Survey and Research Report
On Roseland Cemetery

1. **Name and location of the property: The property known as Roseland Cemetery is located adjacent to Monroe Road near Galleria Boulevard in Matthews, North Carolina.**

2. **Name address of present owner of the property: The owner of the property is:**
   James M Renfrow
   Evelyn Renfrow
   9813 Wesleyan Court
   Charlotte, NC 28227

3. **Representative photographs of the property: This report contains representative photographs of the property. Click here for photographs of the property.**

4. **A map depicting the location of the property:**

The UTM Coordinates of the property are 17N N: 3887519 E: 523746

5. **Current Deed Book references to the property: The most recent deed to this property is recorded in the Mecklenburg County Deed Book 3116, page 194. The tax parcel number is 213-231-01.**

6. **A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Bill Jeffers.**

7. **A brief physical description of the property: This report contains a brief physical description of the property prepared by Bill Jeffers.**

8. **Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-400:**

   A. **Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance. The Commission judges that the property known as Roseland Cemetery does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following criteria: 1) The Roseland Cemetery is a large and well-preserved burial site of African Americans from Matthews, North Carolina that contains graves dating from roughly 1865 until about 1955; 2) the Roseland Cemetery is located in an otherwise highly-developed section of Matthews and is the one of the few reminders of the rural farming community that once stretched along this section of Monroe Road; and 3) the Roseland Cemetery is one of the few reminders of the quickly disappearing rural African American experience in Mecklenburg County in the years following Emancipation thorough the last decade of Jim Crow Segregation.**

B. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the physical description that is included in this report demonstrates that the Roseland Cemetery 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 21.668 acres of land is $2,704,000. There are no improvements on the property. The property is zoned NS (Neighborhood Service District).**

10. Portions of property recommended for designation: As shown on Attachment A.

Date of preparation of this report: January 30, 2012.

Historical Overview

One can best appreciate the cultural significance of Roseland Cemetery by examining the plight of African Americans in predominately rural Mecklenburg County in the years immediately preceding and following Emancipation and juxtaposing this with the dearth of extant examples of their built environment today. In 1860 slaves accounted for approximately 40% of Mecklenburg County's population.[1] These bondsmen and bondswomen tended to live on small plantations, and the slave owners in Mecklenburg County most often owned a relatively small number of bondspeople. About twenty-five percent of the white population of Mecklenburg County held African Americans as slaves, the majority of whom worked as farmhands or domestics, while a small minority labored in the County's gold mines.

Whites placed onerous controls on free blacks and enslaved blacks during the decades leading up to the Civil War. Slaves were barred from the streets after 9:30 p.m., were not allowed to buy or sell liquor, and could not assemble without the expressed permission of the mayor or town commissioners. Free blacks were limited both by local and state codes, including the Free Negro Code of 1830, which attempted to prevent free blacks from having contact with both slaves and abolitionists, restricted their movement into and out of the state, and forbade whites from teaching bondspeople to read and write. By 1835 the North Carolina General Assembly had also stipulated that free blacks could no longer vote.[2] Charlotte's City commissioners placed severe restrictions on local free blacks and enslaved blacks. The minutest details of black life were circumscribed. For example blacks, both free and slave, were prohibited from smoking, carrying weapons, and from being employed as clerks or retailers. In sum, whites attempted to

prevent African Americans from obtaining even the most rudimentary sense of independence and self-worth in the pre-Civil War era.

After the Civil War, newly-freed blacks relished the opportunity to build families not subject to white control and churches that were similarly independent. Kathleen Hayes, a freedwoman, railed against the practice of seating African Americans in the balcony of Charlotte's First Presbyterian Church and called upon the black members of the congregation to "come out of the gallery and worship God on the main floor." The Northern Presbyterian Church responded to such urgings by establishing the General Assembly's Committee on Freedman on June 21, 1865, which sent 40 white missionaries and teachers to the South.[3]

