HISTORIC LANDSCAPES OF MECKLENBURG COUNTY:
THE SMALL TOWNS

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INTRODUCTION

This essay is about the historic architecture and other elements of landscape that have shaped the small towns of Mecklenburg County.

Between the 1880s and the Great Depression, the small town emerged as a significant settlement form in the county and across the Carolina Piedmont. Pineville, Matthews, Huntersville, and Cornelius grew from sleepy stagecoach stops or crossroads hamlets, with names like Morrow's Turnout (Pineville) or Fullwood's Store (Matthews) into centers of local trade with bustling main streets and often clamorous industrial sites. The town of Davidson, too, expanded in these decades and was influenced by the same social and economic forces. Yet, for all its similarities with these neighboring places, Davidson has historically played a unique role in the county as a college town, and its physical appearance clearly reflects the impact of Davidson College. For this reason it will be discussed in its own terms in a separate chapter. By contrast, the other towns followed common patterns of development that engendered a distinctive small-town landscape in Mecklenburg County. They combined features of the farm as well as the city. Like Charlotte, which blossomed into the hub of the Piedmont textile belt and a prominent symbol of New South industrialism, these towns

held urban ambitions of their own. Townspeople vigorously
participated in the "Cotton Mill Campaign" to bring mills to
their communities, invested in red-brick commercial blocks
and schools, and erected fashionable residences and churches.
Their main streets invariably were oriented to railroad
lines, which crisscrossed Mecklenburg County and sparked
urban growth in the early 1900s. In their housing patterns,
towns reflected the the mounting racial and social
segregation that was simultaneously changing the appearance
of Charlotte and many other Southern cities.

While city-like, Mecklenburg's small towns had a kinship
with the surrounding countryside. The countryside eased into
town in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as
farms and woodland rolled along behind town lots. Pineville,
Matthews, Huntersville, and Cornelius were settled primarily
by rural folk, and traditional farmhouse designs often
occupied parcels broad enough for flourishing kitchen
gardens, smokehouses, and other assorted outbuildings.
Street patterns also reflected rural precedents. The main
thoroughfares tended to follow traditional local
transportation routes, made wide enough to accomodate turning
teams of horses. Reflecting both urban and rural impulses,
these small towns ultimately took shape as a distinctive kind
of place.

This essay first briefly chronicles the rise of the four
towns, and then discusses the principal landscape features
have historically marked these places. It focuses on the

most intact examples of the architectural designs and spatial relationships which epitomized the historic small-town landscape in Mecklenburg County.

THE RISE OF THE SMALL TOWNS

Pineville, Matthews, Huntersville, and Cornelius are children of the railroad. These towns may share many traits, but their stongest bond is the railroad tracks. Due mainly to the availability of rail transportation, on the eve of the Civil War Charlotte was the county's only official "urban place." Between 1850 and 1860 Charlotte had become the junction of four rail lines that penetrated the county, and the population of this farming community and courthouse town promptly doubled in size to 2,265. As the county recovered from the Civil War in the latter decades of the century, new and rebuilt railways not only stimulated Charlotte's continued expansion but also spawned smaller shipping and trading points along their routes. In 1872 the Carolina Central Railway completed its line from Wilmington, North Carolina to Charlotte, locating one of its depots southeast of Charlotte, beside a stagecoach stop kown as Fullwood Store. In 1879 the Town of Matthews was born on this site, named, in fact, for a member of the Carolina Central's Board of Directors. By 1874 rails had been relaid on the prewar Atlantic, Tennessee, and Ohio Railroad line between Charlotte and Statesville. Three years later Huntersville was laid out along these tracks. During the early 1890s Cornelius also

took root along the A.T.and O. Railroad line, three miles north of Huntersville. Starting out as a cotton weighing station and general store, the Town of Cornelius would be incorporated in 1905. At the south end of the county near the state line, Pineville grew up after the Civil War around a depot that the Charlotte, Columbia, and Augusta Railroad had fortuitously sited there in 1852.[1]

These four towns were part of a vast web of railroad-oriented settlements that spread throughout North Carolina in the late nineteenth century. Only twenty-two railroad towns existed in the state in 1860; by 1900 there were two hundred and twenty-five, the majority in the Piedmont.[2] To be sure, most of these urban places were small. The largest of Mecklenburg's four towns in 1900 was Pineville, population 585; by 1930 Cornelius headed the list with 1,230 residents. However, their importance lay not in their size but in their reflection of the Piedmont's changing economic, social, and cultural geography.

By the 1890s the region's railroad towns had been integrated in a national network of rail lines. Mecklenburg County, like the rest of the Piedmont, may have continued to be predominantly rural, but old patterns of isolation were being challenged by a new mobility and access to far-flung marketplaces. Railways tied the towns not only to each other and Southern seaports but also to Northern markets and sources of building materials and finished goods. "We are no longer shut out of the rest of creation!" sang the Davidson

Monthly upon the reconstruction of the A.T. and O. Railroad.
By 1894 this railway was part of the extensive Southern
Railroad system which had direct connections to the North.[3]

Thus Pineville, Matthews, Huntersville, and Cornelius
functioned as rural marketing and shipping stations for the
local cotton crop. The railroads enabled merchants to bypass
Southern port cities and market this staple directly to
Northern cities in exchange for goods shipped in by rail.
Storekeepers stocked their shelves with the latest products
from northern stores, and advanced agricultural supplies to
farmers who, in turn, cultivated more and more cotton to pay
for these provisions.

