

THE WILLIAM LEE HOUSE



This report was written on April 7, 1982.

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the William Lee House is located at 6415 Gaywind Dr. in Charlotte, NC.

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

The present owner of the property is:

Steven W. Kohlhagen

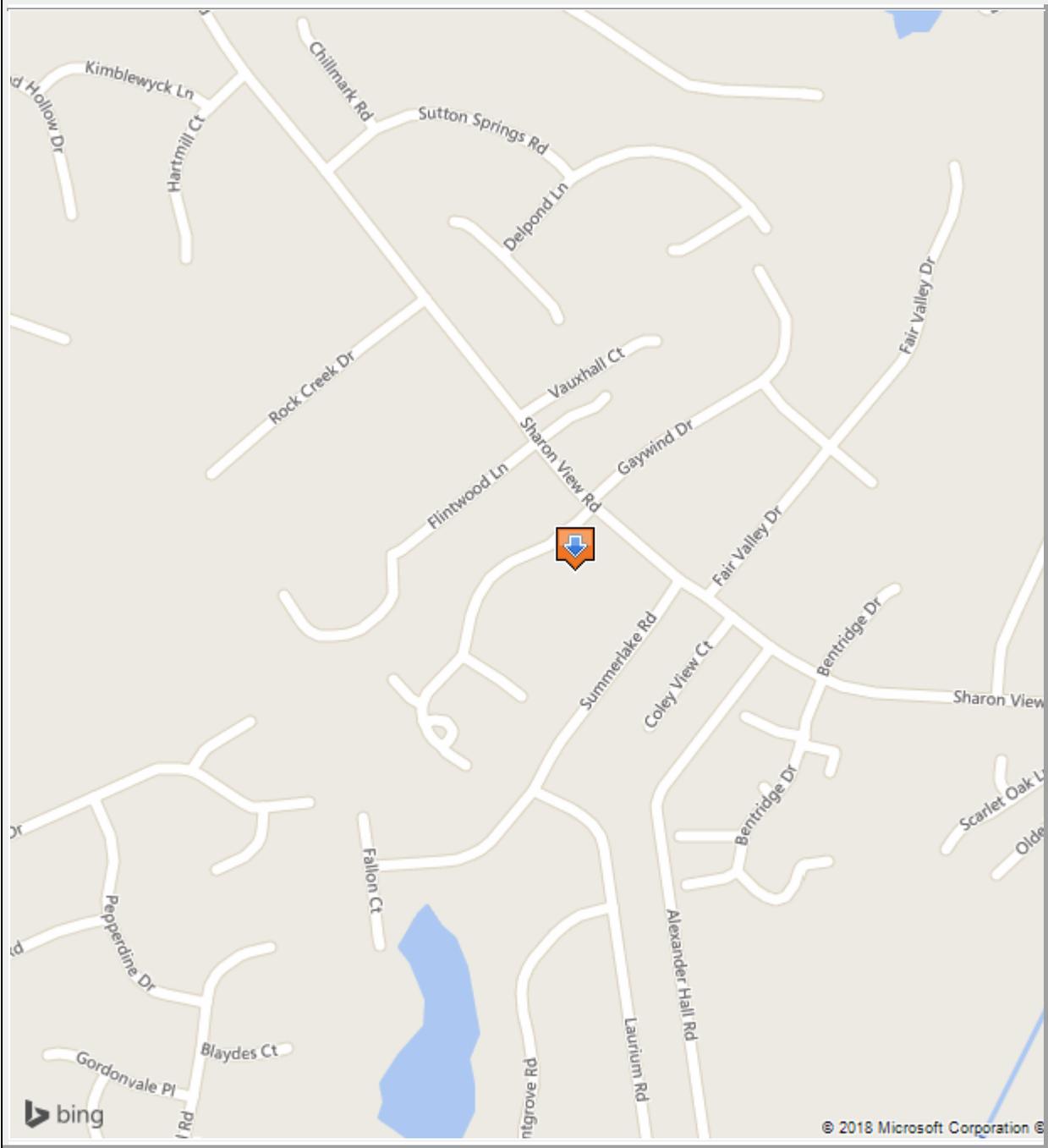
6415 Gaywind Dr.

