

Survey and Research Report On The Sherrill-Robbins House



1. Name and location of the property:

The property known as the Sherrill-Robbins House is located at 19726 Zion Avenue in Cornelius, N.C.

2. Name and address of the present owner of the property:

The owner of the Sherrill-Robbins House is:

RSI Investors LLC
18945 Elm Row Ct.
Davidson, N.C. 28036

3. Representative photographs of the property: This report contains representative photographs of the Sherrill-Robbins House.

4. Maps depicting the locations of the property:

The UTM Coordinates of the Sherrill-Robbins House are: Zone 17 Northing 3926133 Easting 513120

Map of the Sherrill-Robbins House



5. Current tax parcel reference and deed to the property:

Tax Parcel Number 00751121. Most recent deed: Deed Book 30667-466.

6. Brief historical sketches of the property: This report contains brief historical sketches of the Sherrill-Robbins House.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the Sherrill-Robbins House.

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

Sherrill-Robbins House

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance:

1) The Sherrill-Robbins House was the home of F. C. Sherrill, a person of substantial importance in Cornelius and one who made significant contributions to the transformation of Cornelius from

a sleepy stagecoach stop into an industrial and trade center of northern Mecklenburg County at the turn of the last century.

2) The Sherrill-Robbins House is one of the finer and least altered Queen Anne Style homes in Cornelius.

3) The Sherrill-Robbins House is a significant component of the Zion Avenue Historic Area, the preservation of which is crucial in preserving the historic edge of the Cornelius railroad corridor.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the physical and architectural description which is included in this report demonstrates that the Sherrill-Robbins 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 a designated "historic landmark."

Sherrill-Robbins House

The current appraised value of the property is \$199,800.

10. Portion of the property recommended for designation: The exterior of the house and the entire tax parcel.

Date of preparation of this report: November 17, 2016

A Brief History of the Sherrill-Robbins House

Dr. Dan L. Morrill

Cornelius, like the other outlying railroad towns in Mecklenburg County, experienced substantial growth between the 1880s and the Great Depression.¹ Bisected by the tracks of the Atlantic Tennessee & Ohio Railroad, Cornelius participated in a major expansion of the textile industry that occurred in Charlotte and its environs in the late 19th and early twentieth centuries.² The Cornelius Cotton Mill opened in 1880, and the nearby Gem Yarn Mill, also in Cornelius, began operations in 1907. Like its counterparts in Mecklenburg County -- Pineville, Huntersville, and Matthews -- Cornelius also grew as a farm market town. A cluster of brick store buildings appeared near the intersection of its principal thoroughfares, Main Street and Catawba Ave., where farmers came to acquire goods and services. Homes for the full range of town residents -- from mill workers to mill owners, from professionals, merchants, to African Americans -- also came into being. Among the largest and most imposing were those along the railroad corridor, including the homes on Zion Avenue.³ The Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission conducted a survey of Cornelius's built environment in 2015 and identified the Zion Avenue Historic Area as the "historic gateway" of Cornelius for someone entering the town from the south. The Zion Avenue Historic Area contains early twentieth century homes of "good integrity," including the Sherrill-Robbins House.⁴



Gem Yarn Mill



Cornelius Commercial Building

Stylistically, the historic built environment of Cornelius is more sophisticated than one finds in the surrounding rural countryside. The reason is obvious. The railroad facilitated contact with distant markets, thereby allowing town residents to become more readily aware of fashionable architectural trends throughout the Carolinas and even beyond. Three architectural styles were prevalent in early twentieth-century abodes in Cornelius. They were the Queen Anne Style, the Colonial Revival Style, and the Bungalow Style.⁵

The Sherrill-Robbins House, built c. 1903, is a restrained, intact, example of the Queen Anne Style.⁶ The initial owners were Frank C. Sherrill and his wife Mollie A. Sherrill.⁷ Frank Sherrill, a native of Iredell County, was a prominent citizen of Cornelius. He came to the town as one-third owner of the Stough Cornelius Company, operators of a large retail store that sold supplies to farmers and that shipped crops, principally ginned cotton, by rail to distant markets. Sherrill would go on to become president of the Bank of Cornelius and president of the Gem Yarn Mill. Sherrill was also a devoted member of Mt. Zion United Methodist Church, which gives its name to the street on which the Sherrill-Robbins House is located.⁸ In 1927, Frank Sherrill sold his home to Walter Robert Robbins, who lived there with his family until he died in 1967.⁹ Among Robbins's accomplishments was winning election to the Cornelius Board of Aldermen in 1933.¹⁰ The Sherrill-Robbins House retains a high degree of architectural integrity. Sherrill moved to an imposing brick home, still extant, which he had built on Main Street in Cornelius across the railroad tracks.¹¹

