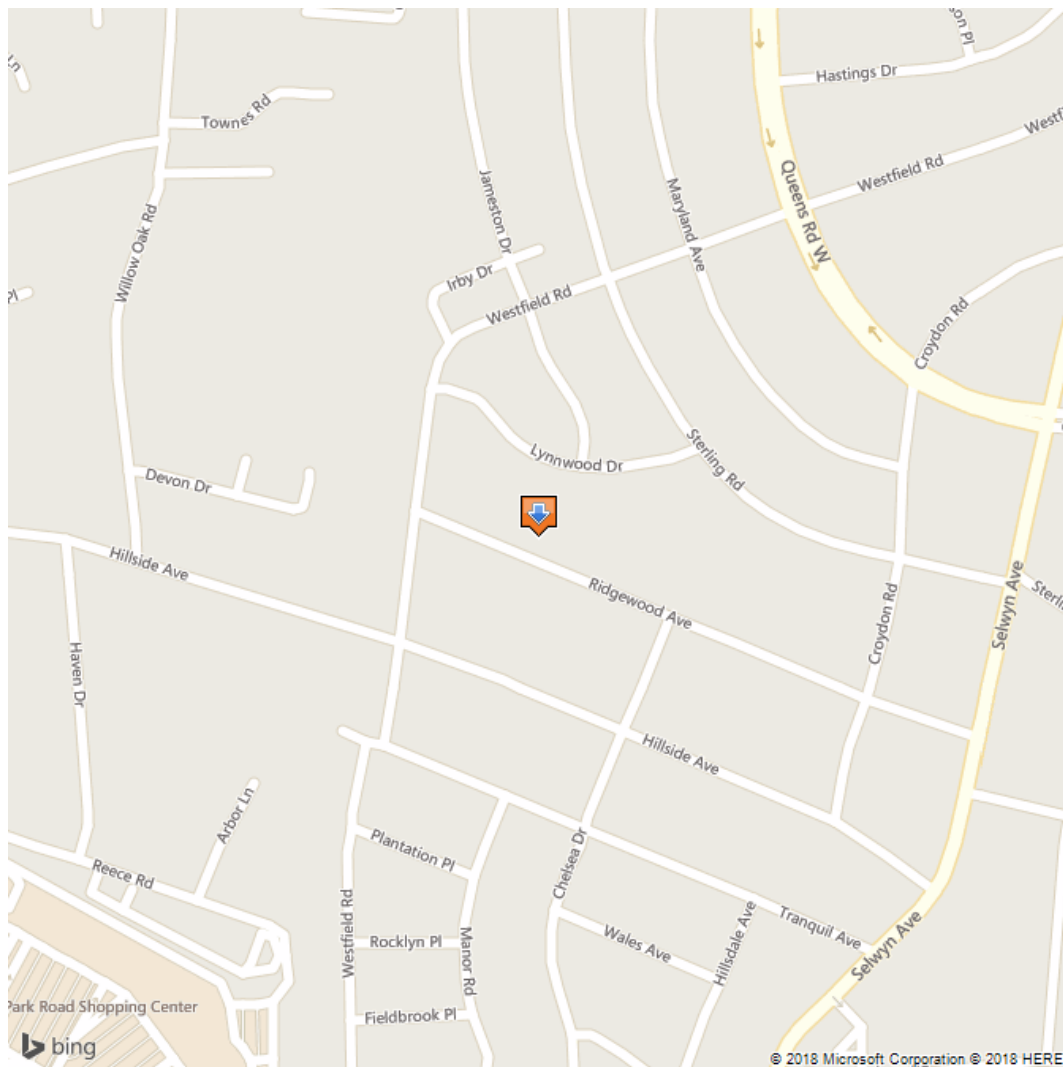


SURVEY AND RESEARCH REPORT
On The
Elizabeth Lawrence House and Garden



1. Name and location of the property. The Elizabeth Lawrence House and Garden are located at 348 Ridgewood Avenue in Charlotte, North Carolina.
2. Name and address of the current owner of the property is:

Mrs. Mary Lindeman Wilson
348 Ridgewood Avenue
Charlotte, NC 28209
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 deed to the property is that of 1986 from James B. Sommers and wife to Mary Lindeman Wilson in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 5172, pp. 0480-0481. The tax parcel number is #15114210.
6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a historical sketch of the property prepared by Davyd Foard Hood. See continuation sheets.
7. A brief architectural description of the property. This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Davyd Foard Hood. See continuation sheets.
8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S. 106A-4005.

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the Elizabeth Lawrence House and Garden possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg County. The commission bases its judgment on the following considerations.

1. The Elizabeth Lawrence House and Garden, constructed in 1948-1949 and the home of Elizabeth Lawrence (1904-1985) from 1949 to 1984, is the single surviving property in North Carolina that holds strong associations with the distinguished career of the celebrated garden writer and plantswoman. The Lawrence family house in Raleigh, where she lived from 1916 to 1948 and wrote *A Southern Garden*, was lost in 2004. Just as gardening in Raleigh had been the genesis of *A Southern Garden*, published in 1942, her Charlotte garden played a central role in two further books that are also considered classics in garden literature. Elizabeth Lawrence wrote both *The Little Bulbs: A Tale of Two Gardens*, published in 1957, and *Gardens in Winter*, published in 1961, in her study here. While a resident at 348 Ridgewood Avenue, she incorporated her experiences as a gardener in the weekly columns she wrote for the *Charlotte Observer* from 1957 to 1971, and in numerous articles she prepared for horticultural journals and magazines.
2. Elizabeth Lawrence was not only an important writer of her time, but a writer whose works have achieved the status of classics not only in North America but also in England. Both *A Southern Garden* and *The Little Bulbs: A Tale of Two Gardens* remain in print as does her memoir of Carl Krippendorf's garden, *Lob's Wood*, published in 1971, and two collections of her shorter writings, *Through the Garden Gate* (1990)

and *A Garden of One's Own* (1997). Also still in print is a collection of letters she exchanged with Katharine S. White, *Two Gardeners: A Friendship in Letters* (2002). Miss Lawrence is also the only twentieth-century American garden writer ever to be the subject of a book-length biography. *No One Gardens Alone: A Life of Elizabeth Lawrence* was published in 2004.

3. The Elizabeth Lawrence Garden is the most intact and best preserved work of Miss Lawrence, who was the first woman to earn a degree in landscape architecture from present-day North Carolina State University. Having received the degree 1932, she enjoyed a brief partnership with Isabel Bronson Busbee (1880-1966) in Raleigh. While this area of her career remains to be fully understood, for both the periods she lived in Raleigh and in Charlotte, a small group of projects is known (and is being studied by this author). With the loss of Elizabeth Lawrence's Raleigh house and garden, the survival and integrity of this garden are all the more remarkable and important to the history of landscape architecture in North Carolina.

8.b. Integrity of design, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association.
The Commission contends that the architectural description and integrity statement prepared by Davyd Foard Hood demonstrates that the Elizabeth Lawrence House and Garden meet 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 that becomes a designated "historic landmark." The current appraised value of the house is \$111,000.00. The appraised value of the lot is \$351,100.00.

Date of preparation of this report: 30 June 2005.

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6. HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE PROPERTY



SUMMARY

The Elizabeth Lawrence House and Garden at 348 Ridgewood Avenue, Charlotte, holds historical significance in Charlotte, the state of North Carolina, and the nation, as the home of the celebrated plantswoman and garden writer from 1949 to 1984. The property reflects and holds association with two critical aspects of her life and career: her work as a garden designer, and her life's work as a writer. With the loss of the Raleigh house and garden, where she resided from 1916 to 1948 and wrote *A Southern Garden*, published in 1942, the Charlotte house and garden is the single surviving property associated with her lifetime career as a horticulturist and writer. She acquired this property in May 1948, oversaw the house's construction in 1948-1949, and occupied it with her mother in the later year. The garden at 348 Ridgewood Avenue dates to 1949-1950, when she laid out its paths, beds, and borders on the grounds around the newly-completed residence and set about the process of planting. Today the garden survives as the most intact and best preserved example of the work of the first woman graduate in landscape architecture from (present-day) North Carolina State University. That significance is underscored by her use of the garden as a laboratory for plants, a place where she continually cultivated a wide range of both heirloom plants and modern cultivars, studied their habits, and used the experience as the grist for her columns in the *Charlotte Observer* from 1957 to 1971 and for the two books published during her years here, *The Little Bulbs* in 1957 and *Gardens in Winter* in 1961. Her experience here also figured in the revision of *A Southern Garden* for its reprinting in 1967.