Charlotte, NC 28226-6900

Telephone: (704) 373-0330

3. Representative photographs of the property: This report contains representative photographs of the property.

4. A map depicting the location of the property: This report contains a map which depicts the location of the property.



Click on the map to browse

5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to this property is listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 2884 at page 228. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 211-112-03.

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

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Thomas W. Hanchett, architectural historian.

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

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the William Lee House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the William Lee House was built ca. 1828 and is one of the older plantation houses in Mecklenburg County and the only extant plantation house in this section of Mecklenburg County; 2) members of the same family resided in the house from ca. 1828 until 1956; and 3) the house represents a rare remnant of antebellum society in the Sharon community of Mecklenburg County.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The house has undergone major renovations, especially during the 1950's. However, the Commission believes that the house retains the overall feel of its antebellum origins, especially because of the magnificent setting which the William Lee House retains.

9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal: The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply annually for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes "historic property." The current appraisal of the William Lee House is \$35,520. The current appraisal of the 3.57 acres of land is \$17,700.

Date of Preparation of this Report: April 7, 1982.

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
3500 Shamrock Dr.
Charlotte, N.C. 28215

Telephone: (704) 332-2726

Historical Overview

Dr. William H. Huffman

From 1794 through the first two and a half decades of the 1800's, William Lee, Sr. bought up considerable acreage along McMichaels Creek in south-central Mecklenburg County to establish his plantation in that area. Between 1810 and 1827, Lee also accumulated land for a plantation on McAlpine Creek in Sharon and Providence Townships.¹ His son, William Lee, Jr., who was born in February, 1802, was married to Mary Ann McKnight (1810-1851) on November 6, 1826 in the county.² After their marriage, William Jr. and Mary Ann Lee established their residence on the McAlpine Creek plantation, and, about 1828, built a roomy, two-and-a-half-story frame house on top of the hill overlooking the Swan Run branch of the creek. The nearby road carried the stagecoach line from Charlotte to Charleston.³ By 1850, the Lees were a prosperous planter family with real estate valued at \$5000.00, and had four children living at home: Jane, who was then 20 years old; Mary, 17; John, also 17; and Nancy, 9. On February 4th of the following year, Mary Ann Lee died after a prolonged illness at the age of forty-one. She was buried alongside two sons who had died in infancy.⁵ Five years later, William Lee, Jr. died at the age of 54 on July 28, 1856.⁶

About seven months after his death, the oldest Lee daughter, Jane E. (1835-1907), married John O. Alexander (1832-1912) on February 17, 1857.⁷ They took up residence in the plantation house built by her father, which must have been her share of the estate division, since in the 1860 census the value of their real estate is shown as \$1720.00.⁸ The oldest of the Alexander's five children, who were raised on the plantation, was Marcellus Allan (M.A.) Alexander, who was born February 2, 1859. When John O. Alexander died in 1912, he willed his estate to be divided among his four living children: the "Davis place" on Four Mile and McAlpine Creeks was given to daughters Mollie Grier and Nannie Reid; the "Ross place" and the "William Lee place" (the latter containing about 180 acres) went to M.A. Alexander; and the "home place" was given to daughter Ida Nesbit, who was also required to pay \$2000.00 to John O. Alexander's "unfortunate grandson," Clayton Alexander.¹⁰ The grandson had been blinded in a wood-chopping accident while a boy of about five.¹¹

M. A. Alexander and his wife, Cora Brown Alexander (1861-1948), farmed the William Lee place for many years and raised their four children there. After M. A. Alexander's death on July 27, 1933, Cora continued to live in the house with a woman companion until her own death in 1948.¹² Since M.A. and Cora Alexander both died intestate, it took nearly two years to settle the estate, during which time the house stood vacant. In the settlement, the estate was divided into lots, and Clayton Brown Alexander, who was the only surviving son (and the same one who was bequeathed the trust fund from his grandfather above), received a lot of 9.22 acres which encompassed the early nineteenth-century Lee house in February, 1950. Despite his blindness,

