



THE JAKE NEWELL HOUSE



This report was written on January 3, 1983.

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Jake Newell House is located at 819 Sunnyside Avenue, in Charlotte, NC.

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

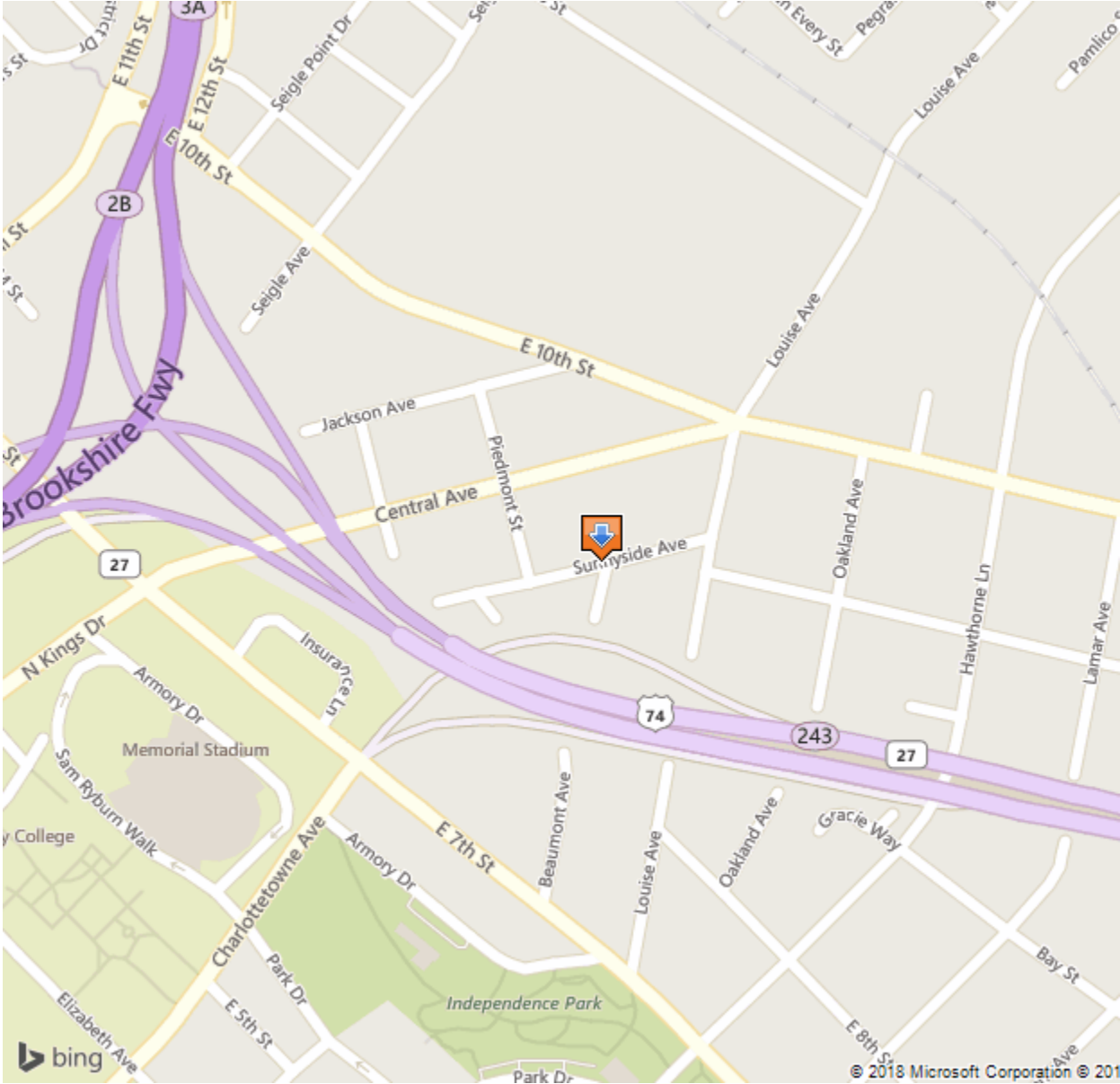
The present owners and occupants of the property are:

Mr. and Mrs. John J. Emerson
819 Sunnyside Avenue
Charlotte, N.C. 28204

Telephone: (704) 372-6211

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.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to this property is listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 4294 at page 456. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 080-212-05.

