

WHITE OAK



This report was written on November 2, 1976

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as White Oak is located on Hood Rd. in the northeastern section of Mecklenburg County.

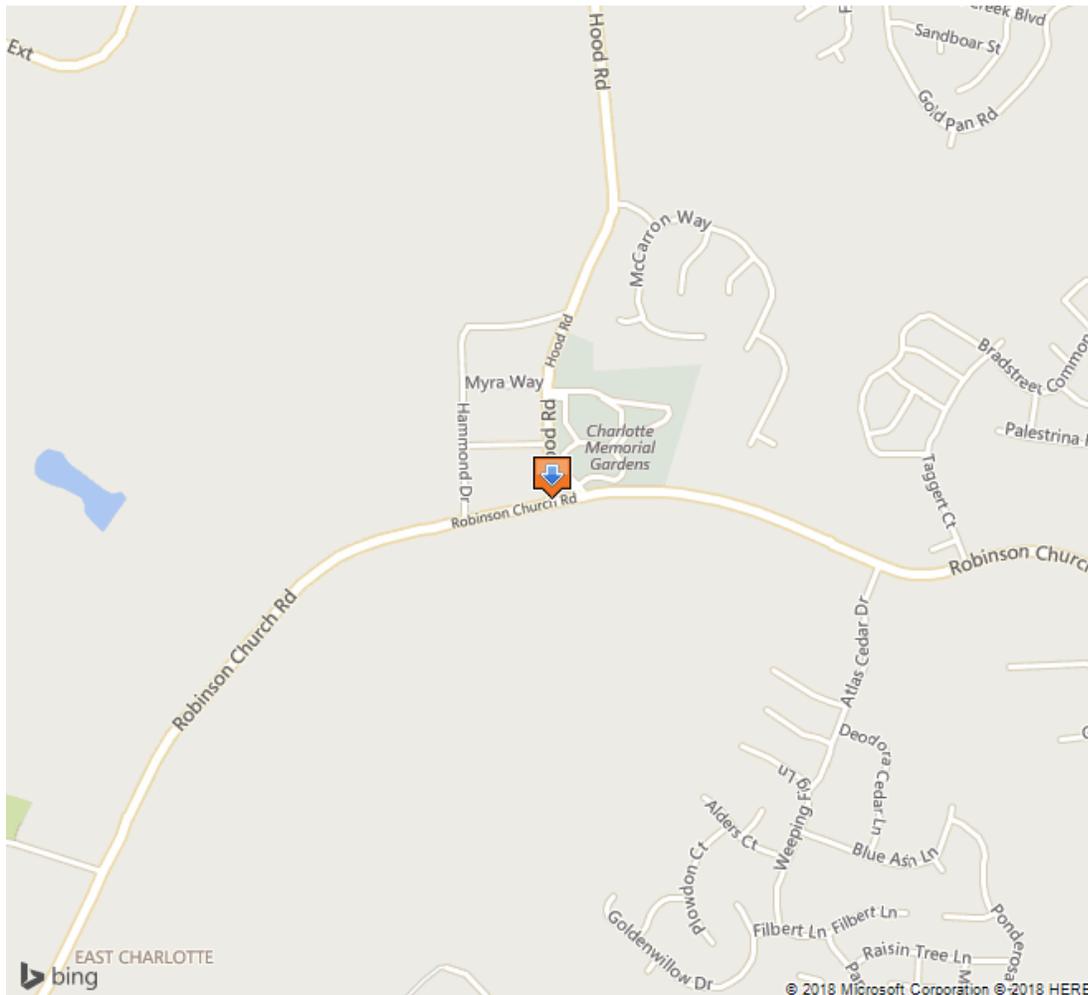
2. Name, addresses, and telephone numbers of the present owners and occupants of the property: The present owners and occupants of the property are:

John T. Porterfield & Ann C. Porterfield
White Oak Plantation
Route 8 Box 284F
Charlotte, N.C. 28212

Telephone: 536-4889

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: This report contains a map depicting the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent reference to this property is found in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 2816 at Page 499. The Parcel Number of the property is 10808106.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property:

