

Survey and Research Report
on the
Jesse and Mary K. Washam Farm



1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Jesse and Mary K. Washam Farm is located at 15715 Davidson-Concord Road in Davidson, North Carolina.

2. Name, address, and telephone number of the current owner of the property:

The current owners of the property are:

Joe K. Washam

15715 Davidson-Concord Road

Davidson, NC 28036

Telephone #: (704) 892-1715

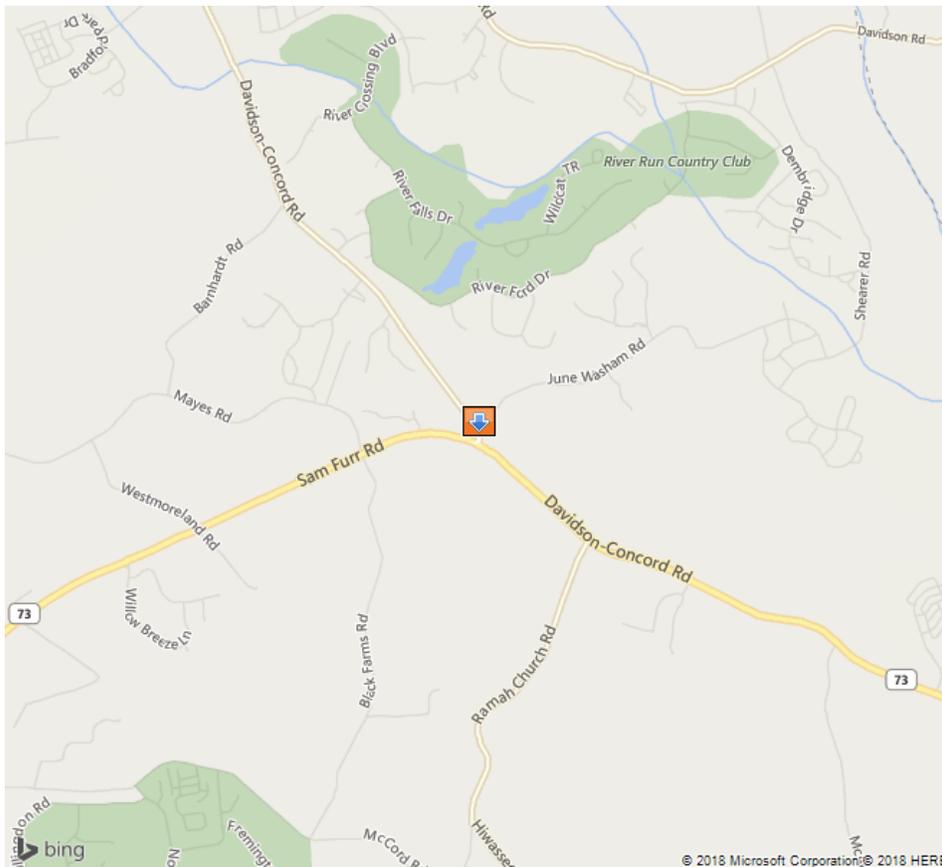
JAGCO Associates

19449 Peninsula Shores Dr.

Cornelius, NC 28031

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 depicting the location of the property. UTM Coordinates: 17 520852E 3921709N





5. Current deed book reference to the property: The most recent deeds to the property are found in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 6254, page 201 and 7090, page 413. The tax parcel numbers for the property are 011-092-14 011-092-05.
6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Emily and Lara Ramsey.
7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Emily and Lara Ramsey.
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 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the Washam Farm possesses special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:
- 1) The Washam Farm is a tangible reminder of the last prosperous decades of Mecklenburg County's agrarian economy, before regional and nation-wide depressions effectively ended the reign of King Cotton and the small farmer in the South.
 - 2) The Washam Farm is an integral part of the Ramah Community in northeast Mecklenburg County and an important part of the rural corridor that runs along Davidson-Concord Road.
 - 3) The Washam Farm is an excellently preserved example of a twentieth-century farmstead – the house and eclectic collection of early-twentieth century outbuildings form a comprehensive complex that retains its original pastoral setting despite nearby residential and commercial development.
 - 4) The Washam Farmhouse, originally a three-room tenant house, is indicative of Mecklenburg County's small farmsteads, which expanded and evolved to fit the needs of growing families and changing farming operations.
 - 5) The Washam farmhouse is a rare surviving example of a bungalow farmhouse in Mecklenburg County, reflecting the influence of current architectural trends and the intimate connection between the area's small towns and the surrounding countryside.

