

William and Cora Osborne House



This report was written on November 1, 1998

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the William and Cora Osborne House is located at 12445 Ramah Church Road, Huntersville, North Carolina 28070.

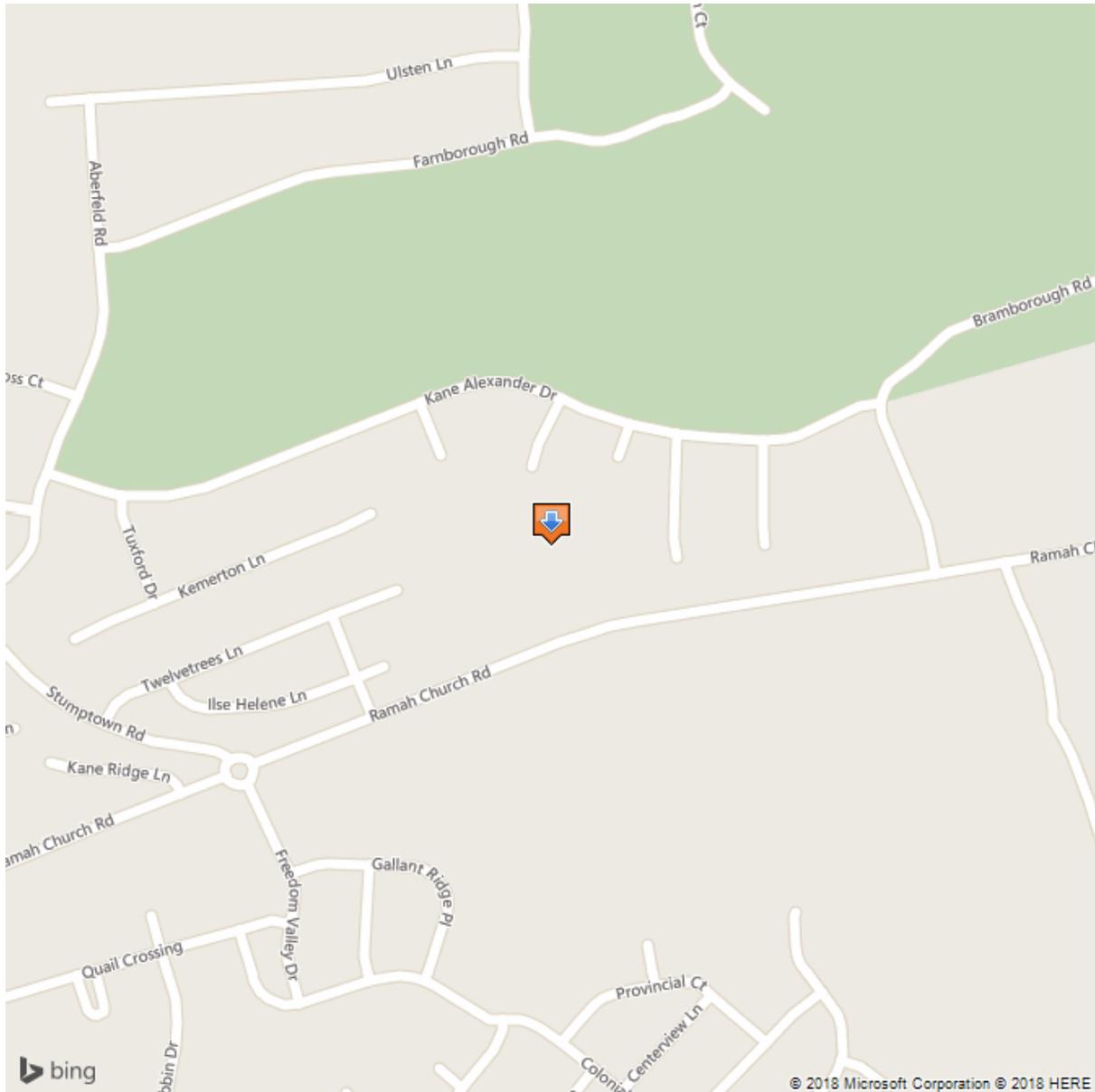
2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner of the property: The present owner of the property is:

Martin Osborne
P.O. Box 1365
Huntersville, NC 28070

Telephone: (704) 875-2105

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 maps that depict the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the Property: The most recent deed to Tax Parcel Number 011-181-13 is found in Deed Book 8405, page 0611.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property by Caroline Wells and Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

7. A brief architectural sketch of the property: This report contains a brief architectural sketch of the property by Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-400.5:

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the William and Cora Osborne House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the William and Cora Osborne House (c. 1890) is representative of the two-story frame I-houses built in rural Mecklenburg County in the late 1800's and is reflective of the robust cotton economy that characterized Mecklenburg County during those years, 2) the William and Cora Osborne House was erected by John Ellis McAuley (1861-1929), a local craftsman who built several structures in the Huntersville vicinity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including the sanctuary and rectory for St. Mark's Episcopal Church and the Lindsey Parks House.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the attached architectural description by Dr. Dan L. Morrill demonstrates that the William and Cora Osborne 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 that becomes a designated "historic landmark." The current appraised tax value of the improvements on the property is \$116,350. The current appraised tax value of the 2.15 acres of land is \$44,100. The total appraised tax value of the property is \$160,450. The property is zoned R3.