Each town contained a host of general merchants who were
part of a new and aggressive entrepreneurial class described
by W. C. Cash as "the army of the enterprising and the
hard."[4] These adroit Piedmont businessmen operated cotton
gins, brokered cotton, organized banks, established textile
mills, and were active in local and state politics. In
Pineville, where 6000 bales of cotton were sold each year
around the turn of the century, merchant Tom Younts "made a
fortune," it is said, in the cotton trade and credit
business. In Matthews business partners Everard Jefferson
Heath and Edward Solomon Reid prospered as cotton buyers,
merchants, and bankers, while B. D. Funderburk operated a
store and cotton gin, sold coal and fertilizer, and was the
president of the Bank of Matthews. Neighbor Thomas Jefferson
Renfrow not only owned one of the town's major dry goods

stores and a cotton gin but served seven years in the North
Carolina General Assembly as well. Cornelius' R. J. Stough
and J. B. Cornelius "sold everything from cotton to coffins,"
in their store, and helped establish two cotton mills in
town. Huntersville's stock of general stores climbed from
three in 1900 to ten by the end of the decade, reflecting the
preeminent role of the town's new "army" of merchants.[5]

The small towns may have been centers of local commerce,
but they also performed a host of other functions. Private
academies and public schools were located there. Both
Matthews and Huntersville were selected as sites for
state-supported rural high schools in 1907. In the latter
town the state school first occupied the former Huntersville
High School Academy, which had been established in 1878. As
the number of residents increased, Presbyterian, Methodist,
and Baptist churches opened their doors in each town.
Hotels, liveries, teacherages, banks, and post offices also
appeared, filling out commercial cores and spilling over into
residential areas. Simultaneously, African-American
communities burgeoned at the peripheries. Tanktown,
Smithville, and Pottstown were the names given such areas
that arose beside Matthews, Cornelius, and Huntersville,
respectively. These black neighborhoods contained
concentrations of farmhands, domestic help for white
households, and skilled carpenters and members of work crews
who contributed to the towns' physical expansion.[6]

Townspeople regarded no single event as more vital to

physical expansion than the arrival of a cotton mill. During
the decades around the turn of the century town building was
synomymous with mill building. "Huntersville has 'factory
fever," announced a resident in 1888, following a citizens'
meeting urging industrial growth. As railroad towns vied for
factories, the infatuation with spindles and looms sometimes
resembled a religious crusade. "Next to God, what this town
needs is a cotton mill," proclaimed one Piedmont preacher.
Between 1880 and 1900, one hundred seventy-seven mills were
established in the state, ninety percent of them in the
Piedmont. Mecklenburg County alone contained seventeen mills
in 1903, and twenty-two by 1915, including fourteen in
Charlotte. This textile boom was powered by steam.
Railroads opened the Appalachian coal fields and hauled into
the region the fuel necessary for operating massive steam
engines. In contrast to previous, water-powered mills, the
new factories were no longer bound to isolated water courses.
Liberated from the riversides, textile plants arose along the
railroads, often around the outskirts of cities and small
towns that eagerly awaited their coming.[7]

The cotton mills--like the rail lines and towns that wove
them together--were symbols of a new order. They
inextricably tied the region into the national market
economy, and began a social movement whereby thousands of
families fled their small Carolina farms for jobs in the
mills. The textile industry promised steady employment and
an hourly cash wage ("public work" it was called) for farmers

confronted with depressed cotton prices and the grim prospect
of lifelong tenancy. The mills, however, were no panecea.
Farmers-turned-millhands faced low wages and work-weeks that
averaged sixty to seventy hours. Though the mill owners
provided subsidized housing and a range of other services
which varied from mill to mill, rarely during the early
twentieth century did their workers rise above the minimum
standard of living in North Carolina.[8]

Textile communities were a complex mix of paternalism and
exploitation, self-reliance and mutual aid. Mill owners
developed mill villages as acts self interest: to provide
basic facilities for the waves of migrants leaving the
countryside for "public work;" and to exercise corporate
control over their new labor force. A 1907-8 federal
investigation commented that "all the affairs of the village
and the conditions of living of all of the people are
regulated by the mill company. Practically speaking, the
company owns everything and controls everything, and to a
large extent controls everybody in the mill village."[9]

Yet textile workers were not merely functionaries of the
factories that employed and housed them. Mill families
breathed life into their villages, creating places that
reflected their agrarian ways. Their rural independence was
so persistent that mill owners, looking to secure a reliable
work force, incorporated a variety of rural elements into the
planned mill complex. Villages included house types borrowed
directly from the Southern countryside; spacious lots for

kitchen gardens; and adjoining pastures, barns, and hog pens
for livestock. Within this setting, millhands sustained a
traditional allegiance to kin and formed new bonds with
fellow workers. When one resident of Pineville's mill
village stated that she was "proud to have grown up in the
mill," she was expressing not just a loyalty to the company
but a sense of pride in her membership in the local mill
community. In Pineville, for example, each mill
family--independent of ownership--contributed twenty-five
cents weekly for a medical insurance program with a town
physician.[10]

Pineville, Huntersville, and Cornelius each had a textile
factory and village by the turn of the century. Cornelius
Cotton Mills began in 1888, and was joined in town by Gem
Yarn Mills in 1907. Anchor Mills was established in
Huntersville in 1898. Dover Mills, a Providence, Rhode
Island firm, selected Pineville as the site for its North
Carolina plant in 1894. By 1908, this factory was part of a
chain of plants owned by Chadwick-Hoskins Company, an
expanding textile mill business based in Charlotte. These
five mills and corresponding villages were not the largest
textile operations in Mecklenburg County.[11] They were,
however, integral to the growth of these towns and bestowed
on each distinctive architectural forms and housing patterns.

