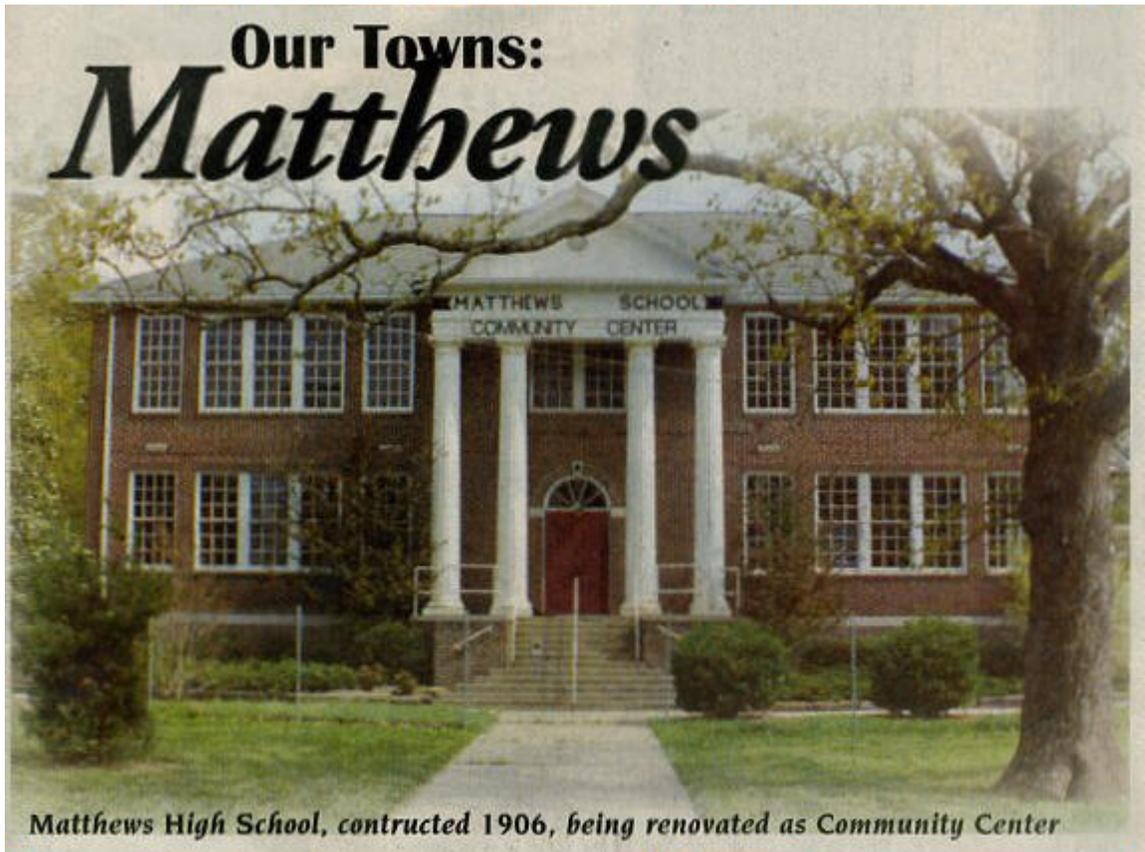


OLD MATTHEWS SCHOOL



This report was written on November 7, 1984

1. Name and location of the property: November 7, 1984 The property known as the Old Matthews School is located on South Trade St. in Matthews, NC.