These teachers and missionaries faced many difficulties, including inadequate funding and rejection and hostility at the hands of many of the local whites. Undaunted, preachers like Reverend S.C. Alexander came from Pittsburgh to help Kathleen Hayes and other disaffected blacks establish Seventh Street Presbyterian Church, now First United Presbyterian Church.[4] Alexander joined with fellow whites Sidney Murkland and Willis L. Miller in October 1866 to create the Catawba Presbytery, the first all-black Presbytery in the United States. These courageous men labored tirelessly to assist African Americans in creating several churches in Mecklenburg County – including McClintock Church, Murkland Church, Woodland Church, and St. Lloyd Presbyterian Church. These newly-founded congregations provided places of worship for those African Americans who wanted to remove themselves from their former white-controlled churches because of the demeaning treatment accorded black members there.[5] Black congregants in white-controlled churches were listed separately on membership rolls, were forced to sit in separate sections, and were denied leadership positions. The

institution of the church proved to be an indispensable refuge for African Americans in the late nineteenth century. The disastrous developments of "Jim Crow" segregation laws and disfranchisement further marginalized the African American community and made the availability of a safe haven and meeting place, such as the church, all the more essential.

However, the effects of "Jim Crow" segregation on the African American community would ultimately transcend religion. The mantra of "separate but equal" (which was anything but) forced the separation of the races from Mecklenburg County's social, economic and political life. Where blacks had once been excluded by custom and the institution of slavery they were now, specifically, excluded by written law. As a result of this, distinctive and separate African American communities were created around most of the towns in Mecklenburg County. One of the most notable of these is the now demolished Second Ward community of "Brooklyn," which was located in center city Charlotte. But smaller communities emerged around the smaller towns of the county. Communities like "Brady Alley" in Davidson or "Smithville" in Cornelius highlight this phenomenon. Other communities for African Americans however, while bordering the town limits, were considered separate from the town proper. Most notable of these is the African American community of Huntersville, which until recently was considered a distinctly separate part of town, and the Crestdale Community of Matthews.

<u>Crestdale: The Forgotten Matthews</u>

Until the latter half of the twentieth century, there was a forgotten community just outside the original town boundaries of Matthews. This area today is known as Crestdale but in the 1870's had the moniker of

“Tanktown.” The community dates from the 1860s and was originally settled by freemen and freed slaves. Crestdale’s early history is obscure; no one seems to know anything about the original inhabitants or how they came to settle there. Most “Tanktown” residents were sharecroppers or day laborers in Matthews. A few worked for the railroad, and these jobs were the best option available to blacks in “Tanktown.” The railroad provided steady employment, cash wages, housing, and later, insurance benefits.[6] Most of the residents of the community, however, were farmers; and few of them could afford to own land.

In the late nineteenth century, the children of “Tanktown” went to Hood’s Crossroads Colored School, which was several miles from their neighborhood. After 1900, a shotgun house that stood at the intersection of what is now Crestdale and Matthews School Roads, and which is the present site of the new Matthews House of Prayer, was converted into a more conveniently located community school. This school had grades one through seven and was only open for three months a year. By 1918, the residents of “Tanktown” were able to build a new school. The Rosenwald Foundation financed 50% of the cost of the new school, and the community raised the remaining funds by having fish fries, and by assessing the parents $25.00. Since this sum was prohibitive for most residents, parents who could not afford the tuition contributed by helping with construction. The “Tanktown” School changed its name to Crestdale School in 1963 and was closed in 1966, when the Crestdale students were integrated into the Matthews School.[7]

The name of “Tanktown”, according to Richard Mattson, “ . . . referred to the railroad water tank that originally stood at the heart of the district, near the train tracks. The men who operated the tank and lived nearby made up the settlement’s earliest residents.”[8] They would come to settle along Tanktown

Road, which is known today as E. Charles St. This was one of the first all African American communities in the area. "Tanktown" would become Crestdale in 1963, but the obvious disparities between it and Matthews were readily visible to anyone who bothered to look. A *Charlotte Observer* article from May 13, 1968, only highlights the inequality: "Most of Crestdale's 250 people use wooden privies. Only about 10 houses have septic tanks. Everybody uses well water, three or four families often draw from a common well, and you can see women trudging wearily with buckets . . . one hundred yards away is a housing subdivision. It's inside the Matthews city limits, with water and sewer lines for all homes. The residents are white."[9]