- b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description prepared by Emily Ramsey and Lara Ramsey demonstrates that the Washam Farm meets this criterion.

9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal: The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes a designated "historic landmark". The current appraised value on the farmhouse is \$44,650.00. The current appraised value of the 1.47-acre parcel of land on which the house and majority of the outbuildings stand (owned by Joe Washam) is \$34,570. The current appraised value of the 84.79-acre tract owned by JAGCO Associates is \$680,190.00

Date of preparation of this report:

January 30, 2002

Prepared by:

Emily Ramsey and Lara Ramsey

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Statement of Significance

Jesse and Mary K. Washam Farm

15715 Davidson-Concord Road

Davidson, NC

Summary

The Jesse and Mary K. Washam Farm is a property that possesses local historic significance as a tangible reminder of the last prosperous years of Mecklenburg County's once thriving agrarian economy, before regional and nation-wide economic depressions ended the era of southern dominance over

cotton production and the autonomy of small, independent cotton farmers, and as an integral part of the closely-knit farming community centered around Ramah Presbyterian Church. When Jesse Washam began farming operations in the early 1900s on the modest parcel of land left to him after his father's death, Mecklenburg County farmers were in the last years of a prolonged economic boom that had begun in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Charlotte, with its four converging rail lines, had become a thriving cotton trading center in the postbellum period and served as the heart of a profitable cotton textile region that covered North and South Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia.

Small farmers across the county took advantage of high cotton prices and close proximity to Charlotte by planting cotton as their major cash crop, and many prospered during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although Mecklenburg County would remain largely agrarian until after World War II, the good times for small farmers came to an abrupt halt by the late 1920s and early 1930s. Henry Washam, Jesse's father, had taken advantage of this earlier prosperity by buying a large parcel of land in the Ramah Community between Davidson and Huntersville, where he planted and raised cotton with the help of several tenant farmers. The Washams took their place as part of the Ramah community, a small and closely-knit group of Scots-Irish farming families. Henry made a good living from his sizeable farming operation; by the early 1910s, when Jesse moved into one of his father's former tenant houses and began growing cotton, the cotton boom in Mecklenburg County was beginning to fade. Jesse Washam's renovation and major expansion of the three-room house in the early 1920s was a product of the last prosperous years for the area's small-scale cotton farmers.

The Washam Farm is also significant as an excellently preserved example of a twentieth-century farmstead. The house and collection of early-twentieth century outbuildings, which includes a large barn, tool shed, corn crib, chicken and brooders houses, a cotton shed, a tenant house, and a concrete-block well house (an early and unusual example of hand-formed concrete block construction echoed in the nearby Bradford store), form a comprehensive complex that retains its original pastoral setting despite nearby residential and commercial development. Originally a three-room tenant house, the Washam Farm is also significant as a representative example of the evolution of farm complexes. The numerous changes and additions to the house and the outbuildings, most completed in the early twentieth century, are indicative of Mecklenburg County's small farmsteads, which expanded and evolved to fit the needs of growing families and changing farming operations. In addition, the house itself is a rare surviving example of a bungalow farmhouse in Mecklenburg County; although

bungalows were popular throughout the county's numerous small towns and in Charlotte, the Washam House represents a break from the area's typical farmhouse, most of which were simple frame I-houses.