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 Jake Newell House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Jake Newell House, erected in 1911-12, is one of the oldest houses remaining in Piedmont Park, one of Charlotte's first streetcar suburbs; 2) the Jake Newell House is one of the best-preserved local examples of the Four Square style; 3) the initial owner and long-time resident, Jake Newell, an attorney, was a prominent figure in the North Carolina Republican party; in addition to serving as State chairman, he ran for the United States Senate and the United States House of Representatives.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and for association: The Commission contends that the attached architectural description by Mr. Thomas W. Hanchett demonstrates that the Jake Newell 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 .201 acres of land is \$3,070. The current appraised value of the house is \$13,870. The property is zoned 06.

Date of Preparation of this Report: January 3, 1983.

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
218 N. Tryon Street
Charlotte, NC 28202

Telephone: (704) 376-9115

Historical Overview

Dr. William H. Huffman

Just a block south of busy Central Avenue in Charlotte, and running parallel with it, one encounters the serenely pleasant, tree-lined Sunnyside Avenue, which originally stretched just over three blocks from Seventh Street to Louise Avenue. It was part of a new twenty-two block

suburb, first drawn up in 1906, which was made accessible to the central part of the city by the new electric streetcar line running along Central Avenue. The suburb, known as Piedmont Park, was to be developed by the Suburban Realty Company (organized in 1905),¹ and indeed, they did build a number of houses in the area. In 1910, however, they sold twelve and one-half lots in Piedmont Park to another development firm, Durham and Murphy Land Company.² This latter firm was organized in 1908 by John Augustus Durham (1853-1922), a prominent Charlotte businessman who had been financially successful in the wholesale grocery business in the city, and Joseph E. Murphy (c.1860-1922), an owner of his own real estate company.

On November 18, 1911, Durham and Murphy took out a building permit from the city to build three houses on the north side of Sunnyside Avenue between Piedmont and Louise Avenues.⁴ The easternmost house of the three (the houses at either end were two-story, and in the middle, one-story), presently 819 Sunnyside, was to be built for Jake F. Newell (1869-1945), and was estimated to cost \$3300.00. The architect for all three houses was Frederick L. Bonfoey (1869-1933).⁵ Fred Bonfoey was an architect in Charlotte for some twenty-five years, starting about 1908, when he came from Connecticut to participate in the city's suburban building boom generated by the extensions of the electric streetcar lines.⁶ His contributions to Charlotte's neighborhoods were numerous and substantial, and thus quite influential. By May, 1911, Bonfoey had designed over fifty bungalows, a style in which he specialized, and these and others were built in various parts of the city, including Dilworth, Villa Heights, Elizabeth, and, of course, Piedmont Park.⁷

The man for whom the house was built, Jake F. Newell, was a widely known, long-time Charlotte lawyer, and a leader in North Carolina Republican politics for many years. Born in Cabarrus County, around the turn of the century Mr. Newell began the practice of law in the city, and for some years shared law offices (and for a time, his new home on Sunnyside) with his younger brother, J. Clifford Newell. As an attorney, Jake Newell was known as "the silver-haired orator," and gained a reputation as a defense counsel in criminal cases, some of which were sensational. In politics, he was an indefatigable campaigner for public office, and considered an honorable and fair-minded opponent. In 1932, he was the Republican nominee for the United States Senate, opposing Robert R. Reynolds, but was soundly defeated in the landslide Democratic victories of that year. Three times he was a candidate for a seat in the United States House of Representatives, and once for state attorney general, but his party affiliation, when compared to the strength of the Democratic party in the state at that time, always prevented him from holding public office. In 1938, the Republican party elected him chairman of the state executive committee, a post which he held for four years and which made him the highest party official in the state.⁸