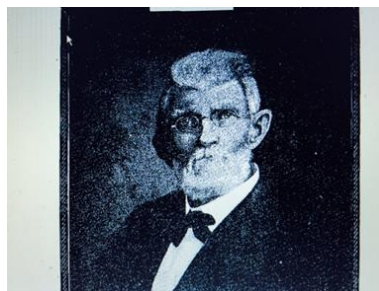


Frank C. Sherrill House on South Main Street in Cornelius

Endnotes:

Special Note: I wish to thank Mary Dominick for her assistance in preparing this essay.

1. Cornelius owes its origins to a disagreement between two businessmen about whether the Town of Davidson should hire a municipal official to weigh bales of cotton. R. J. Stough, owner of a cotton firm, became disgruntled when Davidson voters approved the new arrangement. Believing that hiring a cotton weigher was an unnecessary expense, Stough erected a frame building just south of Davidson at the intersection of what is now Catawba Ave. and Main St. in Cornelius. He placed cotton weighing scales behind the building. Farmers frequented Stough's establishment, and a small residential and commercial center began to appear, originally nicknamed "Liverpool." The community was eventually named "Cornelius" to honor J. B. Cornelius, who was the principal financial backer of the Cornelius Cotton Mill. For a history of Cornelius, see Leslie B. Rindoks, *A Town by Any Other Name*.



J. B. Cornelius

2. The Atlantic, Tennessee, and Ohio Railroad (AT&O) completed laying tracks between Charlotte and Statesville in 1872. Cornelius was on the route. Later the tracks became part of the Southern Railroad, now the Norfolk Southern Railroad. Originally named Liverpool, the town was incorporated as Cornelius in 1905. For a discussion of the development of railroads in Mecklenburg County, see Dan L. Morrill, *Historic Charlotte. An Illustrated History of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County*. For an online version of the house see <http://LandmarksCommission.org/Morrill%20Book/CH1.htm>
3. For a discussion of the built environments of the outlying towns of Mecklenburg County, see Dr. Richard Mattson, <http://www.cmhpf.org/kids/neighborhoods/small-rise.html> Hereinafter cited as Mattson
4. For the Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission's survey of the built environment of Cornelius, see Stewart Gray, "Town of Cornelius Survey " on the website of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission. Hereinafter cited as Gray.
5. Mattson
6. Telephone interview of Stewart Gray by Dan L. Morrill (August 6, 2015)
7. There is a problem with the deed for the sale of the house in 1927. The deed shows "F. S. Sherrill and his wife Mollie Sherrill" as the Grantor. Later in the deed the Grantor is shown as "F. C. Sherrill" and his wife "Mollie A. Sherrill." Logically, F. C. Sherrill and his wife sold the house, and this report accepts this interpretation of the evidence. See Mecklenburg County Deed Book 0703, Page 0705.
8. *"History of Cornelius"* p. 28. Distributed by the Cornelius Jaycess, 1971.
9. *Charlotte Observer*, February 2, 1967.
10. *Charlotte Observer*, May 6, 1933.
11. Gray.

Architectural Descriptions

By Stewart Gray

Sherrill-Robbins House



The Sherrill-Robbins House is located at 19726 Zion Avenue, in Cornelius, NC. The two-story, frame, crossed-gabled house faces west on a large lot and is setback approximately seventy feet from the street. Zion Avenue is quiet, narrow, and unlined. In front of the Sherrill-Robbins House, Zion Avenue runs parallel to the north-south line of the Norfolk-Southern Railway. The street is approximately 30 feet to the east of the rail line. A concrete sidewalk runs along the east side of the street, separated from the street by a grassy strip. The approximately 1 acre lot features large trees and shrubs around the house and dense woods toward the rear of the lot. The lot slopes gradually to the rear.



At the core of this cross-gabled plan house is a two-story, single-pile, side-gabled principal section, which is essentially the I-house form. Projecting forward from the southern side of the principal section is a one-bay-wide gabled wing. Between the gabled wing and the principal section is a shallow, hipped-roof projecting bay that accommodates a large hall and stairwell. This floor plan not only accommodates generous interior space, but it also presents an asymmetrical façade, which is a key element of the Queen Ann style. Other Queen Ann style elements include crossed trim in the gables, and the use of diamond-light sash windows. The Sherrill-Robbins House could be considered an example of Folk Victorian architecture or a restrained example of the Queen Ann style.