As Allen Lacy has written, “Her three major books—*A Southern Garden* (1942), *The Little Bulbs: A Tale of Two Gardens* (1957) and *Gardens in Winter* (1971)—are horticultural classics, fully a match for anything written by such British gardening writers as Gertrude Jekyll and Vita Sackville-West” (TGE, 156). And there, of course, lies her distinction and significance. While a Southern-born writer, who wrote largely about Southern gardens, Elizabeth Lawrence was in no way provincial. She continually evaluated her own experience as a plantswoman and gardener in two North Carolina gardens with that shared by her many correspondents. She then combined this valuable perspective with a detailed knowledge of garden history and a remarkable gift for language to produce writings far above those of most of her American contemporaries. Today, *A Southern Garden* and *The Little Bulbs* as well as two posthumous works, *Gardening for Love: The Market Bulletins* (1987) and *A Rock Garden in the South* (1990) remain in print as do two collections of her shorter works for newspapers, magazines, and horticultural journals, *Through the Garden Gate* (1990) and *A Garden of One’s Own* (1997). *Two Gardeners: A Friendship in Letters* (2002), her correspondence with Katharine S. White, has been issued also in a paperback edition. This body of work, unequaled by her contemporaries in its quality, appeal, and timelessness, has earned her the first book-length biography accorded an American garden writer. Emily Herring Wilson’s *No One Gardens Alone: A Life of Elizabeth Lawrence* was published in 2004. This house and garden, Elizabeth Lawrence’s home from 1949 to 1984, retains its association with her extraordinary achievement



Elizabeth Lawrence with her nephew

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1946-1947 Elizabeth Lewis Lawrence (1904-1985), the gifted American garden writer, plantswoman and landscape architect, was forced to make a painful decision, that of giving up the Raleigh garden she had nurtured for many years and celebrated in *A Southern Garden*. The house and garden at 115 Park Avenue in Raleigh had been the residence of the Lawrence family since 1916, when they rented it, and after January 1918 when Samuel Lawrence purchased it from Charles V. and Daisy Young Albright (Wake County Deeds, 327/149). It had been Miss Lawrence's home for all but the first twelve years of her life.¹

Elizabeth Lawrence was born at the home of her paternal grandparents in Marietta, Georgia, on 27 May 1904, the daughter of Samuel (1874-1936) and Elizabeth Bradenbaugh (1876-1964) Lawrence. The Lawrence family relocated to Hamlet, North Carolina, and then lived in Richmond, Virginia, and Garysburg, North Carolina, before they moved to Raleigh. Elizabeth Lawrence enrolled at St. Mary's School. After graduation there in 1922 she entered Barnard College in New York City where she received a bachelor's degree in 1926. She did coursework as a special student at North Carolina State College of Agriculture and Engineering (now North Carolina State University) in 1928 and 1929 and then completed a three-year degree, receiving a Bachelor of Science in Landscape Architecture degree in 1932. Miss Lawrence remained at home and began a professional design partnership with Isabel Bronson Busbee (1880-1966), who had studied at Lowthorpe School of Landscape Architecture and enjoyed a small design practice in Raleigh. During this time, Elizabeth Lawrence turned to writing about gardening, and in 1932 she saw her first article published in "Garden Gossip," an organ of the Garden Club of Virginia. Four years later, her publication in *House & Garden* launched her as a national garden writer. She continued to work as a free-lance garden journalist up to the publication of *A Southern Garden* in 1942 and through World War II.

The decision to move from Raleigh to Charlotte, North Carolina, came as a result of personal, family concerns. The Depression and the death of Samuel Lawrence in 1936 had left his widow and their family in reduced circumstances. When Miss Lawrence's sister moved to Charlotte, she and her mother followed. Elizabeth Lawrence was one of two daughters born to the couple. The Lawrences' younger daughter, Ann De Treville Lawrence (1908-1980), was married to Warren Wade Way, Jr. (1905-2003) in 1941, and she became the mother of two children born in 1943 and 1945, respectively. For periods during World War II and after Mr. Way's discharge from the United States Army, the Ways were also at 115 Park Avenue. By 1947 Mr. Way had taken a position with the Internal Revenue Service in Charlotte. The Ways moved to Charlotte with their two children and occupied a rental apartment at Morris Field. Meanwhile, the house on Park Avenue was rented for a period and a part of it sublet

as an apartment.² With a large house and garden in Raleigh they could not continue to maintain, and as Mr. Way was the single person in the family with a permanent position and a guaranteed income, Mrs. Lawrence and her daughters concluded the best arrangement was for her and Elizabeth Lawrence to move to Charlotte and re-establish themselves in a house near the Ways. The family would live together, in a fashion, and Mrs. Lawrence would be with her two daughters and her only grandchildren.

When Mrs. Lawrence, Miss Lawrence, and the Ways set about choosing the location of their new houses in Charlotte, they followed the example of Samuel Lawrence. Three decades earlier when he relocated the family to Raleigh, he sought an appealing, substantial house in a good neighborhood. A likely house was one that enjoyed the benefit of close proximity to the capital's main residential thoroughfare, Hillsborough Street, and the handsome new residential development, Cameron Park. Another consideration was proximity to St. Mary's School where he enrolled his daughters as day students.

He found just such a house at 115 Park Avenue, an imposing two-story early-twentieth-century weatherboarded frame house that stood a few doors south of Hillsborough Street. The northern extension of Park Avenue was a part of the road system of Cameron Park. The Lawrences' new house was thus close to the imposing houses lining Hillsborough Street, a favored address of Raleigh's nineteenth-century elite, and the newer bungalows and Colonial Revival-style houses of their sons and daughters in Cameron Park. It also enjoyed a proximity to both St. Mary's School and North Carolina College of Agricultural and Mechanical Arts whose campuses lay but a few blocks, respectively, to the northeast and west. This choice proved propitious, and the Lawrences made many friends among the academic and professional families who resided in the favored enclave between two important educational facilities. The friendships formed over three decades here, from 1916 to 1948, would become critical to Elizabeth Lawrence's work as a landscape architect and garden writer.



Elizabeth Lawrence in her garden in Raleigh

Relocating in mid life, when enjoying the promise of success as a garden writer, Elizabeth Lawrence was three days shy of her forty-fourth birthday when the deed for this property was executed (Mecklenburg Deeds, 1316/313). She acquired the undeveloped lot, measuring seventy feet in width and 225 feet in depth, for \$2,200 from Timothy M and Esther Prigden.³ That same day, 24 May 1948, Ann (Lawrence) and Warren Wade Way, Jr., purchased the small, narrow lot of the same dimensions on the northeast from the Prigdens for the identical price (Mecklenburg Deeds, 1316/312). These adjoining lots were located in a now little-known subdivision on the southwest edge of Myers Park that was initially platted in June 1925 for James P. Tucker as a part of “Mecklenburg Heights” (Mecklenburg Deeds, Map Book 3/190). Between June 1925 and October 1925 Mecklenburg Heights was sold to Wesley T. Heath who renamed it “Poplar Gables.” He widened most of the lots on Ridgewood Avenue from sixty to seventy feet and ordered a new plat of the subdivision which remains the point of reference to the present (Mecklenburg Deeds, Map Book 3/221).

The subdivision’s three main parallel streets, Ridgewood, Hillside, and Tranquil avenues, all extended off the west side of Selwyn Avenue, one of Myers Park’s principal roadways. The back property lines of the Lawrence and Way lots were coterminous with the southwest edge of Myers Park and coincident with an alley that carried along this edge of the more exclusive development. A series of one-story apartments on the north side of the alley faced onto Lynnwood Drive and were a part of Myers Park. In 1948 the Lawrence and Way parcels were among the last undeveloped lots in Poplar Gables, whose streets were lined with mostly two-story Colonial Revival houses or variations of period cottages. The soon-built Lawrence and Way houses, of similar, modest design, were among the few one-story houses in the neighborhood and remain so to the present.

The choice of these lots proved to be an inspired decision for Elizabeth Lawrence, who built and occupied 348 Ridgewood Avenue with her mother. It would be their joint home until Mrs. Lawrence's death in 1964 and hers until she departed Charlotte in 1984. The neighborhood, while newer than their old home grounds in Raleigh, was similar in status with a close proximity to Myers Park and its amenities. Queens College, located on Selwyn Avenue, was about ten blocks away. Exactly how the sisters came to choose these lots remains unclear; however, the fact that well-known gardeners Edwin Osborne (1900-1993) and Elizabeth Barnhill (1904-1988) Clarkson lived at 248 Ridgewood Avenue was likely a determining factor. The Clarkson garden, known as Wing Haven, was then one of the finest gardens in the larger Myers Park area. Elizabeth Lawrence and the Clarksons would become gardening friends and neighbors, and Miss Lawrence soon formed lasting friendships with other gardeners here including Hannah Withers (1902-1999) who gardened at 2001 Queens Road East, Dr. Walter Brem Mayer, and others, like Dr. Herbert Hechenbleikner (1909-2004), a professor of biology at Charlotte College (now UNCC) who lived at a further distance.

Elizabeth Lawrence's Charlotte house and garden reflected her accommodation to a new life and changed circumstances. The lot, at 15,750 square feet, was just over one-third the size of the Raleigh property which comprised just under one acre. The house would be smaller and so, too, would her garden. The adjoining houses of the Lawrence sisters were completed and occupied in 1949, and both families are listed in the 1950 Charlotte city directory at their respective addresses. The design and planting of the garden began in 1949 and continued through the early 1950s with further plantings and the addition of stones along its paths and borders as they became available.

Settling into her new house and garden, Elizabeth Lawrence continued her work as a garden writer. Although her relocation from Raleigh to Charlotte forced her to give up one garden to gain another, the many professional and personal friendships she developed while in Raleigh, and particularly after the publication of *A Southern Garden*, remained true as she enlarged her circle here. Elizabeth Lawrence was an inveterate letter-writer with a correspondence that ranged wide through society and across the nation. A love of plants and gardening and a poet's skill with words enabled her to communicate as easily with the host of gardening friends she developed through Southern market bulletins, as with the botanists, horticulturalists, plantsmen, and writers who occupied higher stations in life and their professions. Letters enabled Elizabeth Lawrence to converse with people she had met and those she might never meet, to share her knowledge with fellow gardeners, to gain theirs in turn, and, all the while, to further develop her talents as a writer and a gardener.