On August 31, 1912, Mr. Newell took possession of his newly-built house,⁹ and three years later, at the age of 46, he married the 31-year-old daughter of a neighbor on Sunnyside, Frances Moody Black (1884-1966). Mrs. Newell was the daughter of Charles A. and Lela Bell Black of Charlotte, and graduated from Elizabeth College for Women in 1904.¹⁰ On Jake Newell's death in 1945, sole ownership of the stately, "rectilinear" style house passed to Mrs. Newell, whose unmarried brother, Louis M. Black,(1895-1979) came to reside with her on Sunnyside.¹¹ Since

the Newells had no children when Frances died in 1966, she willed the house to her brother, who continued in residence there until his own death in 1979.¹²

In that year, the Newell house passed, through the children of another Black sister, Jeane Black Rourk of Florida, to Michael M. Normile and Wawie Kurniawan of Charlotte.¹³ The latter sold the Sunnyside house a few months later to the present owners, John J. Emerson and Helen M. Emerson, who have diligently preserved and restored the house to a very fine condition.¹⁴

Indeed, with a present-day tour through the restored house followed by a walk along that section of Sunnyside Avenue, it does not take a great deal of imagination to recall a quiet, orderly and comfortable middle-class life evoked by the neighborhood. It was a flourishing suburb built for and occupied by many of Charlotte's professionals and their families. Three doors to the west, for example, the large brick house on the corner of Piedmont and Sunnyside was built for a minister, then occupied for many years by a physician.¹⁵ Jake Newell and his brother were, as described above, attorneys, and the solid, square-lined two-story house at 819 Sunnyside reflected the confidence that such professionals and other prospering Charlotteans had in their city and their own lives. This home as a fine example of Fred Bonfoey's designs, reflecting a distinct time and place, and being in an unusual state of preservation, the Jake Newell House is certainly worthy of designation as historically significant.

NOTES

¹ Mecklenburg County, Record of Corporations, Book 1, p. 546.

² Deed Book 269, p.133, 23 November 1910.

³ Record of Corporations, Book 2, p.335; *Charlotte Observer*, July 19, 1922, p. 1; *Charlotte Observer*, November 13, 1922, p. 7.

⁴ City of Charlotte Building Permit No. 299, 18 November 1911.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Charlotte Observer*, January 24, 1933, p.10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, May 26, 1911, p.5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, August 10, 1945, p. 1; *Charlotte News*, August 9, 1945, p. 1B; also information supplied by the librarian, Charlotte Law Library.

⁹ Deed Book 297, p. 139, 31 August 1912.

¹⁰ *Charlotte Observer*, September 9, 1966, p. 10.

¹¹ Will Book 4, p.390, probated 14 August 1945.

¹² Will, Roll 16, Frame 1261, Probated 15 September 1966; *Charlotte Observer*, October 8, 1979, p. 9C.

¹³ Will, Estate File 79-E-1906, Probated 9 October 1979; Deed Book 4267, p.458, 26 December 1979.

¹⁴ Deed Book 4294, p. 456, 8 April 1980.

¹⁵ Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, Survey and Research Report, Detweiler House.

Architectural Description

Thomas W. Hanchett

Attorney Jake Newell's house at 819 Sunnyside Avenue was designed by Charlotte architect Fred Bonfoey in 1911. It is a plainly trimmed two story frame structure, a good example of the Rectilinear Four Square house type popular in Charlotte from the early 1900s into the 1920s. While it is not the city's earliest Four Square, it is the best preserved discovered to date, retaining not only its original trim and most interior fixtures, but even some early wall paper, due to the fact that it remained in the Newell family into the 1970s. The Four Square house type developed around the beginning of the twentieth century as part of a general movement toward more simple and sensible, non-eclectic houses. This general movement, dubbed the "Rectilinear" by some architectural historians, was a reaction against the gaudy, chaotic Victorian era of the late nineteenth century. When the first Four Squares appeared in architectural magazines around 1890, their clean surfaces were a sharp contrast to the heavy detail of the Queen Anne and Colonial designs on surrounding pages.

