



SURVEY AND RESEARCH REPORT ON THE TOMLINSON-WILSON HOUSE AND FARM



This report was written on 25 May 1992

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Tomlinson-Wilson House and Farm is located at 11400 Old Statesville Road, Huntersville, in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

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

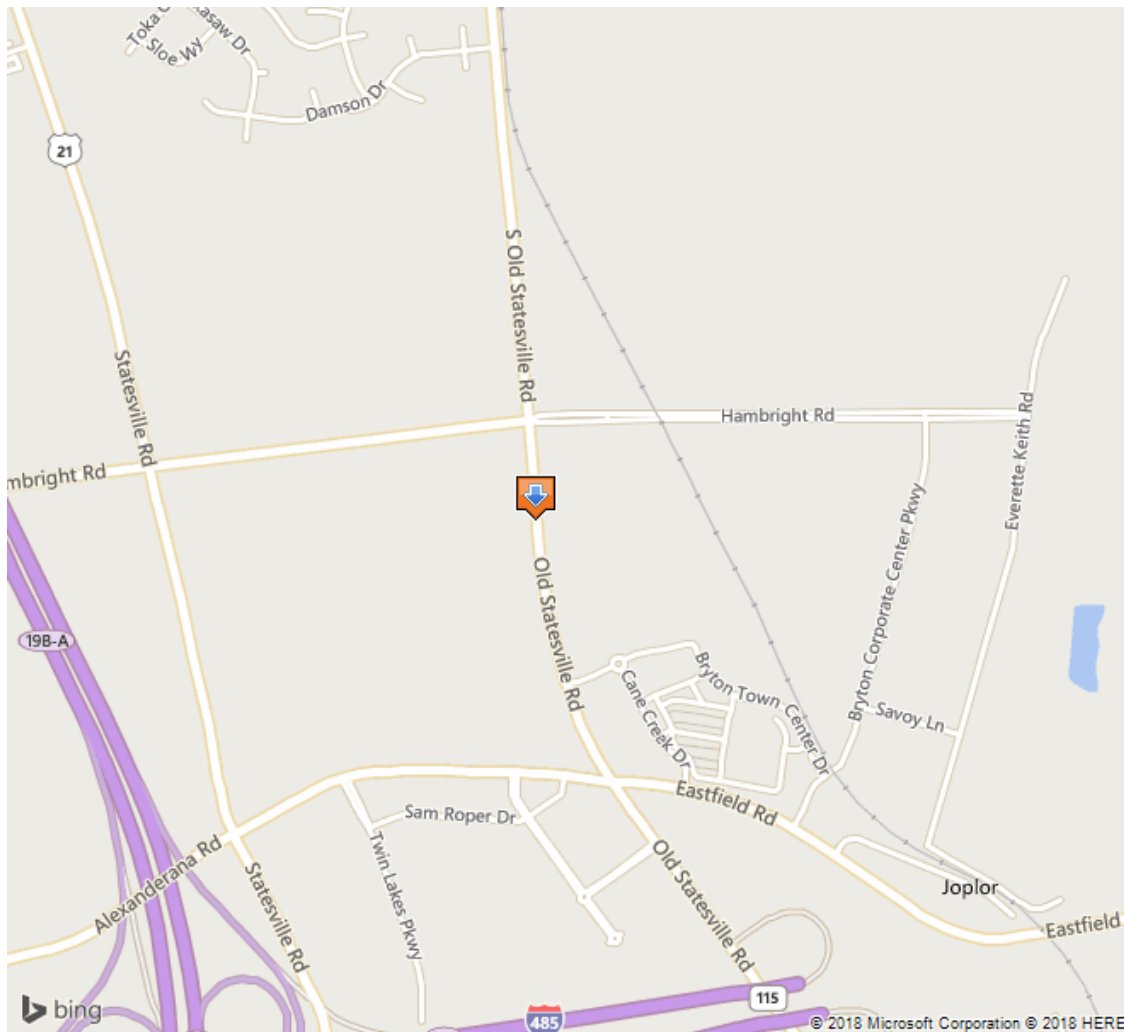
Thomas A. Davis and wife Charlotte B. Davis
11400 Old Statesville Road
Huntersville, North Carolina 28078