Clayton Alexander (1889-1968) pursued undergraduate and graduate studies at Davidson College and the University of North Carolina, where he received his Ph.D. degree. Following his studies, he taught history at Catawba and Rutherford Colleges, and was married for a number of years to the former Norma Black (1895-1968), a native of Ivanhoe, N.C. When Clayton and Norma Alexander acquired the Lee place in 1950, they undertook extensive renovation of the house, but disturbed as little of the original architecture as possible.¹⁵ They also subdivided their tract and sold off two parcels, one of 3.03 acres and another of 2.62 acres, leaving the house on the present lot of approximately three and a half acres.¹⁶ In 1956, the Alexanders sold the Lee house to Bernard G. and Patricia O'Brien Collingwood.¹⁷ Mr. Collingwood was a cotton broker in Charlotte, and, after owning the house for nearly eleven years, he and his wife sold it to the present owners, Eric C. Clark III and Bettie U. Clark.¹⁸ The Clarks have done extensive restoration work on the house and have taken a great interest in its early history and preservation.¹⁹

NOTES

¹ Mecklenburg County Index to Real Estate Conveyances. Grantees. from 1763 to 1840; "L," p.5.

² Monuments in Sharon Presbyterian Church cemetery; Mecklenburg Marriage Bonds (n.p., n.d.), p. 138.

³ *Charlotte Observer* article by Rita Adams (Simpson), c. 1950.

⁴ 1850 U. S. Census: North Carolina, Mecklenburg County, p. 90.

⁵ Monuments in Sharon Presbyterian Church Cemetery.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Monuments in Old Providence Presbyterian Church cemetery; Marriages of Mecklenburg County 1763-1868 (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1981), p. 5.

⁸ 1860 U. S. Census: North Carolina, Mecklenburg County, p. 39.

⁹ 1880 U. S. Census: North Carolina, Mecklenburg County, p. 22; Monument in Old Providence Presbyterian Church cemetery.

¹⁰ Mecklenburg County Will Book Q. p. 223, probated 7 Sept. 1912.

¹¹ Interviews with B. Tate Denton and Gene Denton (Mrs. Allen H.) Singer, Charlotte, N.C., 9 September 1981.

¹² Monuments in Old Providence Presbyterian Church cemetery; Mecklenburg County Certificate of Death, Book 43, p. 555; interview with B. Tate Denton.

¹³ See note 3.

¹⁴ Mecklenburg County Orders and Decrees, Book 45, p. 149, 12 March 1949; Deed Book 1415, p. 379, 28 Nov. 1949; Deed Book 1464, pp. 75 and 83, 20 Feb. 1950.

¹⁵ Monuments in Sharon Memorial Park; interview with Lillian Alexander (Mrs. Percy) Stewart, Charlotte, N.C., by Eric Clark, 17 Oct. 1972; *Charlotte Observer* article cited above in note 3.

¹⁶ Deed Book 1470, p. 513, 25 Sept. 1950; Deed Book 1516, p. 221, 17 August 1951.

¹⁷ Deed Book 1864, p. 523, 5 Nov. 1956.

¹⁸ Deed Book 2884, p. 228, 23 Aug. 1967.

¹⁹ Interview with Eric and Bettie Clark, Charlotte, NC, 29 August 1981.

Architectural Description

Thomas W. Hanchett

The William Lee residence is an early nineteenth century wooden frame "I" house, two stories tall with a hall-and-parlor plan. It is sited on a partly wooded knoll, facing south away from the present Sharon View Road. Over the last thirty years it has been extensively added to and remodeled. The original farmhouse was a two story gable-roofed block one room deep, with two rooms on each floor flanking a central stairway. The foundation is composed of large random-laid boulders flecked with quartz. There are two matching brick end chimneys, double shoulder stepped at attic level. At the point that they narrow they also step away from the walls of the house. Chimney bricks are laid generally in common bond, but there are three courses of headers near the base of each chimney, and occasional sections of headers are mixed randomly in upper courses. The tops of the chimneys feature a course of corbelled brick, a band of stucco said to contain shell fragments, then three more bands of corbelled brick. Pairs of double-hung windows flank the end chimney on each floor, and smaller pairs of swinging windows light the attic.