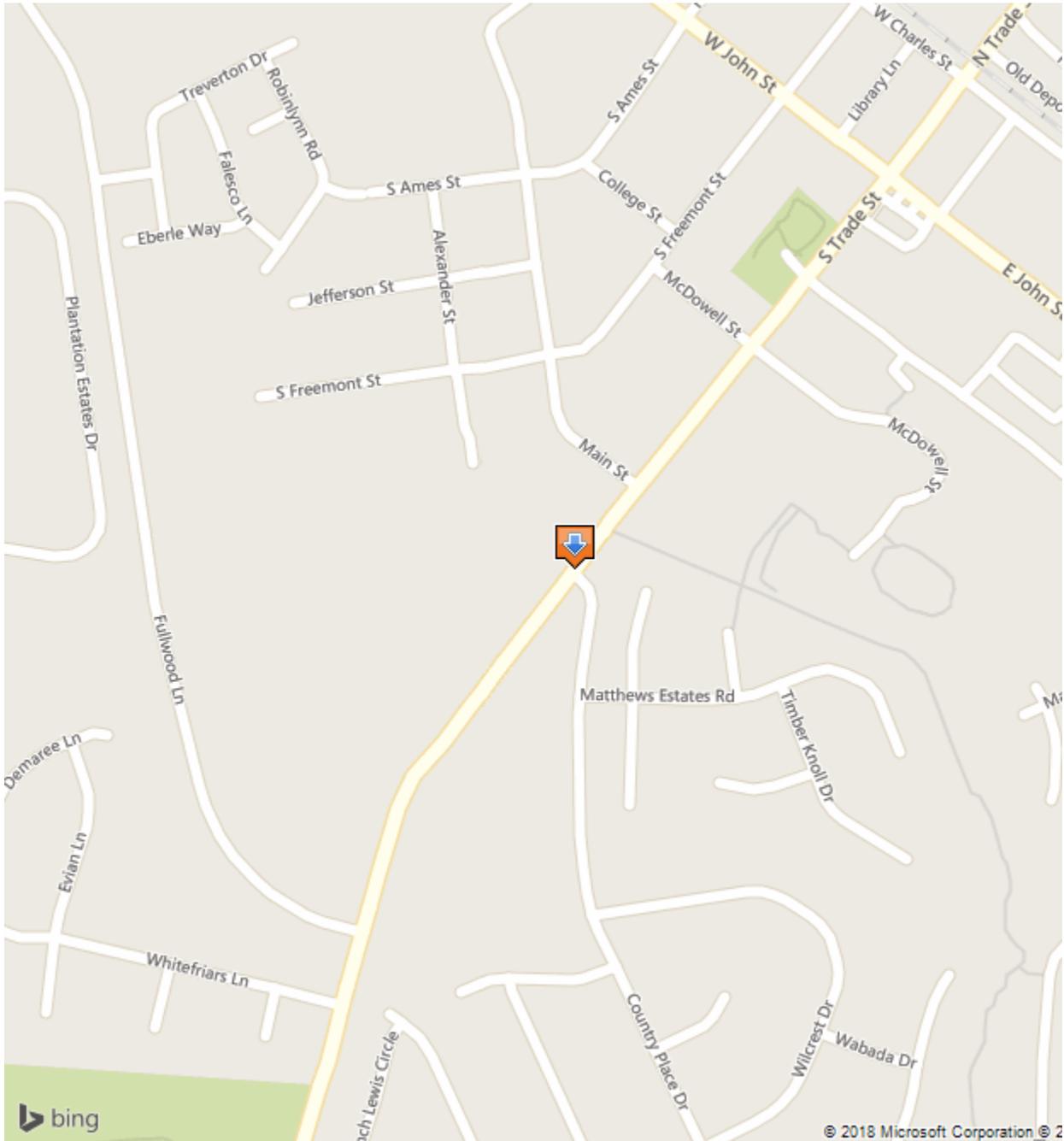
2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner of the property:

Town of Matthews
Box 398
Matthews, NC, 28106

Telephone: (704) 847-4411

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

4. A map depicting the location of the property:



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 4734, page 802. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 227-211-34.

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 Mr. Joseph Schuchman, edited and revised by Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

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 Old Matthews School does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Old Matthews School served as the educational centerpiece of the Matthews community from 1907 until the early 1980's, and 2) the complex exhibits an evolution of architectural styles and motifs associated with public building architecture in Charlotte-Mecklenburg during the first half of the 20th century.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the attached architectural description by Mr. Joseph Schuchman, edited and revised by Dr. Dan L. Morrill, demonstrates that the Old Matthews School meets this criterion.

9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal: The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes "historic property." The current appraised value of the 1.01 acres of land is \$3000. The improvements show no appraised value, but one must assume that the records of the tax office have not been amended to reflect the transfer of the property to the Town of Matthews. The total current appraised value of the property is \$3000. The property is zoned R9.

Date of Preparation of this Report: November 7, 1984

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
1225 S. Caldwell St.
Charlotte, N.C., 28203

Telephone: (704) 376-9115

Historical Overview

Dr. William H. Huffman

Few institutions, from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth, were so intimately a part of a community as the local school. A place where children of different religious faiths and economic background were brought together, its development and growth were a direct reflection of the society it served. So it was for the old Matthews School.