Telephone: (704) 875-6947

Tax Parcel Number: 019-131-02

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 which depict the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to Tax Parcel Number 019-131-02 is listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 2561 on page 161.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Ms. Paula M. Stathakis.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Ms. Nora M. Black.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets 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 Tomlinson-Wilson House and Farm does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Tomlinson-Wilson Farm, once a part of a much larger tract of land, is a good example of the agricultural environment that was predominant in Mecklenburg County and North Carolina; 2) the Tomlinson-Wilson House is believed to have been constructed by the Tomlinson family in the 1840's; 3) as the only surviving early house on the agricultural tract, the Tomlinson-Wilson House is a good example of a mid-19th century vernacular farmhouse with some Adam details; 4) the Tomlinson-Wilson House is architecturally significant as an I-house plan in the Tidewater South, Folk House tradition; 5) the Tomlinson-Wilson House has many exterior features, such as the one-story shed-roofed porch and the front door surround, that are intact and in very good condition; 6) the Tomlinson-Wilson House has many interior appointments, such as the fireplace surrounds and the curved balustrade, that are intact and in very good condition; and 7) the Tomlinson-Wilson House and Farm can provide valuable insight into the life of Mecklenburg County's early yeoman farmers.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials feeling, and /or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description by Ms. Nora M. Black included in this report demonstrates that the Tomlinson-Wilson 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." The current appraised value of the improvement is \$59,140. The current appraised value of the 26.32 acres of Tax Parcel 019-131-02 is \$131,600. The total appraised value of the property is \$190,740. The property is zoned R3.

Date of Preparation of this Report: 25 May 1992

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill in conjunction with Ms. Nora M. Black
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Historical Overview



Ms. Paula M. Stathakis

The Tomlinson-Wilson House was once part of a large farm that consisted of at least 186 acres. Although there are no extant documents that authenticate the date of the house, the accepted local history about the house is that it was built in the early 1840s. Deeds for the property cannot be traced beyond 1891; it is therefore not possible to verify this assumption through legal records.

According to an initial report made by M. B. Gatza, the earliest name that can be associated with this house is Tomlinson, the family who probably built it in the 1840s. The Wilson family subsequently purchased the property. According to the earliest

deed that can be identified with this property, J. F. Wilson is the first member of the Wilson family that can be documented as an owner of the land. ¹ J.F. Wilson was a son of Cyrus Wilson who was probably the Wilson who purchased the property. Cyrus Wilson was killed by a fall from a swing in the backyard of this house.

The history of this house is obscure, but the legal records suggest that the Wilson family encountered financial difficulties prior to the 1890s and lost the house. C. W. (Clarence Wesley) Wilson, son of Cyrus Wilson, lost the property because he defaulted on a loan. No records exist to explain to whom he was indebted or for what purpose. The property was auctioned at the courthouse and purchased by J. F. Wilson. ³ By January of 1892, C. W. Wilson owned 98.25 of the original 186 acre tract and J. F. Wilson owned the remaining 87.75 acres. It is not clear if C.W. Wilson purchased the land or if it was given to him by J.F. Wilson. ⁴

This property is located in the Mallard Creek Township, a rural area populated almost exclusively in the late nineteenth century by small farmers who grew corn and other grains, cotton, and raised livestock. Farmers in this area appeared to be more dependent on cotton as a cash crop towards the latter part of the nineteenth century, as did farmers in other parts of Mecklenburg County. Unfortunately, the Wilsons do not appear in the existing agricultural censuses for the nineteenth century in Mecklenburg County, so there is no way to document their agricultural activity on this land. There is, however, no reason to suspect that they behaved any differently than their neighbors regarding agriculture. ⁵

J.F. Wilson sold his land in 1896 to P.T. Christenbury. ⁶ Christenbury deeded the land to his daughter Margaret in 1933. ⁷ Margaret Christenbury Dellinger and her husband C. M. Dellinger sold part of the property in 1946 to N. S. and Eva Tomlinson. ⁸ N.S. Tomlinson was the last owner to farm this land. The Tomlinsons sold the property that same year to Charles and Helen Bruce. ⁹ When the Bruces bought the property, they found bales of cotton piled on the porch of the house. Charles Bruce was employed as a salesman for Howard and Shelton in Charlotte. In 1975, Helen Bruce sold the house to the current owners, Thomas and Charlotte Davis, her daughter and son-in-law. ¹⁰

Notes

¹ Deed 81-490, 11-25-1891 mentions that J.F. Wilson was the son of Cyrus Wilson who was the previous owner of the property. Indices of deeds in the nineteenth

century do not list a Cyrus Wilson as a landowner of any property in Mecklenburg County.