William Johnston, a prominent Scotch-Irish resident of Mecklenburg County in the 18th century, served in the Colonial forces during the American Revolutionary War. His most noteworthy contribution occurred at the Battle of Kings Mountain in October 1780. On March 9, 1784, Mr. Johnston purchased from John Wiley the land on which the structure known as White Oak presently stands. Local tradition holds

that the house was built c.1792. It is certainly one of the finer Federal Style homes extant in Mecklenburg County. It was the centerpiece of a major plantation of antebellum Mecklenburg. Documenting the standing which Mr. Johnston attained in the community was the fact that one of his daughters, Elizabeth, married Hezekiah Alexander Jr., a son of the locally famous leader of the movement towards independence from Great Britain in 1775 and 1776.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains an architectural description prepared by Jack O. Boyte, A.I.A.

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 White Oak rests upon two factors. First, the structure has architectural significance as one of the earliest Federal Style plantation houses in Mecklenburg County. The Commission, however, believes that the architectural significance of the structure would be enhanced by removal of the front portico. Second, the plantation has historical significance because of its association with a family which was prominent in the early history of Mecklenburg County.

b. Suitability for preservation and restoration: The current owners have demonstrated an interest in returning the structure to its original appearance. Certainly, the structure is suitable for preservation and restoration.

c. Educational value: The structure has educational value because of its historic and cultural significance.

d. Cost of acquisition, restoration, maintenance, or repair: At present the Commission has no intention of purchasing the fee simple or any lesser included interest in the property. The Commission assumes that all costs associated with maintaining the structure will be paid by the owners or subsequent owners of the property.

e. Possibilities for adaptive or alternative use of the property: The Commission concurs with the current owner's use of the structure as a private residence.

f. Appraised value: The current tax appraisal value of the structure is \$31,520. The current tax appraisal value of the land is \$40,500. The Commission is aware that

designation of the property would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the rate upon which the Ad Valorem Taxes are calculated.

g. The administrative and financial responsibility of any person or organization willing to underwrite all or a portion of such costs: At present the Commission has no intention of purchasing the fee simple or any lesser included interest in this property. Furthermore, the Commission assumes that all costs associated with the structure will be met by whatever party now owns or will subsequently own the property. Clearly, the present owner has demonstrated the capacity to meet the expenses associated with restoring or maintaining the structure.

9. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria established for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places: The Commission believes that the property known as White Oak on Hood Rd. in Mecklenburg County, N.C., does meet the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places. Basic to the Commission's position is its understanding of the purpose of the National Register. Established in 1966, the National Register represents the decision of the Federal Government to expand its listing of historic properties to include properties of local, regional, and State significance. The Commission believes that the property known as White Oak is of local historic significance and therefore meets the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

10. Documentation of why and in what ways the property is of historic importance to Charlotte and/or Mecklenburg County: The property known as White Oak is historically significant to Mecklenburg County for two reasons. First, it has architectural significance as one of the earliest Federal Style plantation houses in Mecklenburg County. Second, the plantation has historical significance because of its association with a family which was prominent in the early history of Mecklenburg County.

Bibliography

An Inventory Of Older Buildings In Mecklenburg County And Charlotte For The Historic Properties Commission.

Ruth Blackwelder, *Old Charlotte and Mecklenburg Today* (The Mecklenburg Historical Association, 1973).

Charlotte News (March 17, 1973) p. 34.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office.

Date of Preparation of this report: November 2, 1976

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Architectural Description

by Jack O. Boyte, A. I. A.

In the Reedy Creek community of northeastern Mecklenburg County a prosperous pioneer, William Johnston, purchased a large tract of farm land in the early 1790's. After service in the colonies' revolt against the crown, which included captain's duties at Kings Mountain, Johnston engaged in farming and land trading for the next decade or so. Finally in 1792 he acquired the Reedy Creek lands for his proposed plantation manor house. Subsequently he built the fine two story brick walled structure, known as White Oak Plantation, standing today just south of Reedy Creek on a high rise facing Hood Road.

