

LYLES-SIMS HOUSE



This report was written on January 4, 1988

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Lyles-Sims House is located at 523 North Poplar Street, Charlotte, NC.

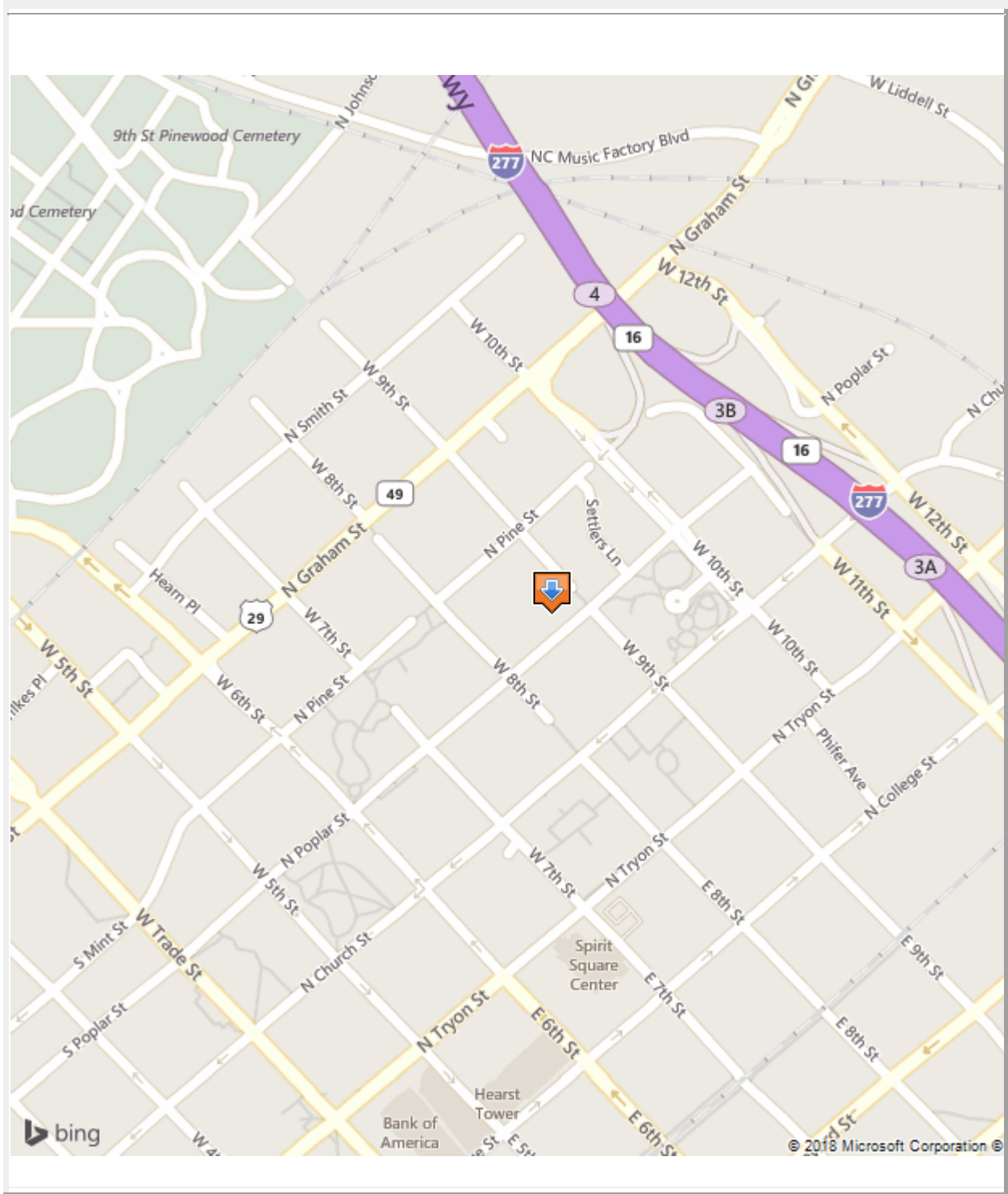
2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner of the property: The owner of the property is:

Jane R. Lesser
523 North Poplar Street
Charlotte, NC 28202

Telephone: (704) 334-1485

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 recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 5547, page 161. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 078-036-14.