² Charles William Sommerville, *The History of Hopewell Church*, Charlotte, N.C.: Observer Printing House, 1939, p. 198. Survey report by M.B. Gatza.

³ Deed 82-59, 8-3-1891, Mecklenburg County Courthouse. In a confusing array of deeds, this property appears to have passed back and forth between J. F. Wilson and E. M. and N. W. Puckett in 1891 and 1892. J. F. Wilson ended up as sole owner of the property in 1892.

⁴ Deed 82-592, 1-7-1892. Mecklenburg County Courthouse.

⁵ According to the 1880 Agriculture Census for Mecklenburg County, one of the owners of the property, E. M. Puckett grew fifteen acres of cotton, ten acres of corn, and ten acres of oats. Puckett probably did not grow these crops on the Tomlinson-Wilson land, but these crops were typical for the area and the region.

⁶ Deed 112-625, 11-18-1896. Mecklenburg County Courthouse.

⁷ Deed 846-126, 11-16-1933. Mecklenburg County Courthouse.

⁸ Deed 1188-10, 2-11-1946. Mecklenburg County Courthouse. This deed conveyed 49.75 acres, slightly more than half of the tract that the Dellingers owned.

⁹ Deed 1222-65, 10-17-1946. Mecklenburg County Courthouse.

¹⁰ Deed 2561-161, 1-1-1975. Mecklenburg County Courthouse.

Architectural Description



Ms. Nora M. Black

The Tomlinson-Wilson House and Farm is located on the east side of Old Statesville Road (Highway 115 running from Charlotte to Huntersville). The house is north of Alexanderana Road but south of Hambright Road. The house is approached by a long unpaved driveway crossing the Southern Railroad tracks (formerly the Atlantic, Tennessee & Ohio tracks) that parallel Old Statesville Road. The front or west facade of the house faces Old Statesville Road; the rear or east facade overlooks a grassy field and woodlands. The house is located on a roughly rectangular-shaped parcel of 26.32 acres owned by Thomas A. Davis and his wife, Charlotte B. Davis. Large trees and tall shrubbery make the house difficult to see from the Old Statesville Road.

The Tomlinson-Wilson House is a Pre-railroad Folk House built in the Tidewater South tradition. The house is a subtype of the Tidewater South tradition called the extended I-house type.)¹ Pre-railroad folk houses built before ca.1850 to 1890 (and locally as late as ca.1920), reflect the difficulty and expense of transporting bulky building materials such as lumber and brick over long distances. Inland regions, far from the coast or navigable rivers, depended on transportation provided by horse-

drawn wagons. For that reason, the average citizen was limited to construction that used materials found on site or very close at hand. The forests covering the eastern half of the United States provided a huge supply of timber and established wooden folk building as the tradition. ²

The linear-plan of the extended I-house type reflects the milder winters of the Southern United States. The plan is exemplified by a center passage running from the front entry to the back door with a single room on either side of the center passage. In two-story plans, the stairway is constructed in the center passage. The plan generally had a one-story shed extension along the rear of the house. Although the New England tradition (massed plan that was two-rooms deep) provided more interior space, builders in the South used the linear one-room deep plan because less time was spent indoors and for cross-ventilation to cool the house.

The Tomlinson-Wilson House was constructed during a period of great change in North Carolina. It is important to note that "[f]or many Carolinians, the 1830s were years of economic decline and outmigration; the decade was also a time of greater economic stratification, as planter families continued to consolidate property and the plantation system expanded into the Piedmont." ³ The North Carolina State Railroad between Charlotte and Raleigh would not be completed until 1854. The tracks of the Atlantic, Tennessee & Ohio, just west of the Tomlinson-Wilson House, would not be constructed until 1860 and then relaid in 1874. The American architectural profession, in its infancy in the 1830s, influenced the work of local builders much less than plan books and carpenters' handbooks.