The landscapes associated with the textile culture and
other aspects of the county's traditional small towns largely
pre-date the 1930s. By the Great Depression, the sluggish

textile industry and severe rural poverty provided scarce opportunities for new construction. Growth remained slow in the postwar decades, as cotton production virtually vanished from the Piedmont and the role of agriculture in the local economy declined. In turn, the roles of storekeepers as cotton brokers and suppliers of merchandise to farmers diminished. The textile mills continued to run in the towns, and even enlarged their physical plants in Pineville and Cornelius. But their work force increasingly lived away from the traditional villages, benefiting from greater housing opportunities afforded them by better salaries and automobile ownership. The automobile, indeed, has contributed mightily to the new patterns of growth. In combination with major highways that now span Mecklenburg County, motor vehicle transportation has fueled decentralized development. When the county's towns have expanded--and growth has spiraled in recent years--new construction has taken place primarily on former farmland at their outskirts. At an accelerating pace auto-oriented commercial strips, shopping malls, and residential subdivisions encircle historic town centers. Around Matthews alone, over one million square feet of shopping plazas have been constructed or proposed since 1986.[12]

Such out-lying development, however, has spared the interiors of the towns from drastic physical change. Each Main Street, though altered by some modern intrusions and recent demolitions, retains turn-of-the-century commercial

buildings often occupying entire blocks. Early white as well as black neighborhoods also remain in place, as do a host of churches and school buildings. Finally, cotton mills and their affiliated villages continue to dominate sections of towns. The finest surviving examples of these traditional landscape elements are the focus of the remaining parts of this essay. Together they epitomize the historic small town in Mecklenburg County.

MAIN STREET

"Main Street"--the principal business street-- was the most important symbol of small-town commerce in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the county's railroad towns this corridor was invariably oriented to the tracks. In Pineville, Matthews, and Cornelius the main business street ran perpendicular to the railroad, while in Huntersville it squarely faced the tracks at the site of the depot. Thus the first impression of a visitor stepping off the train at Huntersville was one of a place geared to commerce. Yet the small-town business areas were historically modest in scale, reflecting populations that averaged only about nine hundred residents by 1930. The retailing cores of Pineville and Matthews consumed about one block. Early rows of stores in Huntersville and Cornelius occupied merely one side of a block, with other general stores or smaller pockets of retail establishments located nearby.

In Cornelius, for example, the prominent Stough-Cornelius Company operated in a building strategically sited beside the railroad tracks, where Catawba Avenue--a busy trade route from the Catawba River--joined Statesville Road. A portion of this structure still exists. Another cluster of stores lined the railroad tracks, at the intersection of the two thoroughfares. They were small, narrow, mostly utilitarian frame buildings ("shoebox stores," according to one observer), that have all been razed.[13] But it was two blocks west, along Catawba Avenue, that a neat row of storefronts would eventually define the commercial center. These stores faced the Cornelius Mill. By the 1940s the plant's main south wall extended along the northern edge of the block, creating a distinctly enclosed setting where the busy hum of the mill mingled with the commercial life of the town.

Main Streets offered a spectrum of goods and services. The county business directories published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries recorded an assortment of general stores, livery stables, drug stores, banks, hotels, and post offices. Main Street, Pineville at the turn of the century was simply characterized as having "ten stores and two bars." Cotton gins, grist and saw mills, blacksmith shops, and other small industries (Huntersville contained a marble works and Pineville a carriage manufacturer in 1896) were typically located away from Main Street, often along a back alley.[14]

Although there were few pretenses to beauty, Main Streets
fit together at the beginning of the twentieth century as
attractive, if not distinctive, business settings. They were
pedestrian places where farmers and town residents walked to
do their shopping. Perhaps all of the towns maintained rows
of shade trees along their business streets, as shown in an
early postcard view of Matthews. Buildings were one or two
stories high and normally constructed of red brick. Brick
commercial blocks embodied permanence and prosperity in these
young towns, and clearly differentiated places of business
from the predominately wood-frame residential areas. The
masonry was frequently made on or near the construction site,
but as commercial districts expanded, brickyards with
permanent kilns producing better-quality, less porous bricks
appeared. By 1910 Cornelius, for example, had a brickyard
situated along the railroad tracks. The more enterprising
merchants also installed shopfronts with large plate-glass
display windows embellished with fancy bracketed cornices.
The finest interiors boasted pressed-tin ceilings.
Storekeepers ordered all of these stylish features from
out-of-town manufacturers and received them--ready for
installation--by rail.[15]

Perhaps the county's most impressive remaining small-town
commercial district is in Matthews (Figure 1). Between the
1890s and 1930s the 100 block of Trade Street, west of the
railroad tracks, developed into rows of brick buildings
accomodating general merchandise stores, a livery stable,

Figure 1. Main Street, Matthews.

Figure 2. Funderburk Brothers Building, Matthews, 1891.

post office, bank, drug store, and hotel. Back alleys held a grist mill and blacksmith shop on the north side, and T. J. Renfrow's cotton gin on the south side, behind Renfrow's general store.

While Trade Street has not been exempt from physical changes over the decades, it continues to feature a host of important early buildings that exemplify the small-town business district. The north side retains a significant section of the Funderburk Brothers Building (Figure 2). Built in 1891, the building's facade includes its original shopfront for the dry goods store, with display windows flanking a traditional recessed entryway. To the east, the former Matthews Post Office is an exemplary small-town postal facility of the Depression era. Dedicated for service in 1939, the one-story brick building with sturdy granite columns was designed to foster public confidence in governmental functions during these economically hard times.[17]

The south side of Trade Street includes the original Matthews Post Office, built about 1892. This one-story frame building with a simple false front has miraculously survived the street's early blazes and widespread enthusiasm for brick construction. To the north, T. J. Renfrow and Son General Store was erected in the heart of the block at the turn of the century (Figure 3). The one-story brick building consists of a matching pair of storefront bays with large display windows designed for pedestrian traffic. The facade

Figure 3.   T.J. Renfrow and Son General Store, Matthews, ca.1900.

