

OAK LAWN



This report was written on December 26, 1975

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as Oak Lawn is located on the northern side of McCoy Rd. to the southwest of the intersection of McCoy Rd. and Gilead Rd. in the northern portion of Mecklenburg County.

2. Name, address, and telephone numbers of the present owners and occupants of the property:

The present owner of the property is:

Mrs. Wilson L Stratton

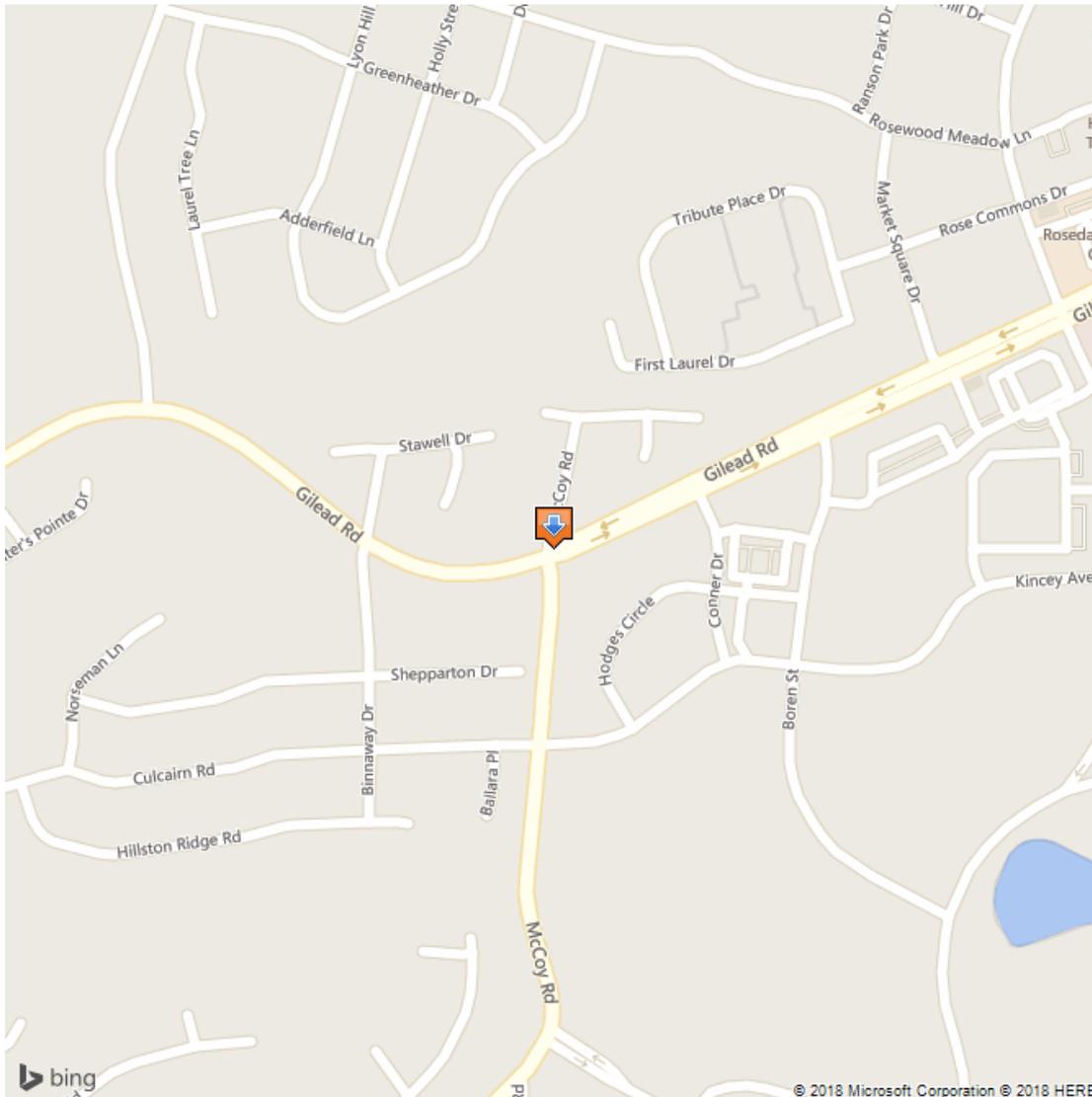
930 Berkley Ave.

Charlotte, NC 28202

Telephone: (704) 333-6018

3. Representative photographs of the property: Representative photographs of the property are included in this report.

4. A map depicting the location of the property: A map depicting the location of the property is included in this report.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent reference to the property is found in the Deed Book 1367, page 410, as filed in the Mecklenburg County Registry.

6. A brief historical sketch of this property:

The traditional building date for Benjamin Wilson Davidson's house, later called Oak Lawn, is 1818, the year Davidson married Elizabeth (Betsy) Latta. The property on which the house was built, however, was not acquired from his father, (Astor John Davidson, a participant in the American Revolution) until April 14, 1819. Furthermore, purchases from Charleston in Davidson's account with his father-in-law, James Latta, in 1821, are of the type and quantity to indicate the building of his house at that time. Tradition holds that Davidson was called "Independence Ben" by his father because he was born on May 20, 1787, the twelfth anniversary of the controversial Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. Davidson lived the life of a prosperous cotton planter as a member of the numerous and locally prominent Davidson family. Davidson died relatively young in 1829, leaving his widow with six sons. Betsy Latta, Benjamin's wife, had been educated at Salem Academy where, it is said the Moravians placed much stress on gardening.