In the midst of the changes in both the state and the country, the Tomlinson-Wilson House was constructed. The house is roughly contemporary with Cedar Grove (1831-33), another rural house in northern Mecklenburg County. Comparing the two houses gives a good example of the economic stratification in the area. Cedar Grove, the larger of the two, was built by a merchant-planter able to afford the expense of constructing brick kilns and importing hardware and manufactured goods from New York and Philadelphia. In contrast, the owners of the Tomlinson-Wilson House, being yeoman farmers, had to use less expensive materials available locally. Unlike the Greek Revival style of Cedar Grove, the Tomlinson-Wilson House is constructed in a Folk House tradition.

The ground plan of the Tomlinson-Wilson House is that of a typical extended I-house plan in the Tidewater South Folk House tradition. Plan variations include a one-story, rear-facing ell and a later extension of the ell on the northeast corner of the principal mass. A one-story addition on the southeast corner provides an infill between the ell and the shed extension of the principal mass. The house presents a symmetrical, two-story elevation to Old Statesville Road. The Tomlinson-Wilson House has a one-

story, full-width, shed-roofed front porch typical of the extended I-house plan. By the late 18th century, this became a common feature in southern folk houses to provide a cool shelter from both the summer's heat and frequent thunderstorms. The side-gabled roof is a common roof type found in this style.

Exterior

The Tomlinson-Wilson Houses has two types of siding: horizontal lapped board siding and flush horizontal siding. The flush horizontal siding is under the protection of the front porch; that type of siding indicates the porch was considered an exterior room. Wide boards trim the corners of the house. The exterior, including the trim, is painted white. The house is set on rectangular piers of granite; the current owner placed concrete block infill between the granite piers.

The side-gabled roof has a moderate slope. It encloses an attic that provides storage space for the house. The roof is supported by common rafters with tie beams; the roof sheathing is tongue-and-groove boards. The charcoal gray composition shingles are laid in a simple, coursed pattern. The boxed eaves support charcoal gray gutters which carry roof runoff to the white downspouts. The gable ends have a moderate overhang. An exterior chimney is centered on each gable end. Wooden louvered vents flank each chimney at the attic level. Gray stucco covers the stone base and brick of each chimney.

Many of the windows in the Tomlinson-Wilson House contain the original leaded glass. Additionally, the original wooden sash has the deep and narrow muntins (wooden moldings holding the individual panes in place) of the Adam style. Except for those in the addition on the southeast corner, all windows are double hung wooden sash. First floor windows in the gable end section are tall 9/9 windows placed singly but in symmetrical rows. Second floor windows in the gable end section are shorter 6/6 windows also placed singly and symmetrically. Windows in the ell section are pairs of 6/6 and 2/2 windows. The addition on the southeast corner has three pairs of casement windows on the east facade and two fixed sash stained glass windows on the south facade.

The symmetrical front elevation is three units wide with the front entry forming the center unit. The one-story shed-roofed porch extends across the front of the house. The roof of the porch is supported by square Tuscan-style columns; the porch railing is a simple wooden balustrade. Most of the balustrade is original; however, a couple of sections, milled to match the original, have replaced deteriorated sections. Both the floor and the ceiling of the porch are tongue-and-groove boards. Five brick steps lead to the porch. A single light fixture is centered at the front entrance.

The front entry, located on the west elevation, is the most decorative element of the exterior. It appears to have changed little over the years. It consists of a wooden enframement surrounding the paired doors with five sidelights on either side. The white enframement has simple decorative moldings. The sidelights do not run the full height of the door but end at knee height. Beneath the sidelights are white wooden panels. A pair of screen doors opens to a pair of narrow two panel wooden doors. The narrow vertical panels emphasize the height of the white doors.

The Tomlinson-Wilson House has no porch on the back or east facade of the house at this time. The back door, which is located in the southeast corner addition, is approximately at ground level.