The town of Matthews itself was incorporated in 1879. Prior to the Civil War, it had been little more than the location of a stagecoach inn with a post office on the run between Charlotte and Monroe. With the end of the war, it became a village known as "Stumptown" because of all the pine stumps left in the fields after the new saw mill had turned the trees into lumber for houses and a general store. The town's history took a decisive turn in 1874 when the Carolina Central Railway routed its track through the village to link up Tennessee, through Charlotte, to Wilmington. It was the railroad officials who named the village "Matthews," which is presumed to be after Watson Matthews, who was a director of the railway.¹

In 1880, Matthews had only 191 residents, and for the next fifteen years, as it was for the rest of the country, education in the town remained a private, most often church-related affair. The first public school was built in 1895 in what was known as the Carpenter Grove on Trade Street. The three-room schoolhouse was under the direction of principal Prof. Judge E. Little, who, with an assistant, appeared to constitute the teaching staff. For eleven years, the wood-frame school served its purpose, but by the end of that period, growth in the community taxed its capacity such that larger quarters were clearly needed. Consequently, in January, 1907, two acres of land for the present school site were acquired from Mrs. S. E. Griffin.²

That same year, the General Assembly passed a bill to help establish state-supported rural high schools throughout the state, and Matthews and Huntersville were designated as the Mecklenburg locations. Although the state only provided part of the funds needed for a school, previously they were financed completely by the local residents. Plans proceeded for the construction of a "modern brick building," which was to be built for the total sum of \$14,000. The actual building of the schoolhouse was truly a community enterprise, whereby the townspeople provided the building materials, teams and wagons for hauling them, and doing the grading work.³

When it was completed later in 1907, the Chairman of the Mecklenburg County Board of Education, William Anderson, characterized it as a "model of beauty and perfection." The impressive two-story building had three classrooms on the first floor and an auditorium on the second, and the entryway was topped by a decorative cupola (whether or not it contained a schoolbell is not known). In the first term, 1907-8, there was a dedication ceremony in which Dr. W. E. Abernathy gave the school a Bible and a flag from the Junior Order. At the time, the school was supervised by a five-member board, and the principal was Rev. I. O. Hinson. The

teaching staff consisted of Annie Lyle Jennings, Intermediate Department; Kate Neal, Primary Department; and Willie Kilpatrick, Music Department.

J. M Matthews, a Princeton graduate who became principal by 1909, set high standards for the school and it began to attract boarding students from adjacent communities, who were put up in the homes of local residents. By the time of the first graduating class in 1911, the school was already overcrowded, and the following year, 1912, the school board, headed by Capt. T. J. Renfrow, sold bonds on the New York market to finance major improvements and expansion of the school. The twelve thousand dollars raised by the bonds paid for the renovation of the 1907 building and expanding the school by adding the present auditorium and more classrooms at the rear third of the structure.⁵

Under the principalship of Boyce S. Plaxco, 1921 to 1924, three classrooms were fitted up in the basement area of the rear addition, which were used for the primary grades and the science department. (These are presently used for special education programs, and at one time also housed the cafeteria). During this time the school also acquired a library, and by 1924, Matthews High School was given full accreditation as a secondary school, and topped it off by winning the county basketball championship that year.⁶

Sometime during the tenure of the next principal, George Neal, 1924-28, another major addition, the last, was made to the school building: the front entryway was enclosed in a two-story addition of six classrooms, and the classical revival porch with columns became the new building front. About the same time, a two-story building was built for a teacherage nearby. Despite this expansion, however, the continually growing community needed more schoolroom space by the next decade, and during the Depression years of the Thirties, a junior high school building was put up as part of the Matthews school facilities. It contained an office, gymnasium and six classrooms. The Agriculture building was another Depression-era project that was built by labor provided by the Works Progress Administration.

Through the years 1907 to 1950, the Matthews school delivered exclusively all the primary and secondary education for the community. Bringing joys and sorrows, triumphs and trials, the halls and classrooms of the school hold special memories for many residents of Matthews and beyond. Many of the principals went on to become school superintendents, and one became a college president.

The inevitable changes and growth of the county as a whole, however, brought about some permanent alterations to the familiar pattern. Starting with the 1950-51 school year, the tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades went to East Mecklenburg High School, and the old Matthews school became a junior high. Primary students were sent to Idlewild and Lansdowne elementary schools.⁸

Because of the construction of newer facilities and the expense of repair and renovation required by the old building, the school authorities were, in recent days, considering demolishing the building. Fortunately for the old school, the Matthews principal let it be known that the building was being abandoned, and the mayor and the Matthews Community Club were able to successfully negotiate its sale to the Town of Matthews in August, 1983. The Community Club

had been sponsoring the Stumptown Festival for the previous eight years to raise money for a community center. When the school building came up for sale, it presented the opportunity to both preserve a building which has so much meaning to the community as well as provide the needed space for the center. With extensive renovation and repair, which will restore the old school to a sound and nearly original condition, it will once again serve the citizens of Matthews, now including youth groups, senior citizens, and college-extension classes, and will remain both a memorable and useful part of the town.

NOTES

¹ *The Southeast News*, Nov. 10, 1975, pp. 1-5.

² *Ibid.*, p. 2; Deed Book 268, p. 346, 12 Jan. 1907.