Agricultural Context and Historical Background Statement

Between 1860 and 1910, Mecklenburg County's agricultural economy experienced a prolonged period of prosperity that would ultimately be its last. The North Carolina piedmont, never a major player in the plantation economy that characterized the antebellum South, had ultimately profited from its status as a land of small-scale farms – after the Civil War, the majority of Mecklenburg County farmers, having never been dependent on slave labor, were able to replant and recover quickly after the war.¹ In addition, the post-war period brought new opportunities to the small farmer – new opportunities in cotton. The introduction of the fertilizer Peruvian Guano, which made cotton (a notoriously difficult and labor-intensive crop) easier to grow, meant that cotton was, for the first time, a profitable cash crop for even the most modest farmer. Close proximity to Charlotte, which had emerged by the turn of the century as a regional cotton trading center and burgeoning cotton textile hub, gave farmers easy access to a far-reaching market for their cotton crops. The impact of these developments was reflected in the rapid increase in the production of cotton in Mecklenburg County – between 1860 and 1880, the number of cotton bales produced in the county tripled, from 6,112 bales to 19,129 bales.²

The cotton boom would continue well into the twentieth century – cotton production peaked in the county in 1910 at 27,466 bales – but by the mid-to-late-1920s, the cotton market in Mecklenburg County and across the South was faltering. What had been a magic crop at the turn of the century became a liability by the beginning of the Great Depression, when cotton prices dropped to an all-time low of around five cents per pound. The arrival of the boll weevil in the early 1920s, capable of devouring entire fields of plants in a matter of days, compounded the problems of small-scale cotton farmers, many of whom could not afford the expensive pesticides and equipment that were needed to make cotton profitable in the twentieth century.³ In 1910, Mecklenburg County's urban population surpassed its rural population for the first time in the county's history. Ten years later, the census reported the county's first recorded decrease in farm production. The Great Depression accelerated the migration from farm to city; between 1930 and 1940, the number of farms in Mecklenburg County dropped from 3,773 to 3,223.⁴

When the Washam family first settled in the Ramah community in northern Mecklenburg County, between Davidson and Huntersville, King Cotton was far from its eventual demise –farmers were planting and harvesting cotton at an unprecedented rate with the help of tenant farmers, and Henry Jackson Washam was eager to profit from the economic boom. Henry Washam began farming a thirty-acre plot of land along the Davidson-Concord Road, which he most likely acquired through his marriage to his first wife, a Shields, in the mid-nineteenth century. He and his family lived in a simple, frame I-house (no longer extant), raising cotton and corn as primary cash crops. As Henry's farming operations proved successful in the midst of the post-Reconstruction cotton boom, he began acquiring additional plots of land; by the time of his death around 1901, his farm totaled almost 200 acres on the north and south sides of Davidson-Concord Road and included the main house along with numerous scattered outbuildings. Henry Washam's third wife, Julia Washam, procured, after filing suit against her stepchildren, one-third of her husband's farmland, in addition to the farmhouse that had served as the seat of the Washam's farming operations.⁵ Jesse Washam, who had left the family home in Ramah and moved to Cornelius to live with his uncle, Mack Washam, around the time of his father's death, inherited just under 32 acres and one of the farm's three tenant houses. Jesse did little with the inheritance initially; however, after his marriage to Mary K. Knox (a native of nearby Caldwell Station and member of Bethel Presbyterian Church) in 1909, Jesse Washam returned to the Ramah Community, moved into the modest three-room house on his property, and began farming. Within a few years, he had earned enough through cotton to buy three adjoining plots of land; by 1913, Washam had acquired approximately 110 acres of his father's original farmstead.⁶ The family grew corn and grain in addition to cotton as major cash crops; Jesse took his cotton to be ginned just down the road, at Hurd Bradford's store, and sold the ginned cotton to local mills in nearby Huntersville and Davidson.⁷

Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, Jesse Washam made several changes and additions to his farmstead, including a side addition to the already existing barn, a new chicken coop, tool shed and a cotton shed. With the help of his teenage sons, Washam dug a basement and constructed a solid brick foundation beneath the house; the family used the cool space to store canned fruits and vegetables.⁸ By 1922, Washam was successful enough to undertake a major renovation on the house itself, one which he doubtless hoped would transform the former tenant house into a more fitting centerpiece for his prosperous farmstead, in addition to providing much needed room for his growing family.⁹ The addition roughly tripled the size of the house and completely changed its appearance. By the mid-1920s, the original three-room house was completely obscured behind a

new, stylish front – passerby on the Davidson-Concord Road saw not a modest hall-and-parlor farmhouse, but a spacious, one-and-a-half story bungalow cottage.