Differences such as these continued to highlight the inequity between predominately white Matthews and predominately black Crestdale. Sam Boyd, known as the "Mayor of Crestdale" and his wife Viola paid with their own money to run a water line to the neighborhood. Sam also continued to lobby the Matthews town council throughout the 1970's to acquire grants to bring water and sewer to all of Crestdale.[10] However, as late as 1982, nearly two thirds of Crestdale's residents still had no running water or sewer service. A former member of the Matthews Board of Commissioners, Vicky Baucom, remarked that, "nobody knew anything about it. And I think that's the problem with Crestdale in general . . . it's sort of like, 'out of sight, out of mind."[11] Baucom was ultimately responsible for spearheading the effort to get Crestdale annexed to Matthews so the residents cold get needed sewer and water lines. In her own words, "I don't think anyone should live in conditions like that today, not in southeast Charlotte."[12] Her efforts would bear fruit, and with infrastructure improvements made to the area, Crestdale officially became part of Matthews in 1988.

As with most southern African American communities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, religion played an important role in Crestdale. There are two churches in the area. Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church was organized in 1879, and the United House of Prayer for all People can trace its origins back to 1928.

Roseland Cemetery

In the woods surrounded by neighborhoods and bordered by Monroe Road lies a barely noticed cemetery. Overgrown and virtually forgotten by many, this property serves as an important and extant piece of the African American story of Matthews. Originally known by local African Americans as "Renfrow Quarters" it is known today as Roseland Cemetery.[13] The Renfrow's allocated a portion of this property for a cemetery for local African Americans. In fact, the cemetery contains the remains of slaves and freed blacks from Matthews and areas beyond.[14] The Renfrow family still remains the primary owner of the property according to Mecklenburg County's Property Ownership and Land Records Information System (POLARIS).[15]

Initially, it seems that the cemetery was primarily used to inter members of Roseville AME Zion Church. Roseville AME Zion was located on Ames St. in Matthews, and while it was not located in the Crestdale community it was the church that served the spiritual needs of this nascent Matthews African American Community. The church was organized in the late nineteenth century and had an active congregation until 1928. That year, The United House of Prayer was established in Crestdale, and most of the members of Roseville switched to that church.[16] The abandoned Roseville

Church eventually succumbed to time and the elements, but the Roseville congregation maintained and opened the cemetery for the members of the African American community of Matthews "who were not affiliated with other churches that had their own graveyards."[17]

Harvey Boyd, son of Sam and Viola Boyd, also mentioned that a house shared the property with the cemetery for a time as well. The African-American family that lived in the house moved to Crestdale, and the home was eventually destroyed, but the foundation of the property remains extant. While the cemetery stopped accepting burials in the mid 1950's,[18] the cemetery's name of "Roseville" eventually morphed into "Roseland" over time and is still the current moniker today.[19] The property contains approximately 70 to 75 graves, at least half of which are identified with simple stone markers. There are several headstones extant on the property, although many more have been lost over time due to vandalism. Mr. Boyd remembers that for funerals coffins were brought three miles to the cemetery on a horse and buggy from Crestdale. Sometimes, when it rained, it made the final leg of the journey more difficult because of the muddy conditions.[20] Mr. Boyd knows this cemetery well because he has many family members buried there. The oldest is his great-grandfather, Calvin Henry Boyd, who was born a slave and died a free man. The Boyd family patriarch also had the distinction of being a founder of Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church in 1879. The Boyd family has other family buried there as well. According to the late Viola Boyd, who stated in *The Matthews News & Record* that in addition to Calvin Boyd, "One of my twins is buried over there. My mother and grandmother too."[21] The Morris family of Crestdale also has a vested interest in the cemetery. This family is one of Crestdale's oldest, with generations of relations still living in the community today. Mary Morris, wife of The Reverend Clement Morris who was

the pastor of Gethsemane Baptist Church in Davidson, stated in the *Matthews Record*, that "my granddaddy, grandmomma, aunts, uncles, plenty of relatives are buried there . . . that's our history."[22]