Date of Preparation of this Report: November 1, 1998

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Summary Statement of Significance

The William and Cora Osborne House, although not on its original site, possesses local historic significance in the areas of Agriculture and Architecture. Built c. 1890, the Osborne House is a manifestation of the flourishing cotton economy of Mecklenburg County during the so-called New South era of the late nineteenth century. With the establishment of the Charlotte Cotton Mills in 1881, Charlotte and Mecklenburg County began to experience rapid industrial growth, especially in textiles. Mecklenburg farmers found ready markets for cotton, both locally and regionally; and those who had the ability and the resources to take advantage of this expanding economic opportunity prospered. With rising incomes, successful farmers like William and Cora Osborne were able to build impressive vernacular farmhouses. A particularly popular house type in Mecklenburg County was the so-called I-house. The builder of the William and Cora Osborne House was John Ellis McAuley (1861-1929). A "country carpenter," McAuley erected several structures in northern Mecklenburg County in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition to the Osborne House, these include St. Mark's Episcopal Church (his most imposing), the St. Mark's Episcopal Church Rectory, and the Lindsey Parks House. McAuley's buildings constitute a significant collection of vernacular rural structures dating from the New South era in northern Mecklenburg County.

Historical Overview

The William and Cora Osborne House was built c. 1890 about 1.6 miles northeast of Huntersville, N.C. in rural Mecklenburg County. The original owner was William Eldridge Osborne (1861-1930), the husband of Cora Watts Osborne. Cora was the daughter of Thomas and Mary Cecelia Allison Watts of neighboring Iredell County; and he was the son of William Osborne, Sr., a farmer, and his wife, Lenora Beard Osborne. William Osborne participated and prospered in the expanding cotton economy of Mecklenburg County during the so-called New South era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He inherited or bought several parcels of land in the Huntersville area and built a home commensurate with his improving economic standing. Historian Thomas W. Hanchett notes that after the Civil War "the Southern attitude toward industry changed radically." "The end of slavery crippled

plantation agriculture," he explains, "and the region's investors began to work toward a 'New South' based instead on industrial development." The expansion of the textile economy of Mecklenburg County was nothing short of spectacular. "Cotton was not an easy crop to grow in Mecklenburg County," writes preservation consultant Sherry Joines. "In fact, only 6,112 bales were ginned in 1860. However, after the discovery of the fertilizer, Peruvian guano, the production rapidly increased to 19,129 bales in 1880. The production of cotton peaked in 1910 with 27, 466 bales." "Thus, between 1860 and 1880," says Joines, "the image, economy, and lifestyle of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County changed dramatically." An additional stimulus to the local cotton economy was provided by the establishment of a substantial number of textile mills in Mecklenburg County during the New South years.

Clearly, these developments brought new challenges and opportunities to local farmers. Among them was the rapid growth of the city of Charlotte, which placed greater pressure on farmers to supply the more diversified needs of Charlotte's increasing populace and burgeoning textile industry. Successful farmers like William Osborne learned that they had to specialize in order to maintain a profit. In addition, the growing demand for products meant that expensive machinery replaced beasts of burden; and as land also grew more costly, losses were felt more intensely. Many farmers in Mecklenburg County could not keep up with these new financial and technological demands. Those like Osborne who could, saw their incomes increase substantially.

In keeping with his improving economic circumstances, William Osborne decided to build a new and more imposing home c. 1890. The contractor was John Ellis McAuley (1861- 1929), a "country carpenter," who had erected several similar two-story frame I-houses in northern Mecklenburg County. Among the houses McAuley fashioned were the Lindsey Parks House on Neck Road and the rectory for St. Marks Episcopal Church. William Eldridge Osborne became, as his obituary states, "one of the best-known farmers in this section of the county." After they moved into their new home, William and Cora Osborne had three sons, Thomas Preston Osborne (1892-1968), George H. Osborne (1897- 1920), and Herman L. Osborne (1905-1975). In 1920 the Osbornes lost their second son, George, at the age of twenty-three to pneumonia. When William Osborne died in 1930, he divided his farm between his two remaining sons. Thomas Osborne received 30 acres of land on the south side of "home place," along with a wagon and some household items. Herman Osborne acquired the home, farm, tractor, Chevrolet, and much of the farming machinery, while cattle, hogs, and other livestock were divided between the sons. Cora Osborne lived in the Osborne House until her death in 1954 at the age of 89. William Eldridge Osborne and Cora Watts Osborne are buried in Huntersville A.R.P Cemetery.