This expansion was the product of Jesse Washam’s last prosperous years as a cotton farmer. By the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929, cotton prices had already slipped considerably, and farmers throughout Mecklenburg County were forced to reduce their crop and livestock production or sell their farms. Although Jesse Washam managed to weather the hard times and keep his farmstead, his farming operations were never as profitable as they had been in the first decades of the twentieth century. In 1939, Jesse Washam died at the age of 59. Fred Washam took over farming operations, and Mary K. and several of the children stayed in the house until the 1960s. Mary K. Washam died in 1963, and the Washams planted their last cotton crop in 1965; as Joe Washam recalled, “There was the boll weevil, and that made everything hard, and that year there was a killing frost, and most people around here just didn’t plant cotton the next year. You couldn’t make money off it unless you had a cotton picker and at least couple of hundred acres.”¹⁰ Eventually, only Joe Washam remained in the house, and in the 1990s, the family sold all but 1.47 acres (on which the house and most of the outbuildings stand) of the remaining land. Joe Washam owns the family home and 1.47 acres, and currently lives in the house. Jagco Associates currently owns the 84-acre parcel behind the house, including the farm’s barn, chicken house and cotton shed – a portion of this parcel should be included as part of the local landmark designation, as it contains not only several significant outbuildings, but also the open fields and pastoral vistas that anchor and provide a visual context for the buildings.

Architectural Significance and Context Statement

Architecturally, the Washam House is significant as a rare surviving example of a bungalow farmhouse in Mecklenburg County. The vast majority of farmhouses within the county were constructed during the earlier years of the post-war cotton boom, roughly between 1860 and 1900, and the continued popularity of the traditional I-house form (a one-or-two-pile, two-story, side-gable structure) reflected the conservative nature of the county’s typical rural homebuilder. By the 1910s and 1920s, when the Craftsman bungalow reached its peak as “the most popular and fashionable smaller house in the country,” this rural building boom had ended, and most of the modest and affordable bungalows built in Mecklenburg County were constructed within Charlotte and in the area’s surrounding small towns.¹¹ Those farmhouses that were built in the early twentieth century reflected a continued “kinship” between Mecklenburg’s small towns and the surrounding countryside. Traditional rural designs had

characterized the early buildings of such small towns as Huntersville and Davidson; by the 1920s, popular urban styles – primarily Craftsman bungalows and Colonial Revival forms – were finding their way onto the farm.¹² The Washam farmhouse, after its renovation and expansion in 1922, exhibited all of the traits of a typical Craftsman bungalow, including low, overhanging eaves with exposed rafter tails, large gabled dormer, and a porch with tapered columns set on low brick piers. This house, transformed from a plain, utilitarian tenant house into a stylish and spacious bungalow, was a fitting reflection of modest but prosperous farming operation that Jesse Washam had made during the first decades of the twentieth century.

The Washam Farm is also significant as an excellently preserved example of a twentieth-century farmstead in Mecklenburg County and as a representative example of the area's constantly evolving farm complexes. The typical farm in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Mecklenburg County was a self-sufficient complex, supporting not only cash crops like corn, cotton and grain, but also a variety of livestock (mainly hogs, cows and chickens) and kitchen gardens for family consumption. The daily operation of an early twentieth century farm required an array of barns, storage sheds, and other outbuildings in addition to the farmhouse itself. At a time when many of Mecklenburg County farmers were paring down their operations or taking jobs in nearby towns, Jesse Washam remained largely self-sufficient – as late as 1935, he was adding to his farmstead. The large number of remaining outbuildings at the Washam farmstead are as significant a part of the farm as the house itself, because, as historians Richard Mattson and William Huffman explain, “the more historically complete and intact the farmyard, the more it reveals about the operations of the farm” and the diverse activities that made up daily life on that farm.¹³