Conclusion

The tangible examples of the rural African American experience in Mecklenburg County today are dwindling. Their history is a rich history covering two centuries and based on themes such as family, religion, and the shared struggle to overcome the constraints of Jim Crow segregation. However, this history is also a bittersweet one due to this dearth of examples of the built environment. Many can point to the destruction of the Brooklyn neighborhood of Second Ward as a prime example of this phenomenon. However, it was not just in the urban centers where the African American story of Mecklenburg County was told. Since the county was predominately rural until the latter half of the twentieth century, the small towns of Mecklenburg County also contributed to this historical narrative.

Rural Mecklenburg County was initially spared this dilemma, but as Charlotte grew out of its four wards, development and change moved with it. Many of the original structures of rural Crestdale have long since faded into history because once relatively safe examples of the African American rural experience, whether they were farmsteads, homes, churches, cemeteries, or institutional structures, would not be able to stand in the way of the need for new housing and development. As Charlotte reached out to touch the smaller towns that now surround it, the smaller towns also responded by growing themselves. Integration further challenged these resources as once segregated low density rural neighborhoods gave way to

mixed communities in a high density urban and suburban setting. While no one can deny that this phenomenon is a positive development for African Americans, as new development continues the ever present danger is that more elements of their rural experiences in this county will fade into history and disappear forever.

Roseland Cemetery is not only an excellent example of the rural African American experience of Mecklenburg County, it is also a vehicle by which that story can be told. The first dedicated cemetery for the African American citizens of Matthews, while today overgrown and partially forgotten amid the rapid change taking place around it, is a hidden gem of historical information encompassing two centuries of African American history in this county. One sees a broad spectrum of the African American experience from slavery to the beginning of the end of Jim Crow segregation. Interred within its confines are former slaves and their descendents, the families who came to call the small community of Crestdale their home. As word of the cemetery's condition became public, a concerted effort to protect and maintain this small but important chapter of African Americana has found root. As Harvey Boyd remarked, "there's over two acres of African American history at the back of the land which many people are interested in protecting and preserving."[23]

James Baldwin wrote that, "History is not a procession of illustrious people. It's about what happens to a people. Millions of anonymous people is what history is all about."[24] Roseland Cemetery contains within its boundaries the story of average people who lived in challenging and changing times, and who shaped history simply by living it. Through their shared experiences as rural African Americans a rich narrative is formed. To ignore their collective contributions to the world in which they lived would be an insult to them and the successes they celebrated and struggles they

endured. To that end, their contributions should be recognized, however possible. In addition, as examples of the rural African American built environment become even less frequent today, preservation of what remains of this history becomes a paramount concern. Designation of Roseland Cemetery as a local historic landmark would be one way to address this issue. It would bring attention to the collective contributions of rural African Americans in Mecklenburg County and also highlight their impact on the built environment of the time and place in which they lived.

Architectural/Physical Description

Roseland Cemetery is situated in a portion of the southwest corner of a 21.668 acre property that is adjacent to Monroe Road and Galleria Boulevard in the Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) of Matthews, NC. Once a predominately rural area, this section has become a busy and heavily developed area with residences, shopping, and business. Roseland Cemetery is situated on a rectangle-shaped lot located approximately one quarter mile from Monroe Road. The lot is primarily uneven with small undulating hills due primarily to the settling of graves over time in the cemetery. Most of the 21.668 acre parcel is covered with mature trees, except for the approximately 1.35 acre portion that contains the graves; there younger trees grow, and some of the ground is covered with periwinkle. Periwinkle was a common ground cover used in earlier cemeteries. Its invasive root system prevents other weeds from growing, and its purple flower acts as a decorative ground cover. However, most of the cemetery area is overgrown with decomposing leaves and trees.