Figure 4.   Heath and Reid General Store, Matthews, ca.1889.

has such stylish touches as decorative wood moldings defining the base of each bay, and fancy brick corbelling along the cornice. Today known as Renfrow's Hardware, it has added significance as Matthew's sole surviving general store that is still engaged in the dry goods trade.[18]

The most striking building on Trade Street as well as the epitome of Main Street architecture in the county is Heath and Reid General Store (Figure 4). Erected in the 1880s, the two-and-a-half-story structure commands its setting by the railroad tracks. In the fashion of the period, the rectangular brick facade includes arched second-story windows and attic vents, and subtle brick detailing. Its shopfront encompasses the first story in grand style, with a bracketed cornice and expansive multi-paned windows, that flood the interior with natural light. The store was constructed of bricks made from clay dug out of site. "They were all stamped out by a mold, like people used to stamp out butter," a Matthews resident once recalled.

The store's prime location, directly across from the railroad tracks and depot, expressed the commercial aspirations of owners E. J. Heath and E. S. Reid. They were Matthews' only merchants to advertise in the Charlotte business directory, displaying a line engraving of their new building amdist a throng of potential customers. The store, in fact, "was a beehive of activity" during Trade Street's heyday. The front of the establishment was stocked with a myriad of items for the ladies, while groceries were sold at

the rear. On Saturdays farmers came here for seed,
fertilizer, flour, sugar, and assorted other goods. And like
general merchants throughout the county, Heath and Reid often
furnished these supplies in exchange for portions of the
cotton harvests.[19]

UPTOWN

The county's small towns were more than places of
business; they were homes to the people who made livings
there. In each town Main Street was bounded by the houses of
leading businessmen and professionals, large farmers who had
moved to town, skilled tradesmen, and smaller shopkeepers and
clerks. They comprised an emerging "uptown" social class in
the Piedmont which, particularly in larger cities, was
culturally and geographically distinct from the white working
class (typically mill people) and African Americans.[20] Its
membership aspired to the fashionable neighborhoods, belonged
to the principal churches, and attended schools beyond the
bounds of the mill. In the small towns of Mecklenburg
County, however, such class distinctions were often blurred.
Wealthier townspeople and mill workers alike worshipped in
the same churches and enrolled their children in the public
schools. On occasion they even owned homes on the same
blocks. Nevertheless, a recognizable uptown landscape
existed. It consisted of streets oriented to Main Street and
the railroad tracks, and geographically set apart from areas
where the great majority of blacks and mill people lived.

Here on oak-shaded lawns (instead of swept dirt yards), which might measure an entire acre, uptown families dwelled in the town's most stylish houses. Nearby stood the major churches, private academies, and, eventually, the public school.

Residences

Uptown houses blended the traditional with the up-to-date. They reflected the conservative tastes of townspeople who still thought as rural folk, accepting new ideas and institutions slowly; but also they embodied a growing attraction for urban and national cultural trends. Thus the range of domestic architecture included folk house types with enduring symbolic appeal, as well as stylishly novel architectural shapes and decoration that represented a major break from the simpler forms of the past. Just as the railroads facilitated commercial exchange, they also brought the latest fashions and building technologies from large cities to the small towns.

By the 1880s virtually all of the dwellings in the towns were erected with mass-produced sawn lumber and nails shipped into the towns by rail. The ready access to standardized building materials encouraged carpenters to abandon the traditional pegged-timber frame construction in favor of balloon framing, employing lighter studs nailed together. This innovative framing technique made all forms of houses radically faster and easier to construct, and neatly cooincided with the rising popularity of more exuberent

architectural shapes. Houses both large and small were now routinely finished with factory-made doors and windows, stairways, flooring, and tongue-and-groove walls and ceilings. These products as well as assorted mantelpieces, fancy brackets, porch posts, and balusters were made at highly mechanized woodworking shops known as sash and blind factories. By 1900 Charlotte, for example, contained three such plants, each of them linked to the small towns by rail. In this atmosphere of building innovation and mechanization--tempered by conservative tastes--an assortment of architectural styles shaped the uptown landscape.[21]

The major surviving house designs in the small towns reflect the influences of three architectural styles: Queen Anne; Colonial Revival; and bungalow. Each enjoyed a wide national following, and many local examples were versions of stock house plans that were constructed across the country. But other new houses did not conform to the architectural mainstream, expressing instead the persistence of traditional forms and layouts that were adapted to the popular styles of the day.

Around the turn of the century the Queen Anne style was claimed enthusiastically by uptown society. The style was the culmination of picturesque architectural tendencies that had been stirring in Mecklenburg County since the 1870s. Contrasting sharply with simple square or rectangular folk house types, Queen Anne dwellings displayed consciously irregular forms, with jutting wings and bays topped by

interlocking hip and gable roofs. These shapes were dressed up in a variety of decorative wood shingling, spindles, and big porches trimmed with lacy sawn brackets that often curved around the facades. The amount of elaboration was determined by the tastes and means of the client.

Today, the influence of the Queen Anne style is most apparent on the prime residential streets of uptown Cornelius and Matthews. As Cornelius expanded around the Gem and Cornelius Mills in the early twentieth century, the Queen Anne style permeated the uptown building boom. R. J. Stough, president of the Cornelius Cotton Mill, chose this style for his residence on Main Street (Figure 5). Moved in recent years to a secondary artery, the two-story frame house has a high hip roof penetrated by cross gables, and a wide, full verandah that has classical columns and conforms to the irregular contours of the the facade. This imposing residence, however, was an exception to the far more numerous one-story Queen Anne cottages that proliferated along major residential streets.[22]

Queen Anne cottages "built in a tasty style" signified modernity. To professional observers of the state's architectural scene, this lively domestic design stood in contrast to "the old fashioned country house or the ancient residence in town [with] huge outside chimneys . . . and the solemn goods-box shape. Now we build cottages which are convenient and much more economical of space and they look 100 percent more beautiful and generally cost no more

Figure 5.   R.J. Stough House, Cornelius, ca. 1900.