In the early 1890s several major architects experimented with the type. These included America's most famous architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, whose later Prairie School houses may have borrowed their geometric massing, wide eaves, and non-historic ornament in part from the Rectilinear Four Square. By the end of the 1890s variations on the Four Square were a regular feature of every magazine dealing with house planning, from *Carpentry and Building* to *Ladies Home Journal*. Charlotte's earliest Four Square is the 1904 C.W. Parker residence, a block away from the Newell house at 901 Central Avenue. It was followed by dozens of variations on the theme both for middle class clients like Newell, and wealthy ones like David Ovens, president of Iveys Department stores, who had his 1916 mansion at 825 Ardsley Road in Myers Park built in the style. A typical Four Square, the Jake Newell house has a slate-shingled hip roof with a front

center dormer. Two brick chimneys may be seen near the apex of the roof, both with simple corbelled caps. Eaves are relatively wide and plainly finished.

The house is roughly cube-shaped, with a one-story kitchen wing at the rear and a two story stair bay projecting from the east side. Walls are sheathed in clapboard, and the double-hung, one-over-one-pane sash windows have simple flat surrounds. On the square front facade, the four second story windows are grouped in two pairs. Below one pair is the first story parlor window with its single large square lower pane and leaded glass transom. Below the other is the characteristically off-center front door, flanked by sidelights. There is a wide, gable-roofed front porch shading the entrance. Its fluted Doric columns are the dwelling's only exterior deviation from rectilinear plainness. Inside, the Newell residence has the four rooms upstairs, four down (plus rear kitchen) plan characteristic of the Four Square. One comes through the front door into a spacious entry hall. To the left, large sliding "pocket" doors open onto the parlor. It features a corner fireplace with a simple, dark-stained mantel and a cast iron fire plate. Hanging from the ceiling is a fine "Arts and Crafts" chandelier of brass with glass prisms. The severe, rectangular shapes of the chandelier go well with the no-nonsense Rectilinear style of the house. A second set of big sliding doors leads from the parlor back to the dining room, which includes a fireplace, mantel, and fire plate like that in the parlor. There is a leaded stained glass window with a torch and fleur-de-lis motif. A small door at the back of the dining room leads through a tight butler's pantry into the kitchen, maintaining the separation between food preparation and food consumption that was typical of American residential design until the mid twentieth century. The kitchen has all recent fixtures.

The right rear quadrant of the first floor, behind the entry hall and next to the dining room, was evidently the domain of a live-in servant for the Newell family. There is a plainly-finished bedroom with its own tiny bathroom. A small hallway connects the bedroom with the dining room and entry hall, and a half-flight "back stair" from the servant's hallway up to the landing of the main stairway allows discreet access to the second floor. Returning to the front entry hall, one may ascend the broad main stair with its large landing to the second floor. This stair bay, which projects out from the main block of the house, has three interesting features. One is the use of cantilever construction for a small portion of the second story. The front bedroom adjacent to the upper half-flight of stairs hangs unsupported in space, allowing the stairwell to be open to the entry hall. The second feature is a large half-circle stained glass window across the top of the stair-bay windows. Its multicolored curvilinear design is a sharp departure from the rectilinear severity of the rest of the house. The stairwell also retains early wall paper put up by the Newell family. At the top of the stair is a rambling hall, more extensive than that usually found in Four Squares. Three bedchambers and a smaller room, perhaps a sewing room, open off of it. Each bedchamber has a fireplace, and all doors have five horizontal panels. At the rear, northeast corner of the second floor is the bathroom, complete with the cast iron tub and early imitation-tile wainscoting.