³ *News*, cited above, p. 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Interview with Suzanne Gulley, Editor, *The Southeast News*, 24 May 1984; interview with Clay Lefler, Mayor, Town of Matthews, 24 May 1984; interview with Ted Kiker, Chairman, Matthews Community Club, 24 May 1984.

Architectural Description

Joseph Schuchman

In a period when the frame schoolhouse was commonplace and the one-room school was still utilized, the construction of a substantial two-story brick schoolhouse in Matthews in 1907 was indicative of the importance placed upon education in the community at that time. By 1912, the already crowded building was expanded and enlarged with the erection of a rear ell, housing the auditorium and classrooms. Between 1924 and 1928, the Old Matthews School assumed its present size. Built onto the front of the structure was a two-story block with a columned portico and six classrooms. Moreover, the original front entrance and belfry were enclosed and incorporated into the expanded facility. The walls of the belfry are still intact.

The original block reflects the influence of the Italianate style, particularly in the appearance of decorative brick courses. The Italianate style was more commonly used for commercial and residential edifices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Consequently, its use in the Old Matthews School is a distinctive architectural element. The front block and, to a lesser extent, the rear ell allude to the Neoclassical style, which was extremely popular as a motif for public buildings at the turn of the century.

The building is roofed with rectangular slate blocks. Elevations are symmetrically arranged, and openings are framed by molded surrounds. The 1907 T-shaped block is highlighted with decorative handmade brickwork arranged in common bond. The corbled courses run across the eight-bay side elevations, but the front and rear elevations were covered by later additions to the building. The water table consists of handmade corbled brick and is composed of a single row of headers above a double row of stretchers and beneath a single row of stretchers. Remaining courses, including the roofline cornice, are of manufactured yellow brick.

Double brick headers comprise the first-story window heads, and a belt course, between the first and second stories, forms the cornice of the first-story window heads. The roof line cornice forms the lintel of the second story windows. 9/6 sash, the primary light, are placed above limestone sills. The roof is low tripped in shape.

The gable-roofed rear ell houses the auditorium on the raised first story and classrooms in the full basement. The structure is of handmade red brick laid in a 1:6 common bond pattern. Second story windows are 6/1 sash; first story lights are primarily 6/6 sash. A soldier course serves as the lintel; each sill is composed of flush vertical headers. A corbled belt course separates the basement and first story. Side elevation windows are paired; second story lights are set within a recessed bay and placed above a blind brick panel. A closed string metal stairway leads to the two rear entrances.

The hip roof front block is Neoclassical in spirit. Stone steps recede in width as they rise to the raised entrance. An entry portico dominates the front elevation. Hollow fluted Doric columns rise to a full entablature and pediment. The words, "Matthews School" in wooden block letters

run across the frieze. Columns rest on rectangular bases and rise to plain rectangular capitals. 9/9 sash are set in single, paired, and triple groupings and are the dominant light. A soldier course serves as the lintel, and the sills are composed of brick headers. The exterior is of common bond brick laid in a 1:5 pattern. A cast concrete water table runs across the elevations. The main entrance is set within a round arch, ornamented with a header course and a central keystone.

As one would expect in a structure used for educational purposes, the interior is functional in appearance and largely intact. There is a great deal of similarity in the interiors of the three separately-constructed blocks. Halls and classrooms have vertical tongue and groove wainscoting, set between a baseboard and a chair rail. The chair rail is composed of a wide frieze set between a molded architrave and cornice. Transoms are set above the entry doors to the classroom. Tripartite movable transoms are located in the front (1924-28) block, while the remaining transoms are stationary single-pane lights. Classrooms are located off center and side halls. Openings are framed by simple surrounds. Closed string stairways rise from stair halls located at the front and rear of the original block. The walls are sheathed in plaster.

The auditorium, in the rear ell, occupies most of the first story and is the most notable interior space of the Old Matthews School. The auditorium is encircled by a wainscot, similar to that found in the rest of the building. The exposed wooden truss system contours to the trapezoid-shaped roof, which is sheathed in horizontal tongue and groove ceiling.

An Agricultural Building, which dates from the 1930s, stands near the north side of the Old Matthews School. The rectangular-shaped building is frame construction with a stretcher bond brick veneer. Elevations are symmetrically arranged. 6/6 sash are the dominant glazing light. A single-bay porch, with wooden pier supports, shelters the centrally-placed front entrance. The site slopes, providing a full basement on the sides and the rear. The tripped roof is covered with asphalt shingles.

Three fieldstone posts serve as an entrance gate to the school complex. The center post contains a stone tablet, which reads, "In memory of T. L. Renfrow, Superintendent of Schools." Flanking posts, to the right and the left, have inset tablets which state respectively, "Class of 1936," and "Class of 1937."