Figure 6.   Perry Goodrum House, Cornelius, 1906.

money."[23] In Cornelius, Perry Goodrum, manager of the Cornelius Cotton Mill, occupied such a dwelling on Catawba Avenue in 1906 (Figure 6). The design is characteristic of the county's Queen Anne cottages--high hip roof, projecting cross gables, full porch with turned posts and decorative sawn brackets. Goodrum's neighbors followed suit. Just west of this house, merchant William Puckett erected a similar frame cottage, distinguished by patterned wood shingles in the gables (Figure 7). Along Main Street, north of the Cornelius Cotton Mill, other versions appeared, conveying good taste and middle-class status in turn-of-the-century Cornelius. Hamilton White, a supervisor at the Cornelius Cotton Mill, selected a gentle rise of land overlooking Main Street to build his stylish cottage (Figure 8). Across the street, farmer Egbert Brown favored a roomier model, with a dormer that pierced the high hip roof and opened up the second story for bedrooms.[24]

While uptowners built comparable Queen Anne dwellings countywide, it was in Matthews that a hallmark of this style appeared (Figure 9). In 1890 Edward Soloman Reid acquired a lot adjacent to the business district and built what is Meckineburg's finest surviving Queen Anne cottage. Family tradition holds that Reid employed a local carpenter to execute the design, fashioned from heart-pine lumber transported to Matthews on the railroad. Reid was a partner in Matthew's largest mercantile enterprise, Heath and Reid, and his new home--like his brick store on Trade

Figure 7. William Puckett House, Cornelius, ca. 1906.

Figure 8. Egbert Brown House, Cornelius, ca. 1906.

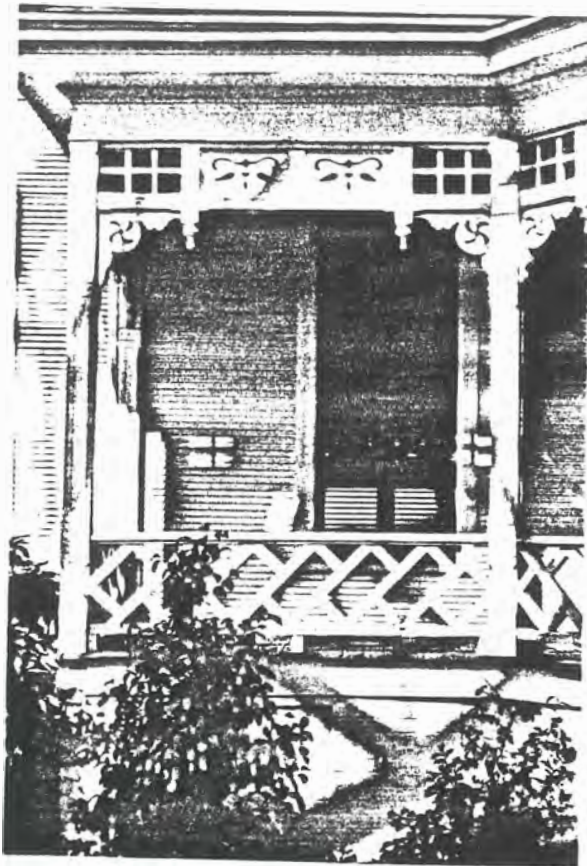Figure 9.   Reid House, Matthews, 1890.

Figure 10.   Reid House.   Porch details.

Street--hailed his prominent status in town. In 1892 Reid moved to Charlotte, and the residence was subsequently occupied for over fifty years by Dr. Thomas Neely Reid, a country doctor, and his wife, Ellen E. Reid.[25]

The complex form of the Reid cottage is accentuated by a corner tower sheathed with scalloped shingles, and a projecting front porch. Exuberent in detail, the porch is trimmed with brackets with a pinwheel design, turned pendents, and a fluted balustrade (Figure 10). The main door opens into a central hallway flanked by a parlor and sitting room, with a dining room and bedroom to the rear. Farther back is room upon room of additions, including kitchen and sunroom. On the interior, the Queen Anne is revealed primarily through paneled mantelpieces, which in the tower room has lozenge-shaped raised panels and a scalloped-edge freize.

Despite the attraction of such up-to-date, picturesque
designs, traditional shapes and plans continued to hold
strong appeal. Though the possibilities for embellishment
were endless, carpenters typically updated these
conservative forms with turned or chamfered porch posts,
some sawn trim, and, occasionally, decorative roof gables.
The result was usually less an inspiration of the Queen Anne
style than it was the expression of a few popular motifs
that builders and clients accepted as tasteful. Uptown
residents selected one customary form in particular, the
two-story house, one-room deep. This rectangular,
symmetrical folk house usually had a gable roof, brick end
chimneys, and a center hallway. A porch extended across the
facade and a kitchen wing was at the rear. Symbolizing
wealth in rural North Carolina since the antebellum period,
this house continued to represent high social status in
Mecklenburg's small towns into the early 1900s.[26]

Examples of the form are most abundant in Huntersville.
By the early 1900s a collection of two-story, one-room deep
residences had gathered along Academy Street
(later Gilead Road). Postmaster J. F. Steele selected this
basic house type, as did farmer R. E. Henderson, who
ornamented the facade of his new residence with a peaked
central gable. A particularly fine version is the
white-painted, frame dwelling that was built, it is said, as
the Huntersville Academy's dormitory (Figure 11). By the
1890s it was converted to the home of Professor Hugh Grey, a

Figure 11.   Grey-Shearer-Knox House, Huntersville, ca. 1890.