Elizabeth Lawrence's letters, like her Raleigh and Charlotte gardens, were the trial grounds for manuscripts which bloomed in her lifetime and afterward. So, too, were the many articles she wrote for magazines and horticultural journals. The move to Charlotte and to 348 Ridgewood Avenue occasioned little disruption to the output of either letters or articles, and soon she was engaged in other literary efforts. Two initiatives met with reward in 1957. Elizabeth Lawrence's friendship with Carl Krippendorf (1875-1964), had begun in 1943 with a letter he wrote appreciating her article on North Carolina amaryllids in *Herbertia*, the yearbook of the American Amaryllis Society. Mr. Krippendorf gardened at Lob's Wood, his estate near Cincinnati, Ohio. When Elizabeth Lawrence addressed a meeting of the Garden Club of America in Cincinnati in 1945, they met for the first time. Their previous, polite exchange deepened and broadened, and it provided the basis for her second book, *The Little Bulbs: A Tale of Two Gardens*, published in 1957 and dedicated to Mr. Krippendorf. One of the gardens in the title, of course, was his at Lob's Wood. The other was hers, the garden at 348 Ridgewood Avenue.

This is a tale of two gardens: mine and Mr. Krippendorf's. Mine is a small city back yard laid out in flower beds and gravel walks, with a scrap of pine woods in the background; Mr. Krippendorf's is hundreds of acres of virgin forest. Both are perfect for little bulbs, for no garden is too small to hold them all if only a few of each are used, and no forest is too large to show them off if enough of one kind is planted (LB, 1).

Readers throughout the country came to know Elizabeth Lawrence's Charlotte garden through *The Little Bulbs*, as some 17,000 copies of the book were sold through its offering as a selection in the American Garden Guild Book Club in addition to those sold through conventional book shops (NOGA, 308).

Readers of the *Charlotte Observer* were also introduced to the Ridgewood Avenue garden in 1957 when the newspaper initiated a weekly garden column, written by Miss Lawrence, in its Sunday edition on 11 August. That first column was illustrated with a photograph of Miss Lawrence standing at the gate, opened for her readers, that looks much the same today, in 2005, as it did then.

This is the gate of my garden. I invite you to enter in; not only into my garden, but into the world of gardens—a world as old as the history of man, and as new as the latest contribution of science; a world of mystery, adventure and romance; a world of poetry and philosophy; a world of beauty; and a world of work.

Over time, and through the course of another 700-plus columns published in the period up to her last column of 13 June 1971, readers came to understand that

romance, poetry, history, and philosophy were attributes as important in gardens as plants.

Gardens in Winter, the third of four books written by Elizabeth Lawrence that were published in her lifetime, also followed the example of *The Little Bulbs* in being both a celebration of her Charlotte garden and garden friendships. One of these friendships was with Caroline Dormon (1888-1971), a pioneering Louisiana environmentalist, forester, botanist, and native plant enthusiast who produced the illustrations for *Gardens in Winter*. Published by Harper & Brothers in 1961 the book was dedicated to Miss Dormon, with whom Elizabeth Lawrence had first corresponded in 1944 but did not meet until 1958, the year in which Miss Dormon's *Flowers Native to the Deep South* was published. The following year, 1959, Caroline Dormon was an overnight guest at Ridgewood Avenue while on a lecture tour (NOGA, 225). Miss Lawrence introduces readers of *Gardens in Winter* to the Ridgewood Avenue garden in its opening paragraphs and never allows them to stray too far from its seasonal embrace.

How beautiful it is when the pattern of the garden becomes clear again; when no leaves blur the long straight line or gentle curve, or the restful circle laid on the square; . . . On chance-mild days when and incandescent light falls on thin twigs, throwing their fine shadows across gravel walks, my garden seems more beautiful than at any other time. The essence of warmth and light is in this delicious sun that seeps into the spirit and penetrates the marrow. At no other season is the sun so grateful, so gentle and so healing (GIW, 3-4).

Gardens in Winter appeared during the long, steadily debilitating illness that would claim Mrs. Lawrence's life on 31 July 1964. Elizabeth "Bessie" Lawrence had suffered a stroke in 1957, and she increasingly required the attentions of Elizabeth Lawrence, her sister, and a series of nurses through seven long, difficult, and demanding years. In retrospect, her mother's care took up both time and energy at a critical point in Miss Lawrence's career; long necessary periods of contemplation and study were lost to her. However, through these years Elizabeth Lawrence continued to produce weekly columns for the *Charlotte Observer* and longer articles for horticultural journals and magazines. In 1966-1967 she was engaged in revisions for the reprinting of *A Southern Garden*. Her last book, *Lob's Wood*, an essay on Carl Krippendorf's gardens, was published in 1971 by the Cincinnati Nature Center which occupies the estate property.

During this period Elizabeth Lawrence maintained a steady correspondence with many friends and welcomed several of them as guests at Ridgewood Avenue. Foremost among this group were Eudora Welty and Katharine S. White. Elizabeth Lawrence met Eudora Welty (1909-2001) in Raleigh in the 1930s, when Miss Welty

also visited the Lawrences' Park Avenue garden. There was a unique friendship. Elizabeth Lawrence, the gardener, had an immediate rapport with Miss Welty's mother, Chestina Andrews Welty (1883-1966), who had developed the gardens at the Welty home at 1119 Pinehurst Street in Jackson, Mississippi. Miss Lawrence, the poet and writer, enjoyed the companionship of a Southern woman writer and gardener who, like her, had remained unmarried and at home with her mother. Eudora Welty visited Elizabeth Lawrence twice on Ridgewood Avenue: in April 1963, and last in April 1982.

Elizabeth Lawrence's friendship with Katharine S. White (1892-1977), an editor and writer for *The New Yorker*, was of shorter duration. Their correspondence began in 1958 and continued into June 1977, a few weeks before Mrs. White's death on 20 July. Through the course of this exchange Elizabeth Lawrence provided a great deal of horticultural information, advice, and recommendations that Mrs. White readily accepted and incorporated into her occasional column "Onward and Upward in the Garden." During this near twenty-year exchange of letters the two women met but once, in New York in 1967. Their correspondence, edited by Emily Herring Wilson, was published in 2002 as *Two Gardeners: A Friendship in Letters*.

Beginning in the 1960s with the deaths of both her mother and Carl Krippendorf in 1964 and that of her long-time friend and editor, the playwright Ann Preston Bridgers, in 1967, the deaths of a series of friends accompanied the denouement of her career as a writer and gardener. The death of Caroline Dormon in 1971 marked the end of a close personal and professional friendship unlike few others she enjoyed. The fact that Elizabeth Lawrence chose to deposit her personal papers in the archives of Northwestern State University of Louisiana, which held Miss Dormon's papers and was far away from the state of North Carolina where she lived all but a few years of her life, is one indication of the depth of their friendship.⁴ As one after another of her friends passed, the ongoing, lively, and rewarding exchange with Katharine S. White gained in meaning to Miss Lawrence. It, too, came to an end in 1977. Through this period, however, Elizabeth Lawrence could always count on her sister Ann, living next door. Her death in 1980 removed that critical pillar of Miss Lawrence's life.

Elizabeth Lawrence took the first steps that led to her departure from Charlotte in the later 1970s. On 21 September 1978 she signed a document granting power of attorney to her nephew Warren Wade Way III. Although notarized that same day, it was not registered until 31 January 1983 (Mecklenburg Deeds, 4621/0254-0256). It was also in 1978 that she sent the first group of her professional papers to the archivist at Northwestern State University of Louisiana. A second, larger donation of papers was sent in 1979.⁵ She had kept, however, the draft manuscripts for books on the market bulletins and rock gardening. Not until the summer of 1984, shortly before leaving

Charlotte, did Elizabeth Lawrence convey this material to Joanne Ferguson, editor-in-chief of Duke University Press (NOGA, 271-273).

Following the death of her sister in February 1980, an independent life for Elizabeth Lawrence at 348 Ridgewood Avenue became increasingly difficult. Domestic affairs were one issue, another was the care and maintenance of her garden. Over the course of years she had employed men to help her with the hard, difficult work of gardening, and in fall 1972 she had had the good fortune to gain the assistance of a helper, Jamie Stemple, a student of Dr. Herbert Heckenbleikner's. He helped her at least until 1979 (NOGA, 289-291). Meanwhile, another helper in the garden on an occasional basis was Steve del Vecchio. He had started working for the Clarksons at Wing Haven in 1969, and helped Miss Lawrence, on request, into the early 1980s, until about 1983 when Elizabeth Lawrence essentially ended her attention to it.⁶

But even in its decline the garden stirred memory and evoked appreciation from those who came to see Elizabeth Lawrence in the 1980s. In early April 1982 Eudora Welty returned to visit Miss Lawrence for the first time since 1963. Miss Welty had just participated in a writers' conference at Converse College and was traveling to Durham for a visit with Reynolds Price. Both women were in their seventies, and it surely went unsaid, if acknowledged in other ways, that the visit would likely be their last meeting. Miss Lawrence was a generous host, and packed a lunch and other treats for Miss Welty to carry away. Eudora Welty was equally gracious in her reply, dated 5 April 1982 from Jackson, and crafted a letter of warm remembrance of hours spent with Elizabeth Lawrence—in her house and garden.

How lovely & how rewarding a day like that can be. . . . You made it happen, and as far as I was concerned it was perfect—the shortness of time wasn't of any consequence at all, it was so fixed with pleasure, and the joy of walking in your garden again and seeing how you'd kept its continuing identity and its peace [marginal note--& as is] & in the beauty of the time of year—I was so glad to see you! and to see you where you belong most, just as always, and garden & house & yourself all looking in charge of one another in the same lively and complete accord—well, it's not easy to express, but so easy to bask in and thank heaven for. (NOGA, 266).