Herman Osborne married Norma Spain Gray (1907-1954) in 1928, and from 1930 the couple lived in the Osborne House for the rest of their lives. Norma Spain was the daughter of R. A. Gray and Mary Long Barnette of Huntersville. She had two children, Otis Gray Osborne and George Lee Osborne. Norma Osborne suffered from arteriosclerosis, which claimed her life in 1954 at the early age of 45. Herman Osborne then married Mary Vance (1906-1975), the daughter of John David Vance and Mary McAuley. Mary Vance Osborne brought two children from a previous marriage, William Franklin and Betty. Herman Osborne worked as a farmer until his retirement; and Mary Vance Osborne was a housewife. Herman Osborne died in 1975 and was buried with Norma Osborne in the cemetery of Huntersville A.R.P. Church. Mary Osborne died less than a month after her husband's demise and is also buried at Huntersville A.R.P. Cemetery.

Herman and Mary Osborne bequeathed the house and one acre of land and 1/3 of the Osborne farm on the north side of Ramah Church Road to their son Otis Gray Osborne in 1975. George Lee Osborne received the remaining 2/3 of land (except the one acre homesite). In 1976, the brothers exchanged the parcels of land. The William and Cora Osborne House now stood empty. Farming operations had ceased. George Osborne and his wife, Marie Elizabeth Primrose Buxey, a native of Great Britain whom George had met while serving in the United States military, resided in Huntersville with their son, Martin Lee Osborne (b. 1963). George and Marie Osborne granted to Martin Osborne a tract of land near their own in 1995-1996. In 1996, Martin Osborne moved the two-story frame "home place," from a wooded area approximately 500 yards south to a narrow tract of land in the open fields along Ramah Church Road. The William and Cora Osborne House, built by his great-grandfather, William Eldridge Osborne, is the home where Martin Osborne now resides.

Research Notes

Will of W. E. Osborne (Record of Wills, Book V, page 283):

To Preston Osborne: 30 acres on south side of home place, second best wagon and reversible disk plow, best broom set, one walnut table, bookcase, grandfather's shotgun, the "note that he holds against him".

To Herman L. Osborne: all of the remainder of home farm, tractor, the best wagon, woodsawing outfit, Chevrolet, blacksmith tools, grain drill, kitchen equipment, best

iron bed, a sofa, chairs, bureau, glass, bookcase, folding walnut table, tools, grandfather's clock, all leftover money.

Both sons should divide the rest of the farm tools and cattle, hogs and other stock equally .

Will of H. L. Osborne (Record of Wills, microfilm roll 578, frame 1468)

To Mary Vance: all personal property, bank accounts, moneys, bonds, household goods; 19 acre; home place north of Ramah Church Road

To William F. Alexander and Betty Privette: fee interest in 80 acres on property north of north of Ramah Church Road, except for 8 acres which goes to Mary Vance

To Otis Gray Osborne: House and one acre of land; 1/3 of land on north side of Ramah Church Road

To George Lee Osborne: 2/3 of land on north side of Ramah Church Road, except 1 acre to Otis as above

Death Certificates

1. William Eldridge Osborne Book 36, page 205

Born: 1-13-1861, Mecklenburg County

Died: 8-6-1930

Age: 69 years, 6 mos., 23 days

Occupation: farmer

Father: William Osborne

Mother: Lenora Beard

Informant of death: T. P. Osborne, Huntersville

Buried in Huntersville

Cause of death: Diabetes?? (*Not legible*)

2. Listing for the death of George H. Osborne in 1920, son of William E. Osborne (Book 14, page 215)

3. Listing for the death of Mary Cora Osborne on 4-18-54 (Reg. 534) at age 89

4. Thomas Preston Osborne

Died: 12-11-1968 (Reg. 2690) at Memorial Hospital

Age: 76

Cause of Death: cerebrovascular accident

5. Herman L. Osborne

Died: 10-17-75 Huntersville Hospital

Age: 69

Born: 12-20-1905 North Carolina

Occupation: retired farmer

Father: William E. Osborne

Mother: Cora Watts

Informant of Death: George L. Osborne

Cause of Death: Parkinson's Disease (advanced-20 years); massive intestinal hemorrhage

Buried in Huntersville Presbyterian Church Cemetery

6. Mary Vance Osborne

Died: 11-2-75

Age: 69

Born: 4-25-1906

Occupation: housewife

Father: John David Vance

Mother: Mary McAuley

Informant of Death: George L. Osborne

Cause of Death: Acute Thrombosis (instant)

