Its Organization 1762*, (Charlotte, N.C.: Hopewell Presbyterian Church, 1939), p. 153.

<sup>[16]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[17]</sup> Mecklenburg County Death Certificate # 1973003298

<sup>[18]</sup> Mecklenburg County Death Certificate # 1971001827

<sup>[19]</sup> Mecklenburg County Death Certificate # 1957000559

<sup>[20]</sup> Mecklenburg County Death Certificate # 1954000314

<sup>[21]</sup> Sommerville, p. 153.

<sup>[22]</sup> Lawing Interview.

[\[23\]](#) Ibid.

[\[24\]](#) Interview with Samuel Carr by Bill Jeffers (August 30, 2010).

[\[25\]](#) Lawing Interview.

[\[26\]](#) Ibid.

[\[27\]](#) Interview with Cornelia Henderson by Bill Jeffers (August 19, 2010).

[\[28\]](#) Lawing Interview.

[\[29\]](#) Carr Interview.

[\[30\]](#) Mecklenburg County Death Certificate #2000002363

[\[31\]](#) Lawing Interview.

[\[32\]](#) Interview with Louise Conner by Bill Jeffers (August 19, 2010).

[\[33\]](#) Ibid.

[\[34\]](#) Henderson Interview.

[\[35\]](#) Ibid.

[\[36\]](#) Ibid.

[\[37\]](#) Ibid.

## Architectural Description



The Lawing House is a front-gabled wood-framed house that faces north, and sits back approximately sixty feet from Neck Road. The house is in good condition and has retained a high degree of integrity. The house lot is approximately .75 acres. Grassy lawn surrounds the house, with approximately 1/3 of the lot being wooded. The surrounding land is undeveloped and wooded, giving the setting a distinctly rural character.





The facade is largely sheltered by a hipped porch roof that wraps around and shelters a portion of the east elevation. The porch is supported by a continuous brick foundation laid in a running bond. A single vent has been set in the foundation wall. Wooden steps (recently replaced) lead to the porch in front of the front door. The porch roof is supported by tapered posts. Simple handrails with picket baluster are set between the posts. Porch floor is tongue-and-groove boards, and the ceiling is composed of beaded tongue-and-groove boards. The porch roof as well as the roof over the principal section of the house is a 5V metal roof. The front gable projects above porch roof and features a three-part opening containing a four-light sash bordered by two rectangular louvered vents.



The house is covered with simple wooden siding, including the portions of the exterior sheltered by the porches. The facade is three bays wide with the front door centered between two four-over-one double-hung windows. The front door features three horizontal panels set below four vertical lights. The pressed metal lockset appears to be original. Doors and windows are surrounded with simple boards topped with moulded trim.



The west elevation is four bay wide. The two bays closest to the facade contain single four-over-one double-hung windows. These windows are separated by an external shouldered chimney with a simple corbelled crown. Set near the middle of the elevation are paired windows. The bay closest to the rear elevation contains a single double-hung window. All of the windows are four-over-one double-hung windows. Original brick foundation piers are joined by early curtain walls. Rafter tails are exposed. Near the rear of the house a corbelled brick flue pierces the roof.





The rear elevations features a full-width porch covered with an engaged hipped roof. Tapered posts are infilled with metal screen and recently added plywood panels. The rear elevation is three bays wide, with a replacement nine-light wooden door centered between four-over-one double-hung windows. Porch floor is tongue-and-groove boards, and the ceiling is composed of beaded tongue-and-groove boards.







The east elevation is partially sheltered by the wrap-around porch. The east elevation is four bays wide. Two single and one set of paired four-over-one double-hung windows in the east elevation are like those found on the other elevations. A short six-over-six window is set near the rear of the house and reflects the addition of a bathroom.



The integrity found on the exterior of the house is also found in the interior. With the exception of a bathroom added around World War II, the floor plan of the house does not appear to have been altered. The front door opens directly into a large parlor that features a Craftsman Style mantle with a mirrored overmantle, and double shelves supported by brackets and short square columns. Walls and ceiling are plastered. Windows and door openings feature simple butted board trim highlighted with mitered band around the perimeter of the trim. Flooring is narrow strip pine boards. The rear wall of the parlor contains a double-door opening (doors missing) opens into a dining room. A two-panel door on the east side of the parlor opens into a front bedroom. The room features an original mantle with decorative beading and a single shelf supported by curved brackets. The room also contains a closet with a six panel door.





The parlor also opens into a long narrow hallway that extends down the center of the house to the rear door. Like the parlor, the hall features plaster walls and ceiling. Flooring is narrow pine strip. The hallway and most of the other rooms contain tall beaded baseboards. The doors opening onto the hallway are all two-panel doors. Most of the interior doors have retained their original pressed steel knobs and escutcheons.



To the rear of the front bedroom is located another bedroom that shares an internal chimney. The mantle in this room is simpler, without beading, and the flooring in this room is wider (approximately four inches). Like the front bedroom, this room contains a closet with a six-horizontal-panel door. A grid and panel ceiling was recently added to the room.



The dining room contains a masonry flue thimble that once served a stove. It also contains a drop ceiling.

The integrity of the interior decreases as one goes toward the rear of the house. The hallway opens onto a bathroom that was carved out of an existing rear bedroom. The bathroom features mid-twentieth century fixtures. The kitchen walls have been covered with paneling.