Physical Description

The Washam Farm is situated on the south side of Davidson Concord Road, on a 1.47-acre lot surrounded by open fields. The house, a one-and-a-half story side-gable bungalow with white-painted weatherboard siding, is fronted by a large front lawn shaded by mature oak trees, and surrounded by the farm's outbuildings. The house itself is a rambling one-and-one-half-story side-gable structure covered in white-painted wooden clapboards, with an integrated porch running the entire length of the façade. The original portion of the house now forms a large rear wing, with a covered side porch running along its eastern side up to the 1922 portion of the house. The 1922 front addition, three-bays-wide by two-bays-deep, features two-over-two windows, two side chimneys with decoratively corbelled tops, low overhanging eaves with exposed rafter tails, and a centrally located front-gabled dormer with paired windows. The interior of the

house has remained virtually unaltered since the 1922 addition, with original fireplace mantels, hardwood floors, decorative wainscoting, a simple central staircase with original newel posts and railing, and original interior doors with hardware. The eastern chimney was largely replaced after Hurricane Hugo damaged it in 1989; the kitchen in the original portion of the house has been significantly altered, and a new passageway was recently opened up between the other two rooms in the original wing.

The Washam farm complex contains seven outbuildings, most of which date from the 1920s and early 1930s. The oldest and largest of these outbuildings is the white-painted frame barn with stepped tin roof, portions of which may date from the late 1800s, which sits to the rear of the house, just south of Joe Washam's property line. The barn contains six stalls on the ground level and a large open hayloft above. A large frame tool and equipment shed, with a lean-to side addition used for the Washam's tractor, and a combination corncrib and tool shed (also a white frame structure) stand between the main house and the barn. Two small, unpainted frame structures on the east side of the complex, also across the Washam boundary line, were originally used as a cotton shed (where farmers stored cotton while waiting for prices to rise) and a brooder house – a chicken house used for small chicks, complete with a small furnace to keep the chicks warm.

By far the most interesting outbuilding on the property is the 1935 well house. While most farm outbuildings in the county were simple frame structures, farmers occasionally branched out into newer building technologies. Jesse Washam, obviously impressed with neighbor Hurd Bradford's use of concrete for his country store and for several outbuildings on his property, decided to build his well house from the same type of hand-formed concrete blocks. As Joe Washam remembers, his father used a crude wooden form with a metal bottom to turn out the blocks, made from a mixture of sand, lime, and aggregate. The Washam well house, along with the buildings on the nearby Bradford property, form an unusual pocket of concrete outbuildings that reflect the experimentations of local farmers.

Despite minor alterations, the Washam Farm remains an excellently preserved example of an early twentieth century farm complex, and a tangible reminder of the last period of prosperity for Mecklenburg County's small farmers.

1. Thomas W. Hanchett, "The Growth of Charlotte: A History" (Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission), www.cmhpf.org.
2. Sherry J. Joines and Dr. Dan Morrill, "Historic Rural Resources in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina" (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1997), www.cmhpf.org.
3. Ibid. Like A Family (get citation, quotation?)
4. United States
5. Emily and Lara Ramsey, interview with Joe Washam conducted January 10, 2002. Hereinafter cited as "Interview". Order and Decree No. 9, p. 128, located in the Mecklenburg County Clerk of Superior Courts.
6. Mecklenburg County Deed Book 349, page 344 and 352, page 281, located in the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office. Tract 1 and 2 from Henry Washams estate were given to Jesse's sisters, Molly and Addie Washam. By 1912, Molly had sold her tract to W.R. Puckett, who then sold it to Jesse Washam. Mack Washam sold his parcel, Tract 3, to W. C. McAuley in 1909. McAuley sold the tract to Jesse in 1913.
7. Interview.
8. Gregory Berka, "Report on the Washam House and Farm" (unpublished research report completed for UNCC Historic Preservation course), 5-6.
9. Interview. Mary K. and Jesse would eventually have twelve children: Fanny Bell, Jack, Mary Alice, Fred, Joe, Margaret, Bob, Nell, Nancy, Emily, Martha Ann, and Jesse Jr.
10. Interview.
11. McAlister, Virginia and Lee, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: 1997), 454.
12. Richard Mattson, "Small Towns in Mecklenburg County" (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission), www.cmhpf.org.

13. Dr. Richard Mattson and Dr. William Huffman, "Historical and Architectural Resources of Rural Mecklenburg County" (North Carolina Division of Archives and History, July 1990), Sec. F, p. 26.