During the middle years of the eighteenth century the Piedmont wilderness was settled largely by Scotch-Irish pioneers. By nature thrifty and hard working, many of these early families achieved a high level of affluence by the turn of the century. Consequently, a number of the finest historic houses in the county date from the early years of the nineteenth century, and were originally plantation manor houses for pioneer Presbyterian settlers. And by coincidence, or perhaps as a result of simpler tastes, most of these houses exhibit the spartan simplicity of the Federal style as opposed to earlier Georgian elaboration. The Johnston house is done in this Federal style, although there are a few indications of Georgian details affecting the design.

The house has the characteristic plantation manor house form. An imposing brick structure, the two story rectangle is dominated by massive single shouldered chimneys at each gabled end. The roof has front and rear uninterrupted surfaces rising steeply to a high ridge running from gable to gable. Front and rear facades are three bays wide. The entrance side features a large six panel door with a recessed molded frame with a rare three light transom above. Flanking the door are tall nine light over six light windows. At the second floor the three bay facade is repeated with large nine light over six light windows. Above the windows on both floors are skillfully crafted jack arches with fine tapered shapes and a center wedge. At the top of a recently erected pedimented entrance frame one may see a small corner of the original jack arch over the door.

This discordant frame does not appear to have damaged the original entrance. At the front there is also a recently installed two story portico with tall wood columns supporting a new gabled roof. A brief look at these added elements indicates that the original wall and roof surfaces could be cleared of the later materials with relative ease and the original exterior features revealed as they were.

At each end the large brick chimneys rise from field stone bases to stepped shoulders above second floor fireplace heights. Over these shoulders the chimneys continue in a diminished size to corbeled caps. Typically, gable chimney construction in this architectural mode set out from wall surfaces. So to achieve this effect in the Johnston house, the narrow sides of the gable chimneys are built with carefully defined edges and shallow recesses. Yet in the mass of the chimneys adjacent to the brick wall the chimneys are built solidly as integral parts of the brick work. At each end there are tall, narrow nine over six light windows flanking the chimneys at the first floor and nine over six at the second floor. Gable windows in the garret walls are double hung four over four.

On the rear wall there is a center six panel recessed entrance door. This frame has no transom since the low interior stair landing passes just over the head in the rear stair hall. At the right rear there has been added a one story kitchen wing in recent years. Connecting this wing to the main house is an original paneled exterior door which has a three light transom frame similar to that over the front entrance. At the opposite side downstairs is a nine over six light window matching the front. On the second floor are three symmetrically placed nine over six light windows also like those at the front.

The house includes an astonishing number of fine bricks in its construction. Not only are all outside walls of solid brick more than a foot thick, but there is a rare fireplace wall between the library and the dining room on the first floor which is more than three feet thick. Also one wall of the central hall is solid twelve inch brick on both floors. This generous use of brick is an indication of the affluence of William

Johnston. Not a rare building material locally at the turn of the century, (skilled brick makers had moved south from Virginia earlier in the eighteenth century) masonry work was nevertheless more costly than the plentiful lumber being produced at several water powered saw mills in the vicinity. Most contemporary planters were content with massive brick chimneys, usually laid in Flemish bond, as is White Oak. One may see some strikingly similar chimneys today at such places as Cedar Grove, Latta Place, Rosedale, and Beaver Dam as well as the sister northern Mecklenburg brick house of William Tasse Alexander.

The exterior of the house reflects largely an Adam style simplicity. There is little or no elaboration in the wood trim. At the cornice, however, there is a mild Georgian influence in the wide overhang. This overhang appears out of context with the design of the house and is perhaps not original.

Entering the front door brings one into a wide center hall finished with rare elegance. Flooring consists of wide pine boards which have aged to a fine patina. Walls are plaster above a molded chair rail, with solid wide panels cut from a single width of pine below. At the beaded plank ceiling there is an elaborate wide classical cornice. Intricately molded casing frames window and door openings. At the right rear of the hall a skillfully crafted stair rises in three runs some fourteen feet to the second floor. This stair has been changed several times since first built. Originally the staircase was located on the Southeast wall (parlor). The house used to have a Quaker floor plan. That was changed by the addition of a partition to create a central hall. However, the original rail and balusters appear to have been preserved and installed in proper sequence. The stair brackets are gracefully turned scrolls. Between the chair rail and stair stringer there is a triangular panel defined with a fine classical molding and ornamented with a carved wood garland.