The façade of the Sherrill House can be divided into three bays. The façade is dominated by the two story front-projecting wing and a hipped-roof porch that wraps around the shallow center bay. The two-story wing is set close to the south elevation and rests on brick piers infilled with brick curtain walls. The wing, and the majority of the exterior, are covered with simple weatherboards that terminate in simple corner boards. A single two-light replacement window is centered in the wing on both the first and second story. The replacement windows are set in the original window frames. The original window frames feature moulded cap trim. The siding continues entirely over the gable. The gable features a decorative cross-design truss with a star-shaped pendant, and rake boards that terminate with curved scroll-work and rests on triangular brackets with applied curved trim. The gabled roof is steeply pitched and covered with green metal roofing panels. The exposed underside of the roof deck is covered with beaded board.

The porch extends from the north elevation of the gabled projecting wing, wraps around the center hipped bay and across most of the northern bay of the principal side-gabled section of the house. The porch is covered with green metal roofing panels and is supported by simple box-construction posts and pilasters with simple caps and bases. The exterior walls sheltered by the porch are covered with beaded boards. The porch floor is narrow tongue-and-groove boards, and the ceiling is beaded boards. The porch rests on brick piers, infilled with brick curtain walls. The porch shelters a wide original door opening in the center bay. The opening has retained the original trim, including starter blocks and a moulded cap. A replacement door frame with sidelights and a transom has been installed in the opening. The porch also shelters two fixed

diamond-light windows. One is located in the north elevation of the projecting wing, and one is located in the north elevation of the shallow projecting center bay. The stained glass is not original. A single window that pierces the northern bay of the principal section is also sheltered by the porch. Like the windows in the front wing, a replacement window has been installed in the original window opening. On the second story, the center projecting bay and the northern bay each contain a single window like those in the projecting wing. The roof overhang features exposed rafter tails.



The original portion of the south elevation is two bays wide. The projecting wing is one bay wide and features a single replacement window set in the original window frame on the first and second stories. Under the wing the original brick piers are exposed and infilled with brick.



Windows are centered on the gabled section, with paired windows piercing the first story and a single window on the second story. The gable features a decorative truss with a simple pointed pendant. The truss originally featured two angled braces, one of which is missing. As on the front elevation, decoratively sawn rake boards rest on triangular brackets with applied curved trim. The gabled roof is steeply pitched, and the exposed underside of the roof deck is covered with beaded board. The original brick piers are exposed and infilled with brick and masonry block. A shed-roof kitchen addition projects from the rear of the house and likely incorporates an original rear porch. A brick pier is visible near the middle of the foundation, but beyond the brick pier, the addition's foundation is entirely block construction. The south elevation of the addition is pierced by a single replacement window.



The rear of the house is dominated by the kitchen addition and an original one-story gabled wing that projects from the northern portion of the rear elevation. The kitchen addition is pierced by modern, glazed double doors, and a small replacement window set high in the wall. On the rear, the foundation of the kitchen addition is block construction. The gabled wing rests on brick piers infilled with a brick curtain wall. Centered in the wing is a single replacement window set in the original window frame. The steep gable lacks the decorative trusses and brackets found in the other gables. On the rear, a portion of the second story of the principal section of the house is exposed. Two replacement windows set in original window openings pierce the second story.



The north elevation is dominated by the two-story gabled wall of the house's principal section. A single two-light replacement window is centered in the wing on both the first and second story. The gable features brackets supporting the rake boards but lacks the decorative trusses found on the front and south elevations. To the rear of the two-story gable is the north elevation of the one-story rear wing, which is pierced by a single two-light replacement window, set in an original window opening. The foundation on the north elevation consists of brick piers infilled with brick curtain walls. Two internal chimneys have been partially demolished to a point below the roof.

Interior



The high degree of integrity exhibited by the exterior of the Sherrill-Robbins House is also found in the interior of the house. With the exception of the bathroom and the kitchen, which likely occupy space that once included a rear porch, the interior is remarkably intact.