One of her granddaughters, Mrs. J.W. Bradfield, wrote of the house as it appeared just after the Civil War. She described an avenue of once a quarter of a mile long, leading from the house to the road. Where the oaks ended, cedars were planted to lengthen the avenue almost a mile. She further described the gardens with their neat beds bordered with trimmed box bushes. There were beds of old fashioned flowers and herbs which were planted to blend the aromas of the garden. There were long seats under the grapevine arbors. She tells of a high brick wall, with four gates, surrounding the house. Only a few large oaks remain of the above description. Mrs. Bradfield continues her recollection with the house interior: "but the glory of the house was the Indian room. It was above the parlor and quite 30 by 20 feet. The paper was from England, decorated with Indian scenes. Red men carrying strings of fish and bananas and leading them in primitive ships and canoes." This has been authenticated as "Captain Cook" wallpaper, issued by Dufour in Macon, France, 1804.

She continued with her recollection that this was the guest room and that there were three or four beds in this room. The kitchen at this time was described as being forty feet from the rear door. Following her husband's death, Betsy Davidson remained at Oak Lawn until 1835. It is said that because of her strong religious convictions (Presbyterian) she would never permit a fire in the kitchen on Sunday; meals were prepared on Saturday and the servants were given a day of rest. To her religious convictions was also attributed her calm among the panic and shouts of "Judgment Day" that ensued at midnight on November 13, 1833, when "stars fell on North

Carolina, "as they did that same night on Alabama. On January 24, 1835, Betsy Davidson married Rufus Reid, widower of one of her deceased sisters who had left three small daughters. They lived at his plantation home, "Mount Mourne," until her death following the birth of their first child, a daughter. Following Betsy's death, Reid married the step-daughter of the third Latta sister, who was a widow with a daughter, and this marriage produced four more children. Following the Civil War, the plantation passed from the Davidson family to John W. Moore who bought the property at the courthouse door on December 13, 1886. In 1904 the place was sold to John R. Cross and his wife; in 1933 the farm was once again sold at public auction, this time to the town of Huntersville. It passed through three more owners and was purchased in October, 1941 by Mr. and Mrs. Wilson L. Stratton who began architecture rescue work on the long-neglected house. Mrs. Stratton continues as owner of Oak Lawn.

7. A brief architectural description of the property:

Oak Lawn is a transitional Georgian-Federal style plantation house with distinctive features clearly related to Holly Bend, a nearby house also related by family ties. Oak Lawn, facing south, is a two-story, five-bay, frame house resting on a stone foundation with Flemish bond exterior end chimneys. The central entrance is slightly off center to the west (left), as is the corresponding window above. A three-bay, one-story replacement porch protects the handsome entrance, markedly similar to that at Holly Bend; the entrance has slender, fluted pilasters flanking a boldly molded, three-part door frame which contains a four-light transoms. Near the top edge of the transom, each of the pillars is a fluted scroll console surmounted by an applied circular molding; above, the pilaster continues, unadorned, to the porch ceiling cornice. The front door has six shallow flat panels. The three-bay wall area of the porch is flush sheathed and is separated from the lapped siding by pilasters similar to those flanking the door. The lapped siding is replacement but the flush siding appears to be original. The window sash is nine-over-nine at both levels but smaller at the second level. The windows at the first level have shutters with three flat panels in each leaf, supported by strap hinges. There are fixed louvered shutters at the second level. The shutters and blinds are replacements but are made to be patterned after the original. The windows also have three-part molded frames as well as molded sills. There are three granite front steps; the first step has a volute on each end.

The cornice of the house and the front and rear porches is ornamented with a series of blocks formed by incised lines suggestive of tiny triglyphs -- one block running vertically and the next horizontally. The pattern is said to have been original but the cornice was so badly decayed that it had to be replaced. The cornice has a small, neat return at each gable end. The gable ends are similar, with windows flanking the chimney at both the first and second floors, as well as eight-light windows flanking

the chimney in each gable. The basement entrance is in the east gable end, north of the chimney. The gable ends have no roof overhang. The rear of the house is similar to the front except for a door in place of a window in the second bay from the east and a one-story, hip roof porch that carries the length of the house. The extra door led into the one-story wing, since removed, that can be seen in a documentary photograph made in 1941. The interior is a modified "Quaker plan" with a center hall; that is, there is one large room to one side and two small rooms at the other. The hall has a molded chair rail and cornice. The open-string stair rises from the rear of the hall along the east wall in an unbroken run. A unique feature of the stair is the end of the first step which is defined by an extended baseboard in a crossette-like manner. The square newel and one baluster rest on the first step. The balustrade treatment is like that at Holly Bend. The newel has a molded cap flush with the molded handrail. The handrail is supported by very short, turned balusters, two per step. Both have an equally unturned long base section, but the urn-like turned section of the rear one of the pair is longer to accommodate the rise of the handrail. The stair brackets are ornamented with distinctive, fanciful, curvilinear forms.