Approximately 70-75 graves are believed to be interred in the cemetery. However it not easy to discern the entire cemetery due to the abundance of overgrown trees and leaves. Most of the easily identified graves are spaced approximately 2 feet apart. As was common practice, families were grouped together, and adult and child graves were interspersed together. It appears that that the graves are oriented from west to east. The earliest graves date from sometime after 1865, when the land was made into a cemetery. The last graves date from 1955, the last year it allowed new burials.

Very few grave markers remain. Four distinct grave markers, with varying degrees of professional craftsmanship, were easily discernible. It has been determined through interviews that there were other markers like these but they have been destroyed over time by vandals. A total of 31 other markers were identified. These markers run the gambit from simple pieces of small stone, to larger pieces of stone and, in some instances, plants which mark the spots of family graves.

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[1] Dan L. Morrill*, A History of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County*, Chapter 4. An on-line resource:www.danandmary.com/historyofcharlotte.htm. (Accessed, December 20, 2011).
[2] Janette Thomas Greenwood, *Bittersweet Legacy: The Black and White "Better Classes" in Charlotte, 1850-1910.* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p. 21.
[3] Greenwood, *Bittersweet Legacy*, p. 22.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Interestingly, Rev. Miller had, prior to his conversion, been a slaveholder, and had fought to maintain the institution of slavery. (Inez Moore Parker, *Historical Narrative, The Biddle-Johnson C. Smith University Story*, Charlotte: Charlotte Publishing, 1975 p. 94) D.G. Burke, "The Catawba Story 1866-1980: A brief History of the Catawba Presbytery. Sponsored by the Historical Committee of the Catawba Presbytery, United Presbyterian Church, USA, 1981". From the Inez Moore Parker Archives, Johnson C. Smith University.
[6] See *Survey of African American Buildings and Sites in Mecklenburg County*, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, http://www.cmhpf.org/surveyafricancontext.htm (Accessed, January 23, 2012).
[7] Paula Hartill Lester, *Discover Matthews: From Cotton to Corporate*, (Charlotte, N.C.: Herff Jones Pub. Co. 1999), p. 60.
[8] Richard L. Mattson, *Historic Landscapes of Mecklenburg County: The Small Towns* (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission), pp. 59-61.

[9] Bob Rosenblatt, "Proud, Poor, They're Cleaning: Tiny Negro Community Wants Water Lines, Playgrounds," *Charlotte Observer*, May 13, 1968. p. 1C.
[10] See Janet Denk, “The Honorees: Mary Lee Caldwell Stewart, *The Matthews Record*, June 18, 2009, p. 5.
[11] Charles E. Shepard, "Matthews Seeking Federal Grant For Crestdale," *Charlotte Observer*, July 31, 1982. p. 2B.
[12] Ibid.
[13] See Janet Denk, “The Honorees: Mary Lee Caldwell Stewart, *The Matthews Record*, June 18, 2009, p. 5.
[14] See Janet Denk, “Old Cemetery Tells Stories of Matthews’ African American Community,” *Matthews News & Record*, February 23, 2006, p. 1.
[15] See Parcel ID: 21323101, Mecklenburg County Polaris (Property Ownership and Land Records Information System), http://polaris.mecklenburgcountync.gov/website/redesign/viewer.htm?Service=RealEstate&OVMap=overview&ActiveLayer=44&Query=TAX.TAXDW.PARCEL_P.OBJECTID=24416&QueryZoom=Yes&RELookup=Yes, (Accessed January 5, 2012.)
[16] See *Survey of African American Buildings and Sites in Mecklenburg County*.
[17] Janet Denk, “In Dire Need of Protection,” *The Matthews Record*, May 29, 2008, p.6.
[18] Jeffers, *Interview with Harvey Boyd*.
[19] Denk, *The Matthews Record*, May 29, 2008, p.6.
[20] Bill Jeffers, *Interview with Harvey Boyd*, January 13, 2012.
[21] Denk, *Mathews News & Record*.
[22] Denk, *The Matthews Record*, May 29, 2008, p.6.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

ATTACHMENT A