The front facade of the residence displays an unusual combination of symmetry and asymmetry. It consists of three upstairs windows aligned directly over two downstairs windows and a central front door. The openings display bilateral symmetry around the front door as was customary in the period. The door is not centered in the facade, instead being located about three feet closer to

the west end of the house, making all the openings off-center in the mass of the building. This arrangement is also found in the upstairs windows at the back of the structure. The wooden front door consists of six vertical panels. It is topped by a fixed transom with four, square, handblown panes of dark glass. The door opening is surrounded by wooden molding, which is also found around all window openings on the home. Windows are all double-hung six-over-six pane sash, and date from an extensive remodeling of the house in 1956. Exterior walls are surfaced with pine clapboard four inches to the weather. According to an interview with owner Clayton Alexander published in the *Charlotte Observer* about 1950, "three main oak beams twelve by thirteen and one half inches in size stretch from the eastern to the western end of the house. The floor joints are morticed in and held together with hickory pins. At each corner is an eight-inch-square oak post for additional support...."

From the crawlspace door at the east side of the house one can see the heavy secondary floor beams, with visible hewing marks, that run north-south under the building. Six inch wide floorboards of pine rest on these. In the attic the handhewn rafters are still scribed with the Roman numerals that allowed them to be easily reassembled in place after trial assembly on the ground. The house may have originally had a two-tier porch extending across the entire front. Such a porch appears, enveloped in wisteria vines, in a photograph of the home dated 1923. The photo shows old-fashioned chamfered columns that appear to have been handmade. In the early 1950s owner Clayton Alexander removed rotted porch floors and columns and created the present two-story high portico with its four, square, built-up columns. An early 1950s photo shows a one-story shed-roofed lean-to across the back of the house, which may have dated to the nineteenth century. By the early fifties the kitchen chimney at the east end of this lean-to had been removed and replaced with a pair of windows, but its stone bed is still visible today. In the 1956 remodeling of the residence by the Collingwoods, half of this kitchen wing was extended further back over a brick foundation.

In 1975 the Clark family, the present owners, added the large rear porch. They also added a new kitchen/dining room at the west side of the house, designed with the help of architect Richard Gillespie to look like a separate early nineteenth century outbuilding connected to the house by an enclosed passage. The new kitchen building, constructed by contractor Cecil Hicks, has an end chimney that mimics the original ones on the house. Inside, the house still retains its basic hall and parlor plan, but remodeling have made it grander looking than it was in 1828. One enters through the front door into the "hall," now the living room. The room is dominated by an elaborate wooden mantel at the end of the room. The mantel has fluted round columns, and a central carved sunburst, a symbolic sunset for this west-facing room. Opposite the fireplace is the open central stair which rises from the back of the room, with turned balusters and open-string sides. Moving through a door at the foot of the stairs one enters the "parlor", now a bedroom. Its mantel is as fine as the one in the hall, featuring a carved rising sun motif as befits the room's easterly orientation. At the top of the stairs is a small landing with two doors that open onto the east and west bedrooms. While the stair woodwork and two downstairs and one upstairs mantels are probably original, additional woodwork was added in the 1956 remodeling for the Collingwoods by contractor Frank Lowrance. Walls were sheet-rocked and cornice molding was added throughout the home. Both downstairs main rooms and the lean-to at the rear now have elegant paneled wainscoting.

A hint of what the walls originally looked like may be seen in the stairwell to the attic which is sheathed in carefully planed and matched vertical heart pine planking. Oak floors had been installed earlier over the pine floorboards downstairs. The 1956 remodeling also saw replacement of the old wood shingle roof with asphalt shingles on a plywood base. A new bathroom was carved out of the upstairs east bedroom, and the earlier bathroom below it on the first floor was redone. Steel beams boxed in wood were added across the living room ceiling to stabilize the floor above. A furnace and accompanying ductwork were unobtrusively installed. On the grounds the Collingwoods built a swimming pool, pumphouse, and a small barn.