Figure 12.   Jesse and Nell Query House, Huntersville, ca. 1890.

member of the faculty and later the superintendant of Mecklenburg's schools. The house was subsequently occupied by J. B. Shearer, president of Davidson College, and, in 1905, by prosperous local farmer J. L. Knox. The residence befitted the stature of these early owners. Handsome slate shingles cover its roofs, and the front porch has turned balusters and stylishly milled brackets. The dignified main entrance is surrounded by paneled and heavily molded sidelights and transom.[27]

Other models in Huntersville appeared along uptown streets facing the railroad tracks or in close range of Main Street businesses. Even the owners of Anchor Mills constructed one as a rooming house for employees. Of special note are two examples that feature double front porches. Directly west of Main Street, sisters Jesse and Nell Query, both schoolteachers, lived for many years in a nicely finished, two-story frame house with a two-tier shed porch (Figure 12). As was a popular trend in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the porch does not extend across the entire facade, but covers only the front door and windows. The dwelling's turned porch posts and combination of wide weatherboards with narrow tongue-and-groove sheathing--all factory-made--expressed in simple terms the fashion of the period.[28]

At the south end of town, facing the railroad tracks, farmer Charles Alexander and wife, Laura, also chose a stylish double porch for their traditional two-story house

(Figure 13). In evidence is the Alexanders' taste for jigsawed trimming and unusual balusters with asterisk patterns that disquise the strict symmetry of the overall form. The attractive main entrance has sidelights and a full transom around a glass-paneled front door. As was standard practice at the time, the Alexanders had the interior ceiled with tongue-and-groove matchboarding. For each of the main rooms they opted for slightly different mantelpiece designs, embellished with variations of raised jigsawed paneling. The kitchen, dining room, and additional bedrooms were arranged in two flanking rear ells.

The appeal of Queen Anne cottages and updated folk houses in the small towns overlapped with the popularity of the Colonial Revival. Variations of the style were carried across the country in a flood of house-plan books, and on the local scene, Charlotte architect Charles Christian Hook promoted the virtues of "colonial" domestic designs. Writing in the Charlotte Observer between November 1903 and January 1904, he praised the Colonial Revival's "symmetry, restfulness, and good proportions" that represented a clear-cut improvement over preceding picturesque styles recklessly shaped by the "jig-saw artist." Though Hook did not explicitly condemn the Queen Anne, he asserted that "colonial architecture" was "the most appropriate form for domestic building in the state."[30] The Colonial Revival was a statement of values as well as fashion. In the South it evoked not just broad patriotic sentiments, but fed a
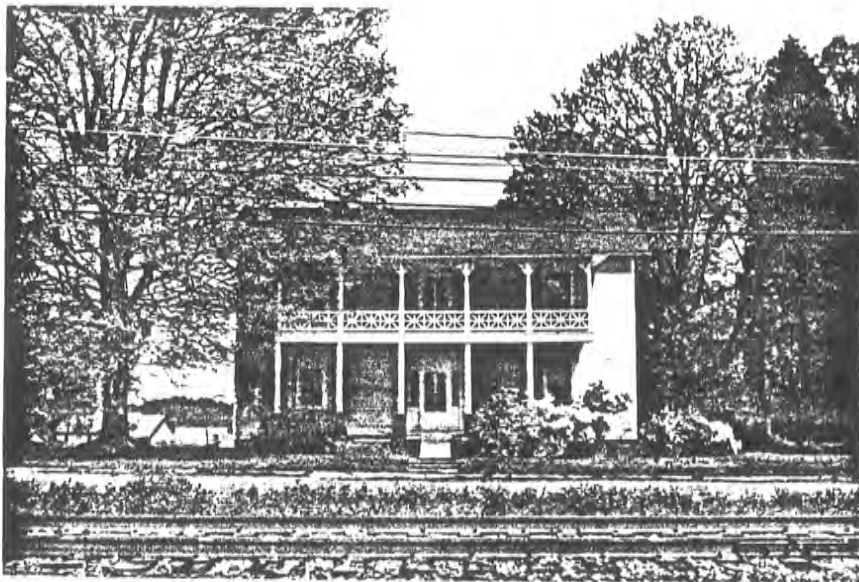
Figure 13.   Charles and Laura Alexander House, Huntersville, ca. 1890.

Figure 14.   William Ranson House, Huntersville, 1913.

longing for an idealized antebellum past. Hook's
architectural firm proceeded to set the local standard for
the Colonial Revival, designing residences in Charlotte's
wealthy, conservative street-car suburbs that were hallmarks
of the style. Hook's single-family dwellings were usually
symmetrical forms capped by simple hip roofs and bedecked in
columned porticoes or porches, and a flourish of other
classical details.[31]

In the small towns, the earliest Colonial Revival houses
arose as grand two-and-a-half-story, hip-roofed forms sided
in white weatherboarding, and wrapped with one-story
porches. These uncomplicated and substantial residences
represented a popular farmhouse design in early
twentieth-century North Carolina, and reflected the solid
agrarian roots of their small-town owners. In Huntersville,
William Ranson occupied an excellent one at the south end of
town (Figure 14). In 1913 Ranson, a farmer, general
merchant, and operator of the town's principal cotton gin,
employed Cornelius contractor Will Potts to build his new
house. The Ranson House is a massive frame box with a
wraparound verandah that expresses the Colonial Revival
style in its porch pediment and classical columns.
Contractor Potts installed fancy pressed-tin ceilings in the
main first-floor rooms and finished the interior with dark
mahogany paneling.[32]

Another imposing early Colonial Revival residence was
owned by Matthews merchant and banker B. D. Funderburk

(Figure 15). About 1900 this two-and-a-half-story house rose from behind the gabled rooftops of one-story dwellings west of Trade Street. Shaded by oak trees, its pure-white form, spacious porch, and clean, classical treatment expressed Funderburk's social prominence.[33]

The boxy Colonial Revival house continued to be the main choice among elites into the post-World War I years. A principal distinction between those built in the 1920s and earlier ones was the application of new building materials--particularly the shift from white weatherboarding to a red-brick veneer. An exemplary design was constructed for Frank Sherrill of Cornelius about 1925 (Figure 16). The Sherrills ranked among Cornelius' leading families, with brothers Frank and Joseph serving successive terms as mayor. Frank was president of Gem Yarn Mill and a major stockholder in the Cornelius Cotton Mill. Inspired perhaps by the stylish homes of textile magnates appearing in Charlotte's Myers Park, Sherrill commissioned Louis Asbury, one of the city's major architects, to design his Cornelius residence. Located on Main Street, on a wide parcel that faces the railroad, the Sherrill House would have fit comfortably along the embowered avenues of Myers Park. At Sherrill's behest Asbury covered the roofs with striking green pantiles, reportedly ordered from a Tennessee manufacturer.[34]

The 1920s also saw the bungalow take its place beside Colonial Revival houses and Queen Anne cottages along uptown

Figure 15. B. D. Funderburk House, Matthews, ca. 1900.