It was also in 1982 that Elizabeth Lawrence saw her last writings published. One was a memoir of Dr. Edgar T. Wherry, a fellow botanist, writer, and champion of rock gardens, published in "The Newsletter of the North Carolina Wildflower Preservation Society" in Fall 1982. The other was an introduction to a selection of newspaper columns and articles written by William Lanier Hunt (1906-1996) which was published by Duke University Press as *Southern Gardens, Southern Gardening*. Mr. Hunt, who had written a foreword for the reprint of *A Southern Garden* in 1967, asked

Miss Lawrence for the honor. Her short essay, a light-hearted elegy on their gardening friendship, returned the favor.

When my mother and I came to Charlotte to live, I thought we would see less of Bill, but as it turned out we saw him more often. He came, bringing with him young botanists, students or faculty of the university; he came, bringing bulbs and plants for my new garden, and once he brought a rectangular block of slate from Morgan Creek Valley. We set it, like a jewel, in a low stone wall. The valley slate is dark gray when dry, but when it rains it reveals tones of Mulberry, Mauve, and Perilla Purple. Between visits there were letters: . . . (SC, SG, xiv).

In 1983 and 1984 Elizabeth Lawrence resolved three important considerations as her days at 348 Ridgewood Avenue came to a necessary end. She entrusted the manuscripts that were published posthumously as *Gardening for Love* and *A Rock Garden in the South* to Joanne Ferguson (b. 1930), editor-in-chief at Duke University Press. The resolution of two other matters concerning her future were intertwined. After extended discussions with her niece and nephew, she set about the process of selling her house and relocating to Annapolis, Maryland, to live near her niece and namesake, Elizabeth Lawrence (Way) Rogers (b. 1945). On 17 October 1984 the deed for 348 Ridgewood Avenue was executed and the property sold for \$90,000 to James B. Sommers, a vice-president with North Carolina National Bank then residing at 226 Huntley Place, Charlotte (Mecklenburg Deeds, 4917/0207). Mr. Sommers' ownership of the Lawrence property was a brief point of transition in its history. On 11 February 1986 he and his wife conveyed 348 Ridgewood Avenue to Mary Lindeman Wilson (b. 1932) for \$121,000 (Mecklenburg Deeds, 5172/0480).

Elizabeth Lewis Lawrence died within a year of leaving her Charlotte house and garden. In Maryland she first occupied rooms in the home of her niece, her husband, and their family at 201 Norwood Road in Annapolis. She subsequently moved to a small apartment. When her health declined further she was moved to Pleasant Living Convalescent Center in Edgewater, Anne Arundel County, Maryland, where she died on Tuesday, 11 June 1985. Her body was cremated and the ashes interred in the yard of St. James Episcopal Church, Lothian, Maryland. Her obituary appeared in the *Charlotte Observer* on 16 June under the heading "Elizabeth Lawrence, Wrote *A Southern Garden*."⁷

Elizabeth Lawrence's house and garden have been the beneficiary of a remarkable stewardship by Mary Lindeman "Lindie" Wilson. A native of Petersburg, Virginia, a well-informed lifetime gardener, and the divorced mother of two, she relocated to Ridgewood Avenue from a house at 4919 Gorham Drive in Charlotte.⁸ She was also the owner/proprietor of Interior Greenworks, Inc., a firm which designed, installed,

and maintained tropical foliage plants and interior landscapes in business and institutional settings. Mrs. Wilson continued this enterprise into the mid 1990s at an off-site office and warehouse facility.

The house built by Miss Lawrence had remained unchanged during her years here and Mr. Sommers' brief tenure as owner, but with the passage of thirty-seven years, maintenance and certain upgrades became necessary. When effecting these and two more substantive improvements to the house, Mrs. Wilson and her architect, David Wagner, exercised restraint and sensitivity to the house and its character. While the two-bedroom house had been satisfactory for Miss Lawrence and her mother, whose closest relatives lived next door, Mrs. Wilson needed additional space to accommodate her family on visits. Mr. Wagner provided a new second-story suite for Mrs. Wilson in the existing attic of the Lawrence house by adding a small dormer window on the south façade and a larger shed-roof dormer, incorporating seven windows, on the north elevation overlooking the garden. This suite included a spacious bed-sitting room, bathroom, closets, and laundry closet while reserving the unfinished west end of the attic for household storage. On the first story the terrace was enclosed as a garden room with a brick floor and windows overlooking the garden. These improvements were completed by June 1986 when Mrs. Wilson occupied the house.

The garden at 348 Ridgewood Avenue, little attended in the last years of Miss Lawrence's life here and largely neglected during Mr. Sommers' ownership, had become much overgrown by June 1986 when Mrs. Wilson moved into the house and set about her work outside. With careful attention—and knowledge—the garden was reclaimed through pruning, removal of unwanted, volunteer, and invasive growth, and replanting over the course of years. As the work advanced through the late 1980s, the plan devised by Miss Lawrence, with its rock-lined gravel paths, beds, and borders, reappeared with all its simple linear clarity. The essential hard-scape features of the garden had survived altogether intact. Many of the trees, woody and herbaceous plants, bulbs, and perennials dating to Miss Lawrence's period also survived, and they responded well to a delayed but welcome nurturing.⁹ Mindful of the plants Miss Lawrence had grown here with success, Miss Wilson replanted in like fashion, in sympathy with the character of Miss Lawrence's garden, but never slavishly. In 1992, six years after acquiring the property, the garden was open to view on the Mint Museum House and Garden Tour. By coincidence it was also the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *A Southern Garden*.

Public interest in Elizabeth Lawrence was rekindled in 2002 with the publication of *Two Gardeners: A Friendship in Letters* and the knowledge that Emily Herring Wilson was at work on a biography of the garden writer. *No One Gardens Alone: A Life of Elizabeth Lawrence* was published in 2004. Interest also turned to Miss

Lawrence's Charlotte house and garden and its future. Under the auspices of The Garden Conservancy, a preliminary meeting was held at 348 Ridgewood Avenue on 4 March 2003. This initiative resulted, in 2004, in the organization of The Friends of Elizabeth Lawrence, which is now leading efforts to acquire and preserve the house and garden.

SIGNIFICANCE

In a short autobiography published in *Herbertia* in 1943, Elizabeth Lawrence recounted her mother's encouragement to gardening, her telling of the Parable of the Sower, and the magic she herself found among the plants in the garden of the Raleigh house that became the Lawrences' home in fall 1916. The garden had been established by the house's former owners, and in the 1910s and 1920s, including the period when Elizabeth Lawrence was a student at Barnard College (1922-1926), Mrs. Lawrence nurtured its development. Her efforts proved more influential than she could have foreseen at the time. Elizabeth Lawrence concluded the paragraphs on her early life with a remembrance. "The first spring in the South after four years in New York led me to choose gardening as a profession" (AGOO, 3).

Garden Design



Elizabeth Lawrence Garden during her time in Charlotte

A year would pass between that spring of 1927 and spring 1928 when Elizabeth Lawrence began studies as a special student at North Carolina State College of Agriculture and Engineering. This course of education was interrupted by a trip to Europe and it was not until spring 1929 that she was again taking courses. With those

completed she entered a three-year program in landscape architecture offered in the School of Agriculture's horticultural department. In June 1932 Elizabeth Lawrence became the first woman to receive a Bachelor of Science in Landscape Architecture degree from the North Carolina school (NOGA, 88-90). Although Elizabeth Lawrence soon joined her friend Isabell Bronson Busbee (1880-1966) in a garden design partnership, the circumstances were not propitious for a career as a landscape architect. The financial exigencies of the time severely circumscribed opportunities for landscape architects in general, and the opportunities for women undertaking a career in that field in the South were even less promising. Nevertheless, some few modest commissions came her way, and these are simply noted by her biographer, who acknowledges documentation is "scant" for the period preceding the move to Charlotte (NOGA, 124).¹⁰ One such project, garden improvements to the grounds of Chosummeda, a nineteenth-century plantation house in Edgecombe County, came to her in 1948 because its owner Martina (Carr) Fillmore (1904-1972) had been a St. Mary's classmate.

Written records are also thin for the period after she established herself in Charlotte in 1949 except for occasional letters surviving in her papers at Northwestern State University of Louisiana, personal remembrances, and some few rare surviving plans.¹¹ These suggest that it was two pillars of her life, the Episcopal Church and St. Mary's School, around which work came her way. In about 1959-1960, Rebecca Bennahan (Wood) Drane (1892-1984), the wife of the Reverend Frederick Blount Drane, sought Miss Lawrence's advice on improvements to the grounds of The Homestead, an ancestral place in Edenton to which the Dranes retired in 1958 after Mr. Drane's tenure as rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Monroe.¹² Then, at the end of the 1960s, Hugh Boyer, who had grown up in Myers Park and later relocated to Hickory, engaged Miss Lawrence to help with the garden for a house at 824 Seventh Street, NW, whose grounds he was enlarging.¹³ In each of these cases, Miss Lawrence consulted on site, made recommendations in conversation and later in letters to the clients, and often provided favored plants from her own Ridgewood Avenue garden that were supplemented by larger purchases from nurseries. The custom of site visits and letters also occurred at Hope Plantation, Bertie County, North Carolina, in 1967, for which she recommended the standards of historic Southern gardens—magnolia, boxwood, Virginia cedars, and crepe myrtles (NOGA, 282-284).