At the left of the hall are two rooms divided, as described below, by a thick chimney wall. The small front room, which was likely a library, has a modest fireplace near the outside wall surrounded by a fine Adamesque mantel. Oval reeded pilasters flank this fireplace opening and rise to a narrow molded mantel shelf, where the pilaster support is reflected in flared relief in the mantel profile. Below the mantel is a delicately carved apron with a unique inverted scalloped edge creating a series of triangular indentations. The fine chair rail, plastered walls, crown mold and wainscot from the hall are repeated here. Adjoining the fireplace in the thick middle wall is a deep recessed opening above the chair rail. Here the original house likely had built-in shelves or a cupboard of sorts. Now the opening is simply a plastered alcove .

Throughout the first floor the windows are splayed in the thick outside brick walls. With the window sills placed at chair rail height, the wainscot and base, as well as the

rail, follow the angular flow of the wall surface at the windows. Over the window heads plastered walls and ceiling cornices are not recessed.

At the left rear on the first floor there is a relatively small dining room featuring a modest fireplace and mantel similar to that in the library. Finishes are also similar, and there is a plaster alcove in the middle wall. At the rear of this room is the door mentioned above, which was built at first to provide access to the original exterior kitchen. This door is hung on original cast iron butt hinges secured with pointless screws, as are the other first floor doors.

On the right, or east, side of the center hall is the large parlor. Encompassing half of the first floor, this imposing room is essentially undisturbed, and features a fine federal mantel and overmantel. With details similar to those in the two smaller mantels across the hall, this elaborate element typifies the skilled carpentry found throughout the house. In this room trim and finishes are also similar to those found in other first floor areas.

On the second floor one finds bed chambers which reflect the floor plan of the first floor. On the west side are two rooms divided by a foot thick masonry wall and equal in size to the two areas below. Windows are centered in the front and side walls. On the second floor, however, the windows are not splayed as found below. This is an obvious result of less thick exterior brick walls on the second floor. The hall wall adjoining these two rooms is also masonry, although not as thick as below.

On the east side of the second floor hall a partition of single thickness, beaded, tongue and grooved boards forms the enclosure for one large bed chamber. Again, this room is equal to the parlor in size. Also, in this large chamber is a side wall fireplace and mantel. Details of the mantel are similar to those on the first floor, with oval reeded pilasters and molded mantel shelf. However, at the top of each pilaster is a console bracket, a fine detail not found elsewhere in the house.

The finishing details throughout the second floor are comparatively elaborate. Whereas in many contemporary houses the usual first floor elaboration is modified or omitted in the second floor, here the chair rails, molded casing and elaborate ceiling cornice are altogether as fine on the second floor as on the first.

A curious feature on the second floor is the apparent omission of fireplaces in the two small bed chambers. As noted above, the west chimney has high shoulders well above the normal location of second floor fireplaces, but neither room shows any sign of ever having had such a device.

From the rear of the second floor hall a short stair run leads to a wide landing centered in the rear hall window. From this landing a simple paneled door opens to the steep garret stair. In this stair enclosure are unfinished pine boards showing typical elongated shallow grooves resulting from hand planing. In the garret there are heavy hand hewn joists which span the width of the house, front to rear. Above are heavy rafters showing typical vertical marks of water powered saws. At the ridge and at the eaves these members are rabbeted and pegged in tight joints. Joining each pair of rafters are sawn collar beams at head height, also rabbeted and secured with toenails. Across the rafters are the original shingling strips spaced about one foot apart. Embedded in these strips are numbers of the original machine headed cut nails used for the first shingling. At the gable end the solid brick walls appear in unfinished rough coursing.

As is often the case, most of the original dependencies on the manor house grounds have been demolished. Gone are the kitchen, smoke house, well house, etc., but there is one small stone structure remaining on the west side which is likely the original dairy. Although the roof of this building has been rebuilt - probably several times - the walls are intact and there is an original wood bar grill vent beside the one small door.

This fine old house is a rare example of frontier Federal architecture. From the hands of the skilled pioneer craftsmen hired by William Johnston the community has inherited an extraordinary historic building. In recent years the house suffered from neglect and disturbing, though well meaning, change. But fortunately it now has owners who know and care about its historic significance. Preservation and restoration seem assured and should be vigorously supported.