Figure 16. Frank Sherrill House, Cornelius, ca. 1925.

streets. More than any style before it, the bungalow was
disseminated via architectural magazines and mail-order
catalogues with national circulations. Indeed, for a brief
period it even boasted its own periodical, Bungalow
Magazine. Scores of architectural writers attempted to
define the new style, and generally agreed that true
bungalows" were low-slung structures with wide projecting
eaves, exposed brackets and other supports, a large and
sturdily built front porch, and many windows. The bungalow
was trumpeted as a solution to America's need for affordable
middle-class homes. In a period when the costs of building
materials and construction labor were skyrocketing, these
writers asserted that bungalows should stand out as models
of artful simplicity and rational uses of space. Natural
materials were emphasized, including wall claddings of
clinker brick, rough split shakes, and stained wood.
Bungalow plans stressed simple, informal living, and central
hallways were cast aside as wasted, unadaptable space.[35]

Throughout the postwar decades middle-class families in
the small towns chose mainstream bungalow designs which were
regularly pictured in the pages of builders' magazines. In
Huntersville and Cornelius, a variety of popular models were
built facing major uptown thoroughfares. When Statesville
Road was improved through Huntersville in this decade,
bungalows appeared side by side along the modern concrete
highway. Depot agent Tom Youngblood purchased a house lot
on this street from the Ranson family and built one of

Hunterville's notable examples (Figure 17). Youngblood
favored a brick and stucco design with decorative
half-timbering in the front-facing roof gable, brick and
stucco veneering, and a porch that extended into a
porte-cochere. At the rear of the lot Youngblood erected a
wooden garage for his automobile--for with the paving of
Statesville Road this railroad employee and his neighbors
could look forward to smooth motoring south to
Charlotte.[36]

North in Cornelius, bungalows were emblems of the broad,
postwar middle class. Along North Main Street, versions
were built for a barber, house painter, mill supervisor,
banker, realtor, building contractor, minister, and merchant
(Figure 18). In 1921 John Baxter, president of the
Cornelius Savings and Loan, chose one of the more prevalent
designs for his Main Street parcel (Figure 19). The roomy
weatherboarded dwelling has a gable roof that sweeps low
over a large front porch. The center dormer opens up the
second story for sleeping quarters. North of the Baxter
residence, dry goods merchant William Puckett moved from his
Queen Anne cottage on Catawba Avenue into a charming new
bungalow (Figure 20). Veneered in brick and stucco, the
Puckett House showcases decorative angular braces under its
clipped-gable roof. As was the fashion among wealthier
homeowners, a matching garage was erected to the rear.[37]

Across town, on Catawba Avenue, a pair of smaller
bungalows epitomize models that were suited for families of

Figure 17.   Thomas Youngblood House, Huntersville, ca. 1925.

Figure 18.   North Main Street houses, Cornelius, 1920s.

Figure 19.   John Baxter House, Cornelius, 1921.

Figure 20.   William Puckett House, Cornelius, ca. 1925.

more modest means (Figure 21). Their compact forms display
essential elements of the style: low, "snug" rooflines,
deep porches opening directly into living rooms that span
the front the house, and heavy tapered porch posts on brick
piers.[38]

Churches and Schools

As uptowns grew so did their churches and schools.
Standing like sentinels at the borders of town centers,
these institutions were signs of local progress as well as
symbols of a shared moral authority. In the early years
churches and schools were often intimately related. In 1878
members of the Huntersville Presbyterian Church began
worship in the McClintock Academy, a small presbyterian
school. The following year the pastor of the local
Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Dr. William W. Orr,
founded the Huntersville High School Academy and built a
schoolhouse adjacent to the church. In the Catalogue of the
Huntersville High School, 1882-1883, under the heading
"Morals," Dr. Orr confidently proclaimed:

> We can safely say that Huntersville has few
> superiors in point of morals. . . .We have no
> drinking saloons, no billiard tables, no gambling
> rooms, no cockpits, and no race paths. . . But we
> have TWO good churches--one U.S. Presbyterian, the
> other A.R. Presbyterian--in which services are held
> every Sabbath. . . .We can say without fear of

Figure 21.   Catawba Avenue houses, Cornelius, 1920s.

Figure 22.   Huntersville Presbyterian Church, Huntersville, ca. 1881.
(Huntersville Presbyterian Church, 1978)

successful contradiction, that no town has as few
temptations to idleness and vice as our little village,
and there is no place of its size where there is so
much moral and religious restraint brought to bear on
on its citizens.[39]

The author's perceptions of Huntersville's lofty
morality aside, the townspeople created religious buildings
in a fashion typical of uptown churches throughout the
county. The major churches--Presbyterian, Baptist,
Methodist--first appeared in the small towns amid renewed
church construction in the post-Civil War decades. While in
larger urban places, innovative church plans with elaborate
Gothic Revival treatment became landmarks of postwar
recovery, in the small towns and countryside churches tended
to follow a popular antebellum form. These small churches
conveyed religious respectibility and practicality of
purpose through a gable-front design, usually equipped with
a gallery, one or two main aisles, and a platformed alter
and pulpit opposite the entrance.[40]