Despite the good efforts of her biographer and those of this writer, the account of Elizabeth Lawrence's work as a landscape architect and garden designer remains to be thoroughly addressed. To date, few plans for gardens made by her hand are known to survive and the extent to which she directed the design and planting of the entire grounds for a property is unconfirmed. There is the further question of the extent to which the plans she proposed for particular sites were developed. Another serious

complication to developing a chronological list of projects is the fact that Miss Lawrence did not usually include the year on her letters and as often as not simply referenced days by a church calendar, such as “All Saints” day, etc. In consequence, the survival of the garden at 348 Ridgewood Avenue is all the more remarkable—and important. Here, it would appear, she had an absolute hand in the design of her grounds and garden. Confined to a small lot measuring seventy feet in width and 225 feet in depth, she treated the entire property as a garden and laid out an axial series of paths, beds, and borders centered on a pool, that both delighted the eye and provided her with the necessary plots for horticultural experiment. She later reflected on the dual function of her garden, “I cannot bear for people to say (as they often do) that I am better at plant material than design; I cannot help it if I have to use my own well-designed garden as a laboratory, thereby ruining it as a garden” (quoted in GFL, 18, and TTGG, x).



Front entrance to Elizabeth Lawrence House

This garden, having survived well-preserved for a near score of years in the stewardship of Mary Lindeman Wilson, is both an important regional example of a designed landscape from the post-World War II period and a reflection of what might have been, had Elizabeth Lawrence not been restrained by personal obligations and had actively pursued a career in design. Even though acclaim came to Miss Lawrence as a writer, rather than as a garden designer, she identified herself as a “landscape architect” when a profession was first listed beside her name in the Raleigh city directory in 1933. That professional identification held through her (last) listing in the capital in its 1945-1946 directory. She held to that identification in Charlotte. After being simply listed by name in the 1950 and 1951 city directories, in 1952 she is

identified as a landscape architect in both the alphabetical list of residents and in the classified business directory. This pattern held through her final appearance in the Charlotte city directory in 1984. This said, however, Miss Lawrence apparently developed an unexplained aversion to the term. In an undated letter she replied to a magazine editor, “Don’t know what this means, but for the record: I design gardens but cannot bear to be called a Landscape Architect; lecture and write about gardening, but cannot bear to be called an expert. Cannot bear to be called an amateur, but like to be taken seriously as a gardener and a writer” (quoted in TTGG, x).

Garden Writing

The death of Elizabeth Lawrence in 1985 prompted a reassessment of her career, and a series of publications culminated, on the centennial of her birth in 2004, with the appearance of a biography, *No One Gardens Alone*. Upon publication it became the first book-length biography of an American garden writer and it retains that distinction to the present. This process of renewed appreciation, with no known like example among American garden writers of the twentieth century, actually began in 1984, when the University of North Carolina Press issued *A Southern Garden* in its first paperback edition. Following her death, *The Little Bulbs* was reprinted in 1986, and *A Southern Garden* was reissued in a special hardback edition in 1991, which was illustrated with watercolors of her Charlotte house and garden.

The manuscripts of two other books which had occupied the last decades of her life were edited and seen into publication by Duke University Press as *Gardening for Love: The Market Bulletins* in 1987 and *A Rock Garden in the South* in 1990. Two collections of her newspaper articles and shorter writings, *Through the Garden Gate* and *A Garden of One’s Own*, were published in 1990 and 1997, respectively. In 2001 UNC Press printed a paperback edition of the 1991 version of *A Southern Garden*. Then, in 2002, the letters exchanged between Miss Lawrence and Katharine S. White were published to rave reviews as *Two Gardeners: A Friendship in Letters* by Beacon Press. Early in this period, in 1989, Elizabeth Lawrence’s Library of nearly 500 books was sold for \$10,000 by her niece to the Cherokee Garden Library in Atlanta.

Those involved in this renaissance of interest in Elizabeth Lawrence represented a range of talents and areas of specialization in gardening and garden writing. This diversity also reflects the growing, widespread appreciation that people in both North Carolina and the nation, as well as England, have come to hold for her writings. First, chronologically, among this group was William Lanier Hunt (1906-1996), a close friend and gardening colleague since the 1930s when they encouraged gardening and the garden club movement in the Southeast. They shared remarkably similar interests, both were writers for newspapers--he for the Durham *Herald*--and both were well-

and widely-respected in the South. He was instrumental in the first reprinting of *A Southern Garden* in 1967. One can quickly see Bill Hunt's hand in encouraging the press to reprint *The Little Bulbs* and persuading Miss Lawrence to entrust her manuscripts for two books to Mrs. Ferguson, to whom he had dedicated *Southern Gardens*, *Southern Gardening*.

Joanne Ferguson, in turn, went about finding editors for the manuscripts, succeeded in her work, and quickly oversaw the reprinting of *The Little Bulbs* by her press in 1986. This effort, no doubt, was a step in the anticipated promotion of the two Lawrence books to follow. The reprint carried a new introduction by Allen Lacy (b. 1935), a professor of philosophy at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and gardening columnist for *The New York Times*, who also took on the task of editing the market bulletin manuscript into *Gardening for Love: The Market Bulletins*. Allen Lacy also collaborated with Nancy Goodwin, the internationally-known gardener at Montrose in Hillsborough, on the preparation of *A Rock Garden in the South*. The publication of *Gardening for Love* whetted the appetite of readers for both the rock garden book and a compilation of Miss Lawrence's *Charlotte Observer* articles published in 1990 as *Through the Garden Gate*. It was edited by Bill Neal (1950-1991), a gardener and writer better known as a chef and the proprietor of Crook's Corner, a legendary restaurant in Chapel Hill, but someone whose appreciation of Miss Lawrence and her writing was as keen as that of professional garden writers and gardeners.

In September 1992 a symposium was mounted in the Research Triangle Park area to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Elizabeth Lawrence's 1942 classic. Speakers at "A SOUTHERN GARDEN: Past, Present, and Future" included Pamela Harper, a highly respected garden writer who has long cited Miss Lawrence as her mentor; Felder Rushing, the prolific Jackson Mississippi-based garden writer; Nancy Goodwin; Edith Eddleman, who designed the Elizabeth Lawrence border at the North Carolina State University Arboretum in Raleigh; Douglas Ruhren; William Lanier Hunt; and Allen Lacy. In 1997, fifty-five years after publishing *A Southern Garden*, the University of North Carolina Press published *A Garden of One's Own*. Edited by Barbara Scott and Bobby J. Ward, this book is a compilation of fifty-four articles Elizabeth Lawrence had written for magazines, garden club journals, and horticultural publications between 1933 and 1982.

Today, sixty-three years after its publication, *A Southern Gardener*, a timeless meditation on gardening, has become a classic. It remains in print as do *The Little Bulbs*, *Gardening for Love*, and *A Rock Garden in the South*, and the two compilations of her shorter works, *Through the Garden Gate* and *A Garden of One's Own*. *Two Gardeners: A Friendship in Letters* has been issued in a paperback edition. *No One Gardens Alone* is in bookstores in both hardback and paperback editions. This in-print status is one enjoyed by none of Elizabeth Lawrence's

American contemporaries in garden literature. Helen Van Pelt Wilson (1901-2003), probably the most prolific twentieth-century writer on gardening and plants and the published author of at least thirteen books and the co-author or editor of another eleven, has only *The New Perennials Preferred* in print. (Interestingly enough, it is actually a revised reprint of her second book, *Perennials Preferred*, that was first published in 1945.) Other garden journalists and authors of the period—and their works—have faded into a certain obscurity. Dorothy Helen Jenkins (1907-1972) and Joan Lee Faust (____-____), columnists/garden editors for *The New York Times*, Thomas Henry Everett (c. 1903-1986), who also contributed articles to the *Times* as well as the *New York Herald Tribune*, while director of the New York Botanical Garden, and George Taloumis (____-____), a garden columnist for the *Boston Globe* and the author of many articles for popular and garden interest magazines, are names that are virtually unknown today. However, it should be noted that Miss Lawrence had books by both Mrs. Wilson and Mr. Taloumis in her library.

While these writers are indeed her contemporaries they were not her equals as writers. In his sketch, “Listening to Miss Lawrence,” published in 1992 in *The Gardener’s Eye and Other Essays*, Allen Lacy put the matter succinctly.

Although her reputation has been primarily as a regional, specifically southeastern, writer, Elizabeth Lawrence is one of the best writers we’ve ever had. Her three major books—*A Southern Garden* (1942), *The Little Bulbs: A Tale of Two Gardens* (1957), and *Gardens in Winter* (1971)—are horticultural classics, fully a match for anything written by such British gardening writers as Gertrude Jekyll and Vita Sackville-West. Furthermore, she transcends the usual category of “gardening writer”: she wrote about gardening only in the same sense that M. F. K. Fisher writes about cooking (TGE, 156).

Mr. Lacy, who never met Elizabeth Lawrence, was repeating a view he first aired in his introduction to *Gardening for Love*. But, in fact, it was William Lanier Hunt, Miss Lawrence’s long-time friend and an inveterate reader of both American and English garden books, who first placed her in the larger English garden writers tradition. In his foreword to the 1967 reprint of *A Southern Garden* he described it as being “to American gardeners what the best English books are to the Britons. It follows in the tradition of the very rare books of the late E. A. Bowles, which are considered the most readable books ever written on gardening” (ASG, 1967, vii).

Placing Miss Lawrence in the literary company of these now legendary figures is rightful, if not physically possible. She never met them but she knew them and their books well. The works of all three are in her library, now at the Cherokee Garden Library, which includes eleven works by Miss Jekyll and five books by Edward Augustus Bowles (1865-1954). Both writers influenced Elizabeth Lawrence’s

writings, and there are clear links between Mr. Bowles' works on bulbs and his *My Garden* series and her three classics. Another figure who could be added to the roster is Jane Loudon, the great nineteenth-century writer, who, with Miss Jekyll, is among Elizabeth Lawrence's most often cited authorities.