Burial in Huntersville ARP Cemetery

7. Norma Spain Osborne

Died: 3-24-54 Mercy Hospital

Age: 46 (less 5 mos. 3 days)

Born: 10-21-1907 Mecklenburg County

Married to Herman L. Osborne

Occupation: housewife

Father: R. A. Gray

Mother: Mary Long Barnette

Cause of Death: cerebral hemorrhage due to arterio sclerotic disease (10 hours)

Architectural Description

Site Description

The William and Cora Osborne House is set well back from the northern side of Ramah Church Road on a treeless lot that rises slightly from the road to the house. A gravel driveway traverses the eastern edge of the lot and terminates at a parking area just to the right rear of the house. The Osborne House faces south toward Ramah Church Road. The only outbuilding is a spring house at the immediate left rear of the house. Every effort was made to approximate the original setting of the Osborne House and the spring house when they were moved approximately 500 yards south to their present location to prevent their being demolished.

Physical Description

The William and Cora Osborne House is a two-story, three-bay wide by two-bay deep, clapboard-sided building with a one-story kitchen ell projecting from the right rear. A one-story porch with a shed roof covers most of the southern or front facade, which contains the front entrance at the center. The front door is flanked by sidelights. The gable roofs of the house and rear ell were originally wooden shingle but are now tin. The end chimneys on the main block of the Osborne House are replacements, as are the handrails leading to the front porch, the porch balustrade, and the porch posts. The Osborne House originally sat on brick piers. Except for the front and rear porches, it now rests upon a continuous brick foundation. The predominant window type is 6/6 double hung sash, except for 4/4 sash on the side elevations of the house. An original porch with a solid wooden wall at the edge and attenuated wooden pickets supporting the roof is at the left rear of the house. The spring house is located to the immediate rear of the house in roughly its original orientation to the main house. It too is a clapboard-sided building with a gable roof covered in tin (original).

The interior of the William and Cora Osborne House has been changed. The center hallway has been closed off about half way to the rear. A new bathroom with shower and an updated kitchen have been added. Otherwise, the interior is largely in-tact. The floors are heart pine. The ceilings are beaded board. In detailing and overall feel the house reflects the lavish tastes associated with Mecklenburg County farmhouses of the late nineteenth century. The balustrade and newels of the main stairway, which rises toward the front of the house from the original center hall, have extravagant detailing, as do the mantels in the house -- all original.



LEFT: *Main Stairway* **RIGHT:** *Mantel*

For discussions of the rise of industrialism and the concept of the New South, see C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), hereinafter cited as Woodward, *Origins of the New South*; Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970); Holland Thompson, *The New South: A Chronicle of Social and Industrial Evolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919), hereinafter cited as Thompson, *The New South*; Broadus Mitchell, *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1921).

For an account that challenges the interpretation of Woodward and others about the men who led the industrialization movement in the New South, see Dwight B. Billings, Jr., *Planters and the Making of a "New South": Class, Politics, and Development in North Carolina, 1865- 1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), hereinafter cited as Billings, *Planters and the Making of a "New South."*

Southern urbanization is surveyed in David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

Mecklenburg County Record of Marriage Licenses N-S.

Thomas W. Hanchett, "Charlotte's Textile Heritage: An Introduction" (1984).
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

Sherry L. Joines and Dr. Dan L. Morrill, "Historic Rural Resources in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina" (1997). Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

"For a description of the textile mills established in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Dr. Dan L. Morrill, "A Survey of Cotton Mills In Charlotte In Charlotte And Mecklenburg County For The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission" (1997). Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

Edgar T. Thompson, *Agricultural Mecklenburg and Industrial Charlotte* (Chapel Hill, 1926). According to some sources, I-houses derive their name from the fact that they were prevalent in states like Iowa, Illinois and Indiana.

McAuley also built St. Mark's Episcopal Church.

Charlotte Observer, August 8, 1930, p. 10.

Index to Deaths, 1910-1926, Mecklenburg County, Book 14, p. 215.

Record of Wills, V 283.

Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1331, page 318. In 1916, he bought a 60 acre tract from G.M Riley, a salesman with Wilson Motor Company, for \$2410.

Marriage Bonds of Mecklenburg County, 1924-1934.

Records of Deaths, Mecklenburg County, Reg. 2591.

Ibid.

Mecklenburg County Deed Book 3897, page 958-959; earlier deeds were granted from Herman Osborne to George L. Osborne (see Deed Book 1775, page 195) and to

Herman's nephew William E. Osborne, the son of Thomas P. (see Deed Book 1863, page 357).

Mecklenburg County Deed Book 8405, page 609-611 and 8431, page