Interior

Much of the interior of the Tomlinson-Wilson House has not been modernized. Most of the historic fabric is not only intact but visible. Most rooms have original painted moldings and original hardware for the two-panel wooden doors. In the two-story section, the interior walls are boards laid horizontally. This section also has board ceilings. The ell and the southeast corner addition have walls of various materials including antique bricks, boards and sheetrock. The ceilings are approximately 9' high throughout the house. Wide pine boards were used for flooring in most rooms. Flooring in the entry hall and the parlor were replaced due to deterioration. The current owner salvaged similar pine flooring from the Sugar Creek Presbyterian Church for those two rooms. The southeast corner addition has a floor of oversized brick.

The front doors open to the center passage hall. The unbroken run of the open staircase begins at the left (north) of the door. A closet is enclosed beneath the stairwell. A sheetrock wall closes off the east end of the hall; it could be removed if an owner wished to restore the center passage to the back of the house. The square newel on the first floor has a simple square cap while another square newel on the second floor has a round pillbox cap. The balustrade, composed of narrow strips of wood, supports a gracefully curved and carved handrail.

To the right (south side of the house) when standing at the front entry is the room presumed to have been the original parlor. The focal point of this room is the fire surround on the south wall. The fire surround has simple engaged pilasters, set on unadorned plinth blocks, on each side of the fireplace; the pilasters support a high shelf. Beneath the shelf, the wood is paneled in a three-part design with a raised center tablet. Above the shelf, a wooden panel is cut into a pair of quarter circles. The brick hearth is flush with the floor. A fireplace insert makes the chimney more efficient.

The dining room is to the left (north side of the house) when standing at the front entry. The fireplace occupies the north wall of the room. The fire surround has the appearance of a pedimented door surround. Engaged pilasters support a frieze board, cornice and shelf. Above the shelf, the triangular piece of wood resembles a pediment. This fireplace has a raised brick hearth.

The dining room has a doorway on the east wall leading to the kitchen. The kitchen has modern conveniences. The oak flooring in the kitchen, although not original, came from the site. A storm in 1980 felled a white oak tree in the back yard and a red oak tree in the front yard. State officials measured the fallen white oak tree and determined it to be the fourth largest in North Carolina. It was also believed to be the tree that held the swing from which Cyrus Wilson fell to his death. The current owners had the trees taken to a sawmill and have used some of the lumber in the house. ⁴

The kitchen, laundry room and small sitting room form three narrow rooms within the original one-story shed extension on the rear (east) side of the house. The ell on the northeast corner of the house contains a crafts workroom, a bathroom and a bedroom laid out in linear fashion. The easternmost section of the ell had to be rebuilt after a tree fell on it. The stone foundation for the original kitchen chimney is still under the rebuilt section. At the extreme southeast corner of the house is a family room added by the current owners in 1980. The brick floor was salvaged from the Glen Alpine textile mill. Two stained glass windows flank a large fireplace set in a wall of old brick.

The second floor is also laid out in the center hall passage plan. A bath has been constructed in the west end of the center passage. The original stair to the attic is located in that bath. At the east end of the hallway, a half-door conceals a storage area tucked under the shed roof of the rear extension.

There are bedrooms located on the north and south sides of the second floor hallway. The south bedroom has a fireplace on the south wall with a fire surround similar to the one in the dining room. A cupboard, originally built-in on the first floor, has been moved to the south bedroom. It serves as closet since the house, as originally constructed, had no closets. The fireplace in the north bedroom was closed when an early oil furnace was used; however, the current owner may reopen it since he has a new heating system.

A natural gas pac system provides heat and air conditioning for the residents of the Tomlinson-Wilson House. The whole house was rewired in 1953 to provide better lighting, but the work was done in a sensitive manner. The house contains 2,893 square feet according to Mecklenburg County tax records.

Conclusion

The Tomlinson-Wilson House and Farm is a mostly intact example of a typical farm with a house built in the extended I-house plan in the Tidewater South Folk House tradition. finishes and decorative details of the Tomlinson-Wilson House suggest that the house was built by a skilled local craftsman who had access to the pattern books of his day. The house and farm can provide valuable insight into the settlement and land use patterns of this area during the Antebellum period.

Notes

¹ Virginia & Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York, 1986), 74-75, 80-82.

² *Ibid*, 75.

³ Catherine W. Bishir, with photography by Tim Buchman, *North Carolina Architecture* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1990), 195.

⁴ Interview with Thomas and Charlotte Davis, current owners; 23 May 1992.