Today, with the long-ago loss of Elizabeth Lawrence's Raleigh garden and the demolition in 2004 of the house in North Carolina's capital which was her home from 1916 to 1948, her house and garden at 348 Ridgewood Avenue is the single property associated with her long and important career as a plantswoman and writer. Her home and garden from 1949 to 1984 holds significance in the history of Charlotte, the state, and the nation. In her letter of 5 April 1982, following a visit with Miss Lawrence, Eudora Welty phrased the remarkable association of person and place as well as possible for anyone—but here for Elizabeth Lawrence, her house, and her garden in Charlotte:

I was so glad to see you! and to see you where you belong most, just as always, and the garden & house & yourself all looking in charge of one another in the same lively and complete accord—well, its not easy to express, but so easy to bask in and thank heaven for (NOGA, 266).

ENDNOTES

1. The principal published source on Elizabeth Lawrence is Emily Herring Wilson's *No One Gardens Alone: A Life of Elizabeth Lawrence*. This author readily acknowledges its value in the preparation of this survey and research report together with that of the other works and sources cited in the bibliography. Where appropriate, quotations and documentation are noted internally with the use of acronyms, for instance NOGA for *No One Gardens Alone*, etc. Conventional endnotes are also used herein.
2. The circumstances of the Lawrence family in the immediate post-World War II period are unclear. In the 1945-1946 Raleigh city directory Mrs. Lawrence and Elizabeth are both listed as residents of the two-story house at 115 Park Avenue. In the 1947 directory neither are listed at that address. Instead, the house has become a duplex with Clement A. Rodwell at #115 and Mrs. Gladys B. Wheeler at 115 ½ Park Avenue. In the 1948 Raleigh directory Mrs. Lawrence is again in residence at 115 Park Avenue. In the alphabetical residential listing she appears as "Eliz (wid Saml) landscape gdnr."

In the 1949 directory both Clement A. Rodwell and J. Brice Moore, who (with his wife) purchased the house from Mrs. Lawrence in October 1948, are listed as residents of 115 Park Avenue while Mrs. Wheeler remains in an apartment at

115 ½ Park Avenue. The house was subsequently acquired by the Farmhouse Fraternity at North Carolina State University and occupied by the fraternity until 2004 when a new house was built on the property and the Lawrence house was demolished.

3. Mr. Prigden, formerly a reporter for the Charlotte News Publishing Company, and his wife had resided at 312 Ridgewood Avenue. The Prigidens had purchased the lot on 18 June 1936 (Mecklenburg Deeds, 886/169). By 1948 they had relocated to Washington County, Tennessee.
4. The choice also reflects the persistence of Carol Wells, the archivist at Northwestern State University of Louisiana, who beginning in January 1977 actively sought the Elizabeth Lawrence Papers.
5. Author's telephone conversation with Mary Linn Wernet, archivist, Northwestern State University of Louisiana, 14 June 2005.
6. Author's telephone interview with Steve del Vecchio, 19 June 2005.
7. Author's telephone interview with Elizabeth Lawrence Way Rogers, 12 June 2005
8. The account of Mrs. Wilson's occupation of 348 Ridgewood Avenue is based on an on-site interview on 2 March 2005 and a telephone interview with Mrs. Wilson on 20 June 2005.
9. These are recorded on a site plan of the property prepared by Keyes Williamson in 2005 and submitted with this application.
10. Plans for at least two projects survive from the Raleigh period: "Sketch of Layout of Grounds of Farmville Community Park, Farmville, N. C. by The Farmville Woman's Club" is undated and bears the name of both "Isabel B. Busbee (and) Elizabeth Lawrence, Landscape Architects," and "Planting Design for Dr. Bullitt," also undated and signed "Elizabeth Lawrence, L.A." This writer is now investigating the status of the Farmville project. "Dr. Bullitt" was Dr. James Bell Bullitt (1874-1964), chairman of the department of pathology at the University of North Carolina Medical School. The house for which Miss Lawrence prepared the planting plan was designed for Dr. Bullitt and his second wife in June 1938 by George Watts Carr and was built at 737 Gimghoul Road, Chapel Hill, where it stands to the present. The planting plan probably dates to ca. 1939-1940. The extent to which Miss Lawrence's proposed design for the grounds behind the house, including an arbor for scuppernong grape vines, was implemented is not known. None of the plants

specified on the plan appear to survive. The flagstone walk and a flight of curved steps off the corner of the house, which appear to be Miss Lawrence's designs, do survive.

11. One such previously-unknown plan came to the attention of this author in September 2005. Unsigned and undated, but bearing Miss Lawrence's identifiable handwriting, it is a small sheet of tracing paper on which she had drawn the plan of a grass-covered terrace feature with brick walks and steps for the residence of James and Charlotte Trotter at 4000 Churchill Road, Charlotte. It is believed to be contemporary with the ca. 1950 construction of the suburban one-story ranch house. The terrace, brick walks, and steps remain intact as does a brick enclosed rose bed and other features that may have an association with Miss Lawrence who wrote about the garden and Mrs. Trotter's gardening here in her columns for the *Charlotte Observer*. The plan, together with photographs made by the Trotters in the 1950s and 1960s, together with other images, remain in the possession of the current owners.
12. Author's telephone interview with Frances Drane Inglis, 16 June 2005. She provided photocopies of two undated letters written by Miss Lawrence to Mrs. Drane and a photocopy of a draftsman's plat of The Homestead lot on which both existing trees and plants and proposed plantings are noted.
13. Author's telephone interview with Hugh Boyer, 14 June 2005.

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After Elizabeth Lawrence left, the garden fell into some neglect



Garden is presently restored

7. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

(Note: Although the Elizabeth Lawrence house faces south/southwest, for the ease of description it will be described as facing south, with its façade being its south elevation, the rear wall being its north elevation, and so forth. The grounds and garden will be described likewise.)

The small one-story-with-attic house at 348 Ridgewood Avenue, built by Elizabeth Lawrence in 1948-1949 and her home from its completion until October 1984, is a modest, simply-detailed dwelling whose appearance belies its importance in the areas of landscape architecture and garden literature. The house stands on its original lot, seventy feet in width and 225 feet in depth. Miss Lawrence's house departs from the appearance of most of its neighbors in three important respects. First, it was built as a one-story-with-attic house in the late 1940s on a street which had been built up in the 1920s and 1930s with mostly two-story Colonial Revival-style houses or period cottages. It and its neighbor at 340 Ridgewood Avenue, the one-story home of Elizabeth Lawrence's sister, Ann Way, were two of the last built houses on the street developed as a part of Poplar Gables, adjacent to the southwest edge of Myers Park. Second, while the Lawrence and Way houses honor the established set-back from Ridgewood Avenue, Elizabeth Lawrence did not have a conventional grass-covered front lawn like her neighbors and her sister. Instead, she designed a rectangular gravel-covered entrance court for her own automobile and that of visitors and centered it in front of the house. She placed the driveway, also gravel-covered and about fourteen feet wide, at the extreme east edge of her lot. In a concession to the neighborhood, she screened this unconventional feature—and her vehicle—with a

hedge of Camellia sasanqua about fifty feet in length, planted along the inside, north edge of the concrete sidewalk. This unconventional treatment of the house's front yard was part of the larger, different point of view taken by Miss Lawrence in the development of her property.

The third distinction is this: confined in Charlotte on grounds that were about a third the size of those on which her mother and she had gardened in Raleigh since the 1910s, Elizabeth Lawrence treated the entire lot as her garden. As a gardener, writer and plantswoman, she was unique in Charlotte and so, too, was her approach to planting. Every square foot of the property was incorporated into a unified landscape, which extended from the front curb and the planted verge, to the alley carrying at the back of her lot, whose long east and west edges were marked by a low open-weave wire fence planted with big-leaf ivy. This view of her property was indeed personal; however, it was not entirely singular on Ridgewood Avenue. A block to the north, at 248 Ridgewood Avenue, Edwin and Elizabeth Clarkson had exercised a similar enthusiasm in the development of their much larger grounds as a series of gardens which they called Wing Haven.

The House

Having lived in a two-story house for virtually all of her life, one larger than was necessary and perhaps even desirable for herself and her mother, she built a small one-story-with-attic house that was entirely suited to the needs of two single women. Rectangular in plan, except for the shallow projection of the terrace in its northeast corner, the house stands on a running bond brick foundation and is covered with a side-gable roof of asphalt shingles. Its elevations are sheathed in gray-stained cedar shingles. The gray shingles, the white-painted molded trim, the recessed entrance and its six-panel door, and the multi-pane sash windows impart a late Colonial Revival-style character to the house. The recessed doorway opens into an interior of essentially two parts. The entrance hall, a small pantry, an eat-in kitchen, and a spacious living/dining room occupy the east half of the house's plan while two bedrooms with adjoining bathrooms and Elizabeth Lawrence's study are aligned off a hall in the west half of the house. Doors opened from the living room and the study onto the concrete-paved open terrace inset in the house's northeast corner.

The house remained intact in plan, finish, and appearance from its completion in 1949 through its sale by Miss Lawrence to Mr. Sommers in 1984 and his, in turn, to Mrs. Wilson in 1986. Between February and June 1986 two substantive changes were made to the house. The terrace was enclosed as a garden room on its original footprint and the easternmost two-thirds of the attic was refitted and enlarged as a bedroom suite for Mrs. Wilson. This involved the addition of a small dormer window on the façade and a larger, more visible dormer on the rear elevation covered by a shed roof which

extends from the house's main ridge line. At this same time, the hood over the kitchen door on the east side of the house was enhanced with the addition of a pedimented gable. Last, about 1992-1995, Mrs. Wilson replaced the cedar shingles in kind.