The string is defined by a robust half-molding which is repeated on the wall above the stair treads. The horizontal wooden edge on the stair supporting platoon is chamfered and molded. There is a closet beneath the stair and the soffitt of the stair has a large, flat panel. Overall, the balustrade is Georgian in feeling and is such lower than might be normally expected. The interior doors have six shallow flat panels and are supported by long strap hinges. Much of the original hardware survives throughout the house. The parlor is to the west of the hall and occupies all of that end of the house. It has a chair rail, wainscot, and molded cornice annular to the hall but it is dominated by the vigorous, vernacular, highly ornamented chimney piece which is nearly identical to that at Holly Bend. Flanking a reeded, molded architrave are pilasters resting on unadorned plinths of baseboard height and rising to the height of the fire opening where a small scroll-shaped console with gouged stop molding which ends at the top with a curvilinear pattern located. The console has a reeded and molded lower portion. A doubled, square-link chain-like motif is deeply incised to about one-third of the way down the pilaster. The molded and reeded shelf breaks over the end consoles and center tablet; the tablet is unadorned except for quarter fans in each corner. The overmantel has two panels with a molded outer frame and a cable molding within. At the upper outside corners of each panel is a truncated pilaster and cap with pierced atop fluting and a reeded band. The molded reeded band carries into a broken pediment with circular bosses ornamented with uneven gougework in a rosette-like pattern. The pediments are joined to the central element above the panels by a cable molding swag. The central element -- an elaborate composition resembling a tall, complex keystone reaches almost to the ceiling and consists, from top to base, of a seeded and molded band, a wooden floral boss, a small molded band, a block

with two concentric applied rings, and a molded console resting on a gouged band with a gouged shell design suspended from the bottom. Near the bottom of the panels, separating them, is a reeded and molded block.

Across the hall in the front root are a chair rail, wainscot and molded cornice similar to the others with notable but less elaborate mantel. The other room of the first floor has become a kitchen. The upstairs rooms are well finished but less elaborate than the first floor. Remnants of "Captain Cook" wallpaper, issued by Defour in Macon, France, in 1804, remain in a corner of an upstairs room made into a closet. To the rear of the house is a well house made of brick which are laid in Flemish bond. There are iron ventilator grills in the well house walls. There is also a small square Greek Revival outbuilding with pyramidal roof.

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

a. Historical and cultural significance: The historical and cultural significance of the property known as the Oak Lawn is primarily due to its architectural merit. As one of Mecklenburg County's notable group of Federal era dwellings, Oak Lawn is especially significant for its elaborate vernacular woodwork of a vigorous and distinctive character, clearly the work of the same carpenter who worked at nearby Holly Bend, a house related by family as well as stylistic connections.

b. Suitability for preservation and restoration: The present owners of the property maintain it in a high state of preservation.

c. Educational value: The structure's architectural merit alone is sufficient proof of the educational value of Oak Lawn. Moreover, the fact that the builder and his wife came from families of local historical importance increases the educational value of the structure.

d. Cost of acquisition, restoration, maintenance, or repair: The Commission has no intention of purchasing this property. Neither is it aware of any intention of the owner to sell the property. Therefore, this criterion would not seem to be applicable.

e. Possibilities for adaptive or alternative use of the property: Because the structure is maintained in a high state of preservation and is of substantial architectural merit, it should not be adapted to an alternate use.

f. Appraised value: The 1975 appraised value of the structure itself is \$8,780.00. The appraised value of the land is \$82,600.00. The Commission is aware that designation of the property would allow the owner to apply for a special tax classification.

g. The administrative and financial responsibility of any person or organization willing to underwrite all or a portion of such costs: The Commission assumes that the present or subsequent owners will meet all financial obligations associated with the preservation of the property.

9. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria established for inclusion on the National Register: The Commission believes that the property known as Oak Lawn does meet the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places because of its architectural merit and because of its association with locally prominent families of distinguished lineage. Also worth noting is the fact that the North Carolina Division of Archives and History is presently processing Oak Lawn for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

10. Documentation of why and in what ways the property is of historical importance to Charlotte and/or Mecklenburg County: Oak Lawn, as one of the few surviving Federal era structures in Mecklenburg County, possesses considerable local historical significance, especially in view of its refined architectural merit and unspoiled setting. In addition, its association with the Latta and Davidson families places it among the structures which reflect the lifestyle of the gentry of Mecklenburg County of the early nineteenth century.

Bibliography

An Inventory of Older Buildings in Mecklenburg County and Charlotte for the Historic Properties Commission.

Letter from Charles Greer Suttlemyre, Jr. to Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

Materials Supplied by the Division of Archives and History.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office.

Date of Preparation of this Report: December 26, 1975

Prepared by: Dan L. Morrill, Director
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
Telephone: (704) 332-2726