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 a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Ph.D.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation 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 Lyles-Sims House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Lyles-Sims House, erected between 1867 and 1869 and substantially enlarged and modified sometime between 1870 and 1887, is a rare survivor of nineteenth century domestic architecture in Charlotte and exhibits the impact which growing prosperity had upon the built environment of Charlotte; and 2) the Lyles-Sims House is among the few older houses in Fourth Ward that occupy their original sites.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description by Dr. Dan L. Morrill which is included in this report demonstrates that the Lyles-Sims House meets this criterion.

9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal: The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes "historic property." The current appraised value of the improvement is \$95,600. The current appraised value of the .190 acres of land is \$66,250. The total appraised value of the property is \$161,850. The most recent tax bill on the property was \$1,995.29. The property is zoned UR1.

Date of Preparation of this Report: January 4, 1988

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
1225 S. Caldwell St.
Charlotte, NC, 28203
Telephone: (704) 376-9115

Historical Overview

Dr. William H. Huffman

The Lyles-Sims House is one of the few original houses in Charlotte's Fourth Ward, and incorporates the distinctive "Charlotte Gable" in its architecture. Originally built between 1867 and 1869 by Eli Washington Lyles (1829-1914), the second owners, James Monroe Sims (1840-1922) and his wife Frances (Fannie) E. Moody Sims (1845-1912) improved the house into its present form between 1870 and 1887.

Eli W. Lyles was a prosperous strawberry farmer who was the first to raise them in the county. Born in Anson County, he settled on a plantation four miles northeast of Charlotte (near Sugar Creek Church) in 1858, and was married three times, to: Elizabeth Ann Williams of Union County; Jane Elizabeth Moore (1832-1885), also of Union County, and Elizabeth Douglas of Mecklenburg.¹ As was common in those days, Lyles bought and sold real estate in the city and county for investments, and also apparently built himself a town house. In 1863, he bought about an acre fronting on what is now Poplar Street for \$700.00, but due to the Civil War, the deed was not recorded until 1867.² Two years later, a mortgage deed on half the land mentions that it "adjoins the fractions of lots on which E. W. Lyles and J. E. Lyles (his wife) now live."³ The following year, 1870, Lyles sold the subdivided tract as two 1/2 acre lots: the vacant one went for \$300.00, and the house lot was sold to J. M. Sims for \$1500.00.⁵

J. M. Sims was a native of Cabarrus County, the son of James A. and Isabella Deweese Sims. He came to Charlotte as a young man, and began his grocery merchant career as a clerk in M. D. L. Moody's store, which was located opposite the First Presbyterian Church on Trade Street. When the War Between The States broke out, he enlisted and left with the Charlotte "Greys," and served in Company A, 11th North Carolina Regiment, where he became quartermaster. Wounded in the first days fighting at Gettysburg, Sims also fought alongside Henry Wyatt, the first soldier to be killed in the war. At war's end, he returned to work in Moody's store.

On February 15, 1869, he was married to Frances E. Moody of Lenoir. The daughter of William and Martha Barber Moody of Lenoir, at the time of her marriage she was living with her uncle, M. D. L. Moody, J. M. Sims' employer. The Simses raised four daughters to adulthood; one son died at the age of four months.⁷

In the spirit of Horatio Alger, a hard-working, determined person should make good, and so it was with J. M. Sims. A few years after returning from the war, he went into the grocery business with Henry McGinn and a Mr. Cochran; eventually, in the late 1870s, opened a store of his own on the west side of N. Tryon Street, three doors north of Trade.⁸ Sims was fortunate in being in a good place at the right time. Charlotte was just coming out of the effects of the war and Reconstruction and was about to enter an era of unprecedented, sustained prosperity. New South industrialization, based on cotton mills and related production, transformed Charlotte from one of many small towns in the state in 1880 to a regional banking, distribution and mill center of the Piedmont and the largest city of the Carolinas by 1930.⁹ It was during much of this time, from

the late 1870s to about 1912, when he retired, that J. M. Sims operated his grocery business in the city.¹⁰

Indeed, his prosperity could be seen by the fact that by 1883, he bought a 198 foot square tract of land at the southwest corner of Eighth and Poplar for \$1375 at public auction, and in 1887 sold the former Lyles house (for \$2200.00) and built a bigger residence on the new property. About twenty years later, the Simses moved out to Dilworth, the city's first streetcar suburb (opened in 1891), and put up another house on South Boulevard.¹² Before the turn of the century and the advent of streetcar suburbs, however, Charlotte's Fourth Ward was a popular place for the town's middle-class business and professional people to live (the wealthier citizens lived in grand houses along Trade and Tryon Streets).