Today, the Elizabeth Lawrence House presents an essentially symmetrical five-bay façade to Ridgewood Avenue, if also one partially hidden by the evergreen hedge and the plantings of shrubs and vines that embower the elevation. The recessed, centered entrance has a traditional late-Colonial Revival finish with a molded surround, sheathed sides, and a six-panel door flanked by five-pane sidelights above blind panels. The brick stoop incorporates brick steps which descend to a patterned brick and concrete block walkway to the gravel court. The bays flanking the recess each hold six-over-six sash in molded surrounds. The window opening at the west edge of the façade holds eight-over-eight sash. It is positioned to adjoin a larger window opening at the south edge of the west elevation, which holds paired six-over-six sash. This three-part corner window provided good illumination for the southwest bedroom occupied by Mrs. Lawrence. The corner window concept was reversed for the kitchen in the pendant southeast room where a large window opening at the east edge of the façade is fitted with paired six-over-six sash windows and the companion opening at the south edge of the east elevation contains eight-over-eight sash. The low, three-pane shed dormer, whose roof extends from the house's ridge line, is centered above, behind the entrance, where it has the appearance of a clerestory. It abuts the brick interior chimney on the west.

The east gable end of the Lawrence House has an asymmetrical three-part division whose appearance, again, is partially hidden by plantings. These include the vine-covered archway set perpendicular to the elevation, incorporating Miss Lawrence's well-published garden gate and a stand of bamboo in the center of the elevation. The south third of the elevation includes the above-mentioned kitchen window and the door opening under the bracketed, pedimented hood into the kitchen; the opening is fitted with both a screened door and a glazed and paneled door. The center third of this elevation contains an unusually wide window opening, fitted with six-over-six sash flanking a fixed panel of twenty panes, which illuminates the living/dining room. This window's view is screened by the stand of bamboo. When the second-story bedroom suite was added in 1986 this part of the house's east elevation was raised to two stories to provide a full-height wall. The (former attic) window opening, centered in the top of the gable, was refitted with one-over-one sash and now illuminates Mrs. Wilson's bedroom. The north third of the house's east elevation is fitted with a trio of tall one-over-one sash windows that form a part of the garden room fenestration.

The asymmetrical north, rear elevation of the Lawrence House, overlooking the garden, includes the windows of three rooms. Here the projecting wall of the garden room, comprising the east section of the elevation, is fitted with paired, centered

fifteen-pane French doors, below a transom, and broad flanking openings each holding three tall one-over-one sash. The long low horizontal dormer, with its seven one-over-one sash windows, rises above and behind the garden room fenestration. Elizabeth Lawrence's wide picture window, from which she could look up from her desk and out into the garden, is positioned in the west part of this elevation. It comprises paired six-over-six sash flanking a fixed panel of twenty panes. A wood window box, added by Mrs. Wilson, carries under this window. A small window to the west illuminates the bathroom in the northwest corner of the house. The gable end rising above this original part of the elevation is finished with a ventilator with horizontal louvers.

The house's three-bay west elevation also has an asymmetrical appearance. A window opening near its center holds paired six-over-six sash that illuminated Miss Lawrence's bedroom. A single window to the north provided additional light and ventilation for her adjoining corner bathroom. The window opening at the extreme south edge of the elevation, with its paired six-over-six sash, formed part of the corner window in Mrs. Lawrence's bedroom. An opening in the brick foundation wall, fitted with a board-and-rail door, provided access to the storage area where Elizabeth Lawrence kept many of her garden tools. The centered attic window in the upper gable end retains its eight-over-eight sash, and the apex of the gable is finished as a ventilator with horizontal louvers.

The interior of the house, including both its plan and finish, remains essentially unchanged except for Mr. Sommers' addition of brass chandeliers in the entrance hall and kitchen, his installation of draperies and their rod in Miss Lawrence's study, and certain improvements made by Mrs. Wilson. The chandelier in the entrance hall replaced one taken down when Elizabeth Lawrence left the house; she never had curtains at her study window. The enclosure of the garden room, the addition of the stair to the new second-story bedroom suite, and its installation all date to 1986. About 1992 Mrs. Wilson installed ceramic tile floors in the pantry and kitchen and made improvements to the cabinetry of both rooms. Ceramic tile floors were installed in both bathrooms in the 1990s, and some simple changes in lighting, mainly recessed lighting in the living room, were also effected. Mrs. Wilson also installed louvered doors in the opening between the entrance hall and the hall. The original interior decoration includes narrow oak flooring, molded top baseboards, and plaster walls and ceilings that are painted in all rooms except the living room, which has painted grasscloth on the walls. The entrance hall and living room have molded plaster cornices; the other rooms have no finished cornices. The traditional, three-part molded door and window frames are consistent throughout the house, and the doors all have a six-panel arrangement.

The entrance hall, immediately inside the front door, also has doorways in each of its other three walls. The opening into the living room, on axis with the front door, is fitted with double-leaf, three-panel doors. The doorway in the west wall connects with the private hall serving the bedrooms while the door in the east wall opens into a small pantry. The pantry, which housed a combination washer and dryer in Elizabeth Lawrence's later years, is en suite with the kitchen in the house's southeast corner. With the relocation of the washer and dryer to the second story in 1986 Mrs. Wilson installed a counter and sink with cabinets below on the south wall and added doors to the wall-hung open shelves above. Doors to the heating closet and ironing board closet are set in the north wall. Miss Lawrence apparently removed the original drawers for linens, etc., when she installed the washer/dryer. In the kitchen the original wall-hung and counter cabinets remain in place; however, the refurbishment of ca. 1992 included the new tile floor, tile counter tops, new cabinets under the south windows, shelves above windows and the door into the living room for open storage, and the replacement of the stove and refrigerator.

The large handsome living room remains as it did in Elizabeth Lawrence's time except for two changes made in 1986, in addition to recessed lighting. The glazed doors in the two openings onto the terrace were taken down when the terrace was enclosed as a garden room. (The doors are in storage on the premises.) The enclosed stair, with visible splayed risers at its foot and a closet below its rise, was installed along the room's west wall. The projecting chimneybreast, centered in the room's south wall, is fitted with a Federal-style mantel and flanked by open bookshelves that rise to the ceiling from wainscot-level closed shelves. The broad, multi-pane window centered in the room's east wall is likewise flanked by built-in corner cabinets with open shelves, above wainscot-height cabinetry, where Miss Lawrence is said to have displayed Rose Medallion and Chinese export china. She had a refectory table positioned parallel with the window. The garden room has a patterned brick floor, painted wallboard walls, molded baseboards, and both recessed ceiling lights and skylights.

When the Lawrence house was built, the internal access to the paired bedrooms, bathroom and study on its west side, was through the opening linking the entrance hall with the private hall serving these rooms. With the enclosure of the terrace, the fifteen-pane glazed door, opening from the study onto the terrace, became an interior door. The study, where Elizabeth Lawrence read and wrote from 1949 to 1984, producing the manuscripts for three books published in her lifetime and two others published posthumously, remains intact except for repainting. Two original features reflect her pursuits. Her writing table is a long desk-height counter about two feet in depth, carrying almost fully under the window overlooking the garden. Supported on paired two-drawer file cabinets, it abuts the room's west wall and terminates at its east

end with open curved shelves. Nearby, open bookshelves rise from floor to ceiling on both sides of the terrace door and across the opening. Doors on the opposite west side of the study open into a closet and the northwest corner bathroom which also communicates with Miss Lawrence's bedroom in the center of the house's west side. The bathroom retains its original corner tub, wall-hung sink, two ceiling-mounted light fixtures, and ceramic tile wainscot that almost certainly dates to the Lawrence ownership. The writer's bedroom is also intact. Here, the door in the east wall, into the private hall, is flanked on the left (north) with open bookshelves from floor to ceiling and on the right by tiers of built-in floor-to-ceiling drawer/cabinet units that flank a mirrored recess for her plate glass dressing table. The ceiling fixture and the dressing table light are also original. The private hall, which carries from the study at its north end to a bathroom (used by Mrs. Lawrence) at its south end, is lined on its east side with floor-to-ceiling closets. Tall paired doors provide access to compartments for everyday storage while shorter doors provide access to the more permanent storage above. Mrs. Lawrence's bedroom, in the southwest corner of the house, remains as it was in her lifetime and includes a closet with two-tiers of sliding doors and an overhead light. The adjoining bathroom retains its original tub, wall-hung-sink, commode, and the Lawrence-period ceramic tile wainscot.

The Grounds and Garden

Faced in 1949 with a city lot that was just over one-third the size of the Raleigh acreage she and her mother had given up, Elizabeth Lawrence followed both instinct and necessity in laying out her Charlotte property. She was altogether conscious of her changed circumstances and admitted as much in the opening pages of *Gardens in Winter*.

I should love, above all things, to have enough space (and energy) to make for myself a separate garden for winter flowers and winter greens; but since we have come to Charlotte to live I must make one small garden do for all seasons, and so I have tried to fill it with plants that are always presentable (GIW, 6-7).

Elizabeth Lawrence did not limit her intention to the new "garden" but applied her ambition to the entire lot, treating it as a landscape that she designed, shaped, and planted as the setting for her small house and garden

Her goal and its successful implementation is immediately apparent to any visitor. It is equally visible on the map of the grounds, prepared by Keyes Williamson, which accompanies this application. Elizabeth Lawrence departed from neighborhood precedent and set her front yard apart as a rectangular gravel-covered entrance court where she and callers would park their cars. The drive from Ridgewood Avenue was pushed to the east edge of the lot and also covered with pit gravel. The remaining part

of the seventy-foot frontage was planted with a hedge of Camellia sasanqua, positioned immediately inside the public sidewalk, which created a sense of privacy and enclosure so dear on so small a property.