South Front Room

The interior is composed of central hallways on the first and second stories, connected by a staircase. The hallway on each story opens onto three primary rooms. These rooms on each story have nearly identical floor plans. All of the rooms are approximately the same size, and it is difficult to tell precisely the original function of the rooms on the first story. It is likely that they included a parlor on the south side and a dining room on the north side. The three rooms on the second floor were bedrooms. Each of the rooms features the original pine flooring. The majority of the flooring is approximately 4 inches wide, but 5 inch flooring is also installed. The flooring is bordered by a tall baseboard topped with a moulded cap. It appears that the original plaster walls have been replaced with wallboard. While most of the windows have been replaced, the original interior window trim has been preserved. The stool trim features a moulded lower edge. The jam and head trim is fluted and meet at square rosette blocks. A five-panel door is used throughout the house. The same fluted trim and rosettes are used around the doors, with the jam trim resting on moulded starter blocks. The walls are topped with narrow moulded trim. Ceilings are beaded board. All of the primary rooms feature a fireplace. Each fireplace mantle is different, and appears to have been constructed on-site. On the southern side of the house there are back-to-back fireplace on each story serving the four southern rooms and sharing a single internal chimney. Each room originally featured a closet with a shorter five-panel door. On the southern side of the house the closets flank the masonry mass of the chimney.



Front room, north side



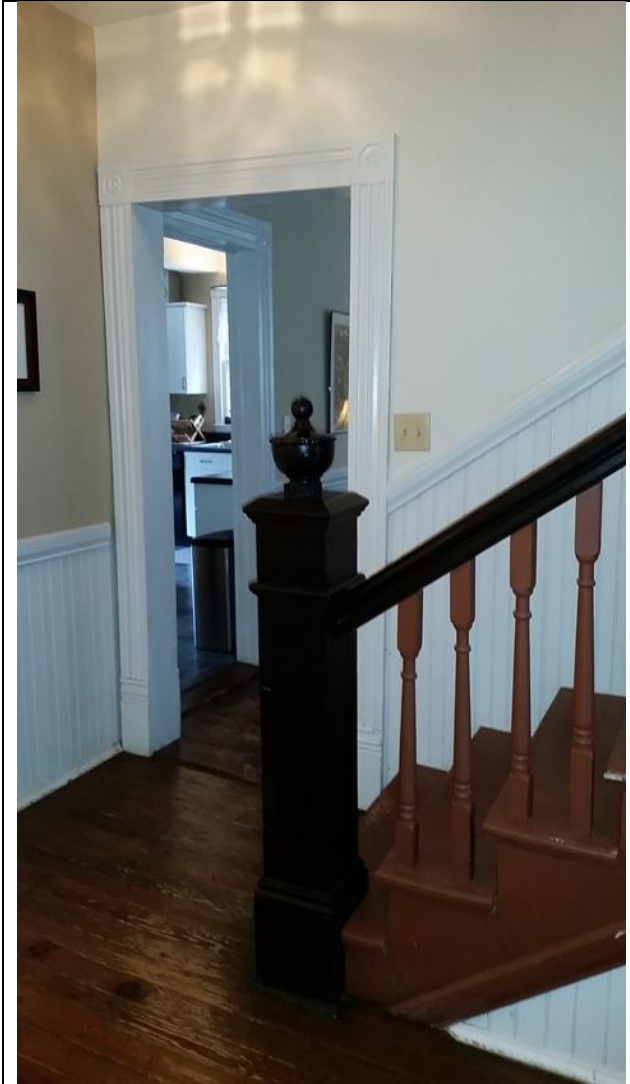
Front room, south side

On the first floor the closet from the front room has been removed to form a passageway between the rooms on the south side. The rearmost primary room on the first story features beaded-board wainscoting, with a substantial moulded cap rail, and a simple quarter-round base moulding.



Rear room, south side

The wainscoting continues in the hallway on both stories. The staircase features a substantial newel post with a turned urn-shaped finial, turned balusters, pine steps and risers, and a moulded handrail. On the second story the newel posts are smaller, with chamfered caps.



First story hall, newel post



Second story hall

The former kitchen is located in the one-story rear el. It shares a chimney with the primary rooms on the north side of the house. The kitchen features a fireplace and the same trim found in the rest of the house. Walls and ceiling are covered with beaded board.



Former kitchen

Originally a rear porch ran from the kitchen to the southern edge of the house. The space was enclosed and expanded and now houses a bathroom adjacent to the former kitchen and a new kitchen at southern end of the space.



Current kitchen built in former porch space

Update: The image below was made in the Fall of 2016 after a renovation. No significant changes have been made to the house, with the exception of the addition of an accessible ramp to the north side of the front porch.