The Lyles-Sims house was sold in 1887 to another grocer, Willis I. Henderson, whose store was around the corner from Sims at 32 East Trade Street.¹³ In 1896, Samuel W. Brooks, the manager of William J. Matheson Co., a dyestuffs and chemical company located at 12 North College Street, purchased the house,¹⁴ and in turn sold it to A. Earle McCausland and his wife, Ella T. McCausland, in 1902.¹⁵ The McCauslands lived in the house for forty-seven years.¹⁶

In the thirty-one years after Mrs. McCausland's death in 1949, the house went through a series of related owners, and was part of a neighborhood that declined rapidly and became, as was common in post-war American cities, an inner-city slum area that seemed beyond saving.¹⁷ But in the 1970s, the energy and foresight of some dedicated individuals and groups, most notably the Junior League, Berryhill Preservation, Inc., and the Historic Properties Commission, resulted in the complete transformation of the neighborhood by preserving some of the original houses that remained, moving others in from various areas of the city undergoing development, and infill construction of modern condominiums. Its establishment as a historic district completed the recognition that it is one of the most important areas of the city's early history. As one of the few original houses to be preserved in Fourth Ward, the Lyles-Sims house, with its distinctive "Charlotte gable," also deserves recognition as being historically significant.¹⁸

Notes

¹ *Charlotte Observer*. June 5, 1914, p. 6; *ibid.*, March 12, 1885, p. 3.

² Deed Book 5, p.158, 28 February 1863.

³ Deed Book 6, p. 131, 26 June 1869.

⁴ Deed Book 6, p.658, 10 February 1870.

⁵ Deed Book 6, p.618, 1 February 1870.

⁶ *Charlotte Observer*. July 16, 1922, p.4.

⁷ Ibid., August 5, 1912, p.2.

⁸ Ibid. July 16, 1922, p. 4; Charlotte City Directory. 1879/80, p.89, et seq.

⁹ Thomas Hanchett, "Charlotte Neighborhood Survey," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1983.

¹⁰ See note 8.

¹¹ Deed Book 33, p. 138, 15 February 1883; *ibid.*, Book 57, p.60, 9 November 1887.

¹² Charlotte City Directory. 1907. p.180, et seq.

¹³ Deed Book 57, p.60, 9 November 1887; Charlotte City Directory, 1889, p. 9., et seq.

¹⁴ Deed Book 108, p. 469, 24 January 1896 (price; \$3300.00); Charlotte City Directory, 1902, p.211.

¹⁵ Deed Book 170, p.418, 12 September 1902.

¹⁶ Will Book 7, p. 324 (1949).

¹⁷ Deed Book 141d, p.567; 1758. p.381; 2885, p.22; 1263, p. 365.

¹⁸ In 1980 it was purchased by Jane and Philip Lesser. Ms. Lesser presently operates a bed and breakfast in the Poplar Street home; Deed Book 4323, p. 13.

Architectural Description

Dr. Dan L. Morrill

Statement of Significance

Unquestionably, the Lyles-Sims House has experienced major alterations over the years. The historical significance of its architecture, however, must be judged in terms of the local context. Specifically, Fourth Ward is the only pre-streetcar Charlotte neighborhood that retains even a hint of its original streetscapes. Years ago, the Commission secured the historic designation of most of the other Victorian era houses in Fourth Ward that are situated at their original locations. This is probably the last potential historic property in Fourth Ward, and it is a rare survivor of the

nineteenth century domestic architecture of Charlotte, the largest urban center in the two Carolinas.