While dense, tall, and at the edge of the sidewalk, the hedge was not the beginning point of her landscape effort. Instead, she went to Ridgewood Avenue and claimed the narrow verge between the street and sidewalk, incorporating it into her grounds with plantings of small flowering trees and shrubs. The ground of the verge was then covered with an inset patternwork of brick and concrete block pavers. She repeated a variation of this paving as the walkway between the court and her front steps and for a walk that leads from the court around the front left (southwest) corner of her house to the passage along its west gable end. Elizabeth Lawrence mentions some planting in this narrow strip of ground; in her writings, however, her occasional use of it for horticultural storage has been made more permanent by Mrs. Wilson who uses it as a screened, gated garden workyard. As the map indicates, the edges of the court and foundation across the front of the house are planted with both deciduous, flowering and evergreen shrubs and an “Old Blush” rose that climbs then as now in an aged wild cherry tree that Miss Lawrence retained when she built the house.

Elizabeth Lawrence positioned the entrance to her garden on the east side of the house where it was accessible to her sister and her family at 340 Ridgewood Avenue. English boxwoods mark the transition from the gravel court to a rectangular brick paved court outside her kitchen door. Here she fashioned the gated archway, planted with Clematis armandii, that became the well-known, published entrance to her garden. The clematis failed and Mrs. Wilson planted the arch with a climbing rose. A gravel walkway leads along the extreme east edge of the lot, past the stand of bamboo outside the living room window, and around the northeast corner of the house to the stone steps now rising to the garden room doors.

Miss Lawrence designed her garden with primary and secondary axes that correspond to the house’s plan. The principal axis, a wide gravel-covered walk, carries from the stone steps at the edge of her terrace—now Mrs. Wilson’s garden room—to the back of the garden. There it terminates with a shallow recess in a concrete block wall that forms a part of the screening of a horticultural workyard occupying the rearmost ten feet of the lot’s width. A Madonna plaque mounted at eye-level in the recess, which appeared in a photograph of this axis in the 1967 reprint of *A Southern Garden*, survives in place. About midway along this axis Elizabeth Lawrence located a small circular pool, lined with stones and encircled with concentric brick paving. Stones, used to line the edges of the walks and beds, also form a larger square frame around the brick circle which further emphasizes the garden’s principal ornamental feature. Because of overflow problems Mrs. Wilson has replaced the brick rim of the pool

with a slightly raised edge and finished the top with stones similar to those used for edging.

When seen in plan this principal axis, while a primary design feature, becomes one of two generally parallel gravel paths that carry from the house to the back of the garden and effectively divide its surface into three linear beds. The second path carries from a point below Elizabeth Lawrence's study window and gently curves as it nears the back of the garden, where it eases what might have been a too-obviously-insistent symmetry. (An existing, but now-lost tree may have also forced this curve.) The view along this path was the one with which Miss Lawrence opened *Gardens in Winter*.

I am writing, as always of my own garden, which I see, whenever I look up from my work, every day in the year—never without pleasure, and seldom without seeing something in bloom. (GIW, 11)

This view was punctuated with an allee of pruned cherry laurels, planted in a row in the centre bed, whose airy shape and weight provided a transition from the open sunny area of the garden immediately behind the house to the woodland garden at the back of the lot with its towering native pines and her own plantings. These trees and larger shrubs include Magnolia denudata, Magnolia x Veitchii, and Magnolia soulangeana, among others. The two long gravel paths have important perpendicular linkages, incorporating paths, shallow stone steps at low changes in grade, and other ornamental features, across the south front of the garden, immediately adjoining the house, and at the back of the garden. There, a gravel path provides access to a sheltered bench, centered and partially inset in the concrete-block screen wall, and to the (now) paired gates opening into the back workyard. A third perpendicular axis, punctuated with step stones marking shallow changes in grade, carries through the center of the pool. In addition to the two main gravel paths, a third path, paved with combinations of concrete-block and brick, and flagstones, extends from the gate of the enclosed workyard on the west side of the house, along a course generally parallel with the west fence line into the near center of the garden. There it terminates at a point west of the pool. Among the other Lawrence-era plants of note are her "White Empress" camellia, a Stewartia pseudocamellia, which is the largest in North Carolina and a champion big tree, and a seedling of her beloved Prunusume, the Japanese apricot.

In short, in a very small space, Elizabeth Lawrence created a garden of rich complexity, making the optimum use of the grounds at hand, and her resources, and yet one distinguished by the deceiving appearance of simplicity. Its design served her requirements for pleasure and horticultural experiment until 1984 and its hardscape remains intact today. Through the pages of *The Little Bulbs* and *Gardens in Winter*, and her columns published in the *Charlotte Observer*, she frequently discusses the

plants in her garden, those that thrived as well as those which did not, but always with learning, knowledge, and an enthusiasm she could convey to her readers. The plants which survive from her years here, 1949 to 1984 are noted on the maps prepared by Mr. Williamson and so, too, are those added by Mrs. Wilson beginning in 1986.

Integrity Statement

In his introduction to the 1986 reprint of *The Little Bulbs*, Allen Lacy wrote “Time is not always kind to the gardens that passionate gardeners bring into being and lovingly tend” (TLB, xii-xiii). He was writing, of course, about the two gardens in the book’s title and with satisfaction that Mr. Krippendorf’s estate gardens had become the property of the Cincinnati Nature Center. “It also survives,” he continued, “in the pages of *The Little Bulbs* together with Miss Lawrence’s own, much smaller gardens in the North Carolina piedmont” (TLB, xiii). When Allen Lacy wrote these words, some nineteen years ago, he could not have known that Elizabeth Lawrence’s Charlotte house and garden also would enjoy a remarkable degree of stewardship and preservation in private hands, those of Mary Lindeman Wilson, from February 1986 to the present.

When Elizabeth Lawrence left Charlotte and sold her property in 1984, its future carried no guarantee. Fate, with good fortune as its handmaiden, intervened. Mr. Sommers’ purchase of the property came as a result of personal, marital concerns that eventually resulted in his divorce from his wife. His occupation of the house was a temporary stage in its life and his. Consequently, in the seventeen months he owned the property his only changes were minor: the addition of a chandelier in the entrance hall to replace a hanging lamp which Miss Lawrence’s family removed and retained, the installation of a chandelier above the table in the kitchen, and the addition of draperies at the windows in Elizabeth Lawrence’s study which she had never curtained. At points in his ownership friends of Miss Lawrence, including Jennie White, worked in the garden.

The acquisition of the property by Mary Lindeman Wilson in February 1986 assured its preservation to the present. A lifetime gardener and the divorced mother of two, Mrs. Wilson also came to the Elizabeth Lawrence House at a point of transition. Her needs at a new stage in life were simple and not unlike those of Elizabeth Lawrence and her mother in 1948: a good house in a desirable neighborhood and grounds for a garden. The Elizabeth Lawrence House and Garden met those requirements to an extraordinary degree. As noted in section six of this report and the foregoing description, the essential character, appearance, and integrity of the house were preserved through the enclosure of the terrace as a garden room and the addition of the second-story bedroom suite. The addition of the front and rear dormer windows intrude little, and the house retains the qualities of design, workmanship, materials,

feeling, and association from the period of Miss Lawrence's ownership. The replacement of the deteriorated cedar shingles by cedar shingles of like appearance by Mrs. Wilson in the 1990s reflect her commitment to the character of the house. It can be reasonably argued that the preservation of the house's original east gable end and its original roofline, by positioning the rear dormer as a set-back three feet or so behind the elevation, would have been aesthetically preferable to raising a part of this elevation to two stories. However, the present treatment does not seriously compromise the integrity or significance of the house. The simple improvements on the interior, likewise, do not affect the fundamental integrity of the house and are generally sympathetic to its character.

Not surprisingly, Elizabeth Lawrence's garden and grounds have also enjoyed Mrs. Wilson's learned and sympathetic stewardship. While maintenance during Miss Lawrence's last years here and Mr. Sommers' brief ownership would have been preferred, the fact that they were unattended also meant that they suffered little except in the way of certain plant losses. Likewise, the slow, careful way in which Mrs. Wilson went about reclaiming the garden in the period from 1986 to 1992 also favored the preservation of its hardscape features and many of the plants from Elizabeth Lawrence's tenure. In this effort she was aided by Steve del Vecchio who had worked here on occasion for Miss Lawrence for over a decade, and he held a long experience with it and the important plants that survived time and neglect. Through weeding, pruning, and the removal of volunteer, invasive, and overgrown plants, and a good deal of simple cleaning and maintenance, Mrs. Wilson uncovered the physical fabric of the garden and its character. As this process advanced through the late 1980s and early 1990s, her knowledge of the garden increased and her sympathy with it enlarged. As she recently remarked, "This garden was Elizabeth Lawrence's laboratory, and it has been my classroom" (*Carolina Gardener*, January/February 2005, 20). Mrs. Wilson's learning, however, was not limited to her outdoor experiences. As the owner of Elizabeth Lawrence's garden, she quickly turned to Miss Lawrence's writings, and these, too, bore on her approach to the garden and new plantings. In recent years she has returned to Elizabeth Lawrence's weekly columns for the *Charlotte Observer*. Insights gained from them have been applied to the garden. (This research, undertaken with Ann Armstrong, will soon result also in the publication of a new selection of newspaper columns.) Today, Elizabeth Lawrence's garden, like that of Mr. Krippendorf, exists in literature, in the pages of *The Little Bulbs: A Tale of Two Gardens*, and at 348 Ridgewood Avenue.