In Huntersville, the congregations of both Presbyterian
churches probably held worship services in such a building
during their formative years. A rare photograph of the
first Huntersville Presbyterian Church, erected by church
members about 1881, depicts a simple white-frame,
rectangular structure oriented gable end to the front
(Figure 22). The center doorway is framed by tall shuttered

windows designed to light the gallery, which spanned the front of the sanctuary. Similarly, the initial Methodist church building in Matthews, erected in 1877, followed this accepted gable-front form, with a foundation of rock piers, and two front doors. Two aisles led to the pulpit on its raised platform, with an Amen Corner on either side. Like most small-town and rural churches organized in this period, Matthews Methodist Church was situated on land donated by a founding member and constructed by a band of congregants.[41]

None of the nineteenth-century churches survives in the small towns, for during the early decades of the new century expanding memberships led to a wave of rebuilding. The new church buildings were larger and more architecturally polished than their precedessors. They made use of mass-produced building materials; were sheathed with brick veneering; and often constructed by professional contractors. The popular stylistic choice among the various denominations was the Gothic Revival, clearly signified by rooflines, arched windows and doors, and corner towers that pointed sharply heavenward, and pointed-arched windows.[42]

In 1901 members of Huntersville's Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church selected this style for its new building at the north end of town (Figure 23). The handsome brick edifice follows a cruciform plan, featuring four broad gabled wings, each pierced by a round louvered opening and Gothic-style windows, and a steepled corner entrance tower.
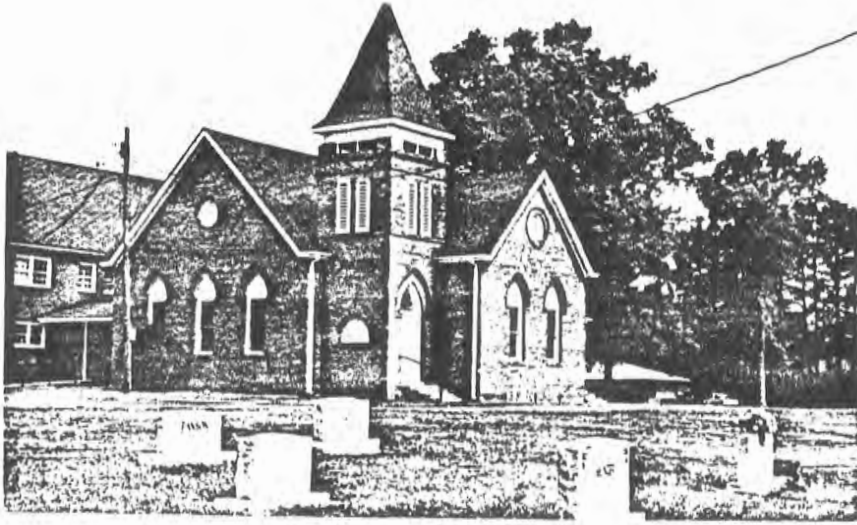
Figure 23. Associate Reform Presbyterian Church, Huntersville, 1901.

Figure 24. Matthews Presbyterian Church, Matthews, 1929-1942.

Although the church's 1969 sanctuary faces motorists on
Highway 115, the original building was oriented towards
Church Street and the railroad tracks, serving daily notice
to turn-of-the-century train passengers that Huntersville
was a progressive, and Presbyterian, town.[43]

For more than four decades into the twentieth century,
as membership levels and fund-raising drives allowed, the
county's small-town churches turned to the Gothic Revival.
The style might be interpreted with two flanking towers, as
at the 1903 Matthews Methodist Episcopal Church (no longer
standing), or accented with concrete trimming and a striking
rosette window in the center gable, as at the Matthews
Presbyterian Church, completed in stages between 1929 and
1942 (Figure 24).[44]

Not every new church, however, reflected this penchant
for the Gothic. A significant exception is the Matthews
Baptist Church, constructed in 1929 in the Neo-Classical
Revival style (Figure 25). Whereas the towns'
nineteenth-century churches might have suggested the
classical temple idea in their gable-front forms and
occasional use of cornice returns, the Matthews Baptist
Church is a more literal version. The brick building is
dominated by a full projecting (prostyle) portico with large
columns and a fanlight in the pediment.[45] In its
small-town setting it is an especially forceful design that
commands attention and verifies the Baptist church's solid
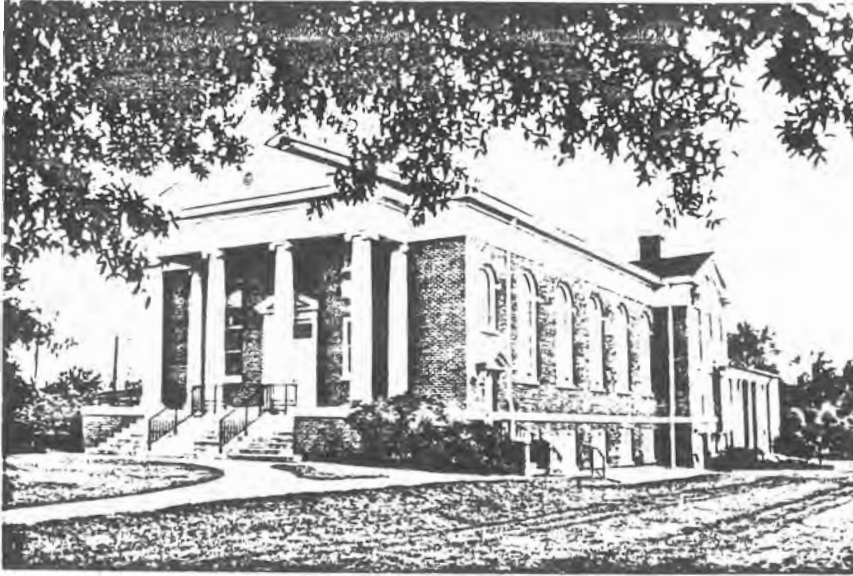standing in the community.