Description

The Lyles-Sims House, a two and one-half story modified Queen Anne style frame dwelling with a complex hip roof in slate with cross gables and a gable on the left front, faces east toward Poplar Street in Fourth Ward, the neighborhood which comprises the northwestern quadrant of Uptown Charlotte.¹ The Lyles-Sims House, unlike many older homes in Fourth Ward, is on site; and, like the Overcarsh House at 326 West 8th, its original site; and, like the Overcarsh House at 326 West 8th St., also in Fourth Ward, it represents a rare example of the evolution of domestic architecture during the second half of the nineteenth century in Uptown Charlotte. Specifically, the Lyles-Sims House was first built as a modest frame dwelling between 1867 and 1869. Later, sometime between 1870 and 1887, when the cotton mill campaign began to bring greater prosperity to Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, the house was enlarged and substantially modified, to make it more stylish and fashionable, so to speak. As one would expect, the architectural style which was selected was Queen Anne.

In keeping with the fundamental eclecticism of Queen Anne style architecture, the Lyles-Sims House is essentially asymmetrical in form and heterogeneous in ornamentation.² The most distinctive exterior details are: 1) a broad, open wraparound porch which is bordered by a forceful balustrade with turned pickets and large Doric columns which support a shed roof in slate; 2) distinguishing gable end treatments, each consisting of a "checkerboard" panel above supported by brackets and an embellishment below which resembles half-timbering; and 3) a front entryway, composed of a transom with small, geometric lights, broad pilasters with decorative corner blocks, and a door with a single, rectangular light. The clapboard sheathing has been covered with aluminum siding. The house has simple boxed eaves, enclosed gutters, brick piers with brick infill, two offset brick chimneys, predominantly 1/1 windows, and a deck off the rear of the house. The lot, in keeping with the walking scale neighborhood in which the Lyles-Sims house is located, is long and narrow but is otherwise devoid of historical features.

The interior of the house also exhibits the asymmetrical complexity associated with Queen Anne style architecture. The most impressive space is the front parlor. One enters directly from the outside into the room itself, which is dominated by a stairway on the right with two quarter landings, turned pickets, heavy newels with bulbous finials, and a pendant. Wainscoting extends up the stairway and along the walls of a portion of the front parlor. The front parlor also contains an original single-shelf mantelpiece. Doorway and window surrounds, in the front parlor and throughout the Lyles-Sims House, are typically Victorian -- molded with "bull's-eye" corner blocks. The crown moldings and the base moldings are quite simple, again throughout the house.

Immediately behind the front parlor is the dining room, entered on the right by a new hallway and on the left by an enlarged hallway. It has a mantelpiece, originally located in an upstairs bedroom, with a pair of attenuated columns supporting a shelf with a mirror above; and wainscoting extends along the walls of part of the room. Behind the dining room is the original pantry. Substantial changes have been made in this portion of the Lyles-Sims House, which is probably part of the original dwelling. The pantry entrance has been moved from one end of the

room to the other; and a new hallway has been built into a large, modern kitchen, which bears no resemblance to its historical antecedents. A large bathroom on the right rear of the first floor with beaded ceiling has been divided into a bathroom and a laundry room, but the original woodwork, including window surrounds, has been retained. The final major space on the first floor is a room to the right of the dining room, which contains an original mantel and woodwork.

The Lyles-Sims House has also undergone major changes on the second floor, which contains three bedrooms and two baths. The center hallway, originally extending to the rear of the house, has been shortened to create closet and storage space. A large bathroom across the back of the house has been divided into two bathrooms and updated. The two bedrooms off the left of the hallway have been joined by the creation of a passageway, and an original doorway from the hallway has been eliminated. Finally, a small room on the right rear of the second floor has been sacrificed for additional storage space. The extensiveness of these modifications notwithstanding, the Lyles-Sims House does retain original woodwork and window surrounds throughout most of the second floor.

Notes

¹ For a detailed history of the development of Fourth Ward, see Thomas W. Hanchett, "Charlotte And Its Neighborhoods: The Growth of a New South City, 1850-1930", Chapter 4 (an unpublished manuscript in the offices of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission).

² For a description of the Queen Anne style, see Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: Guide to the Styles* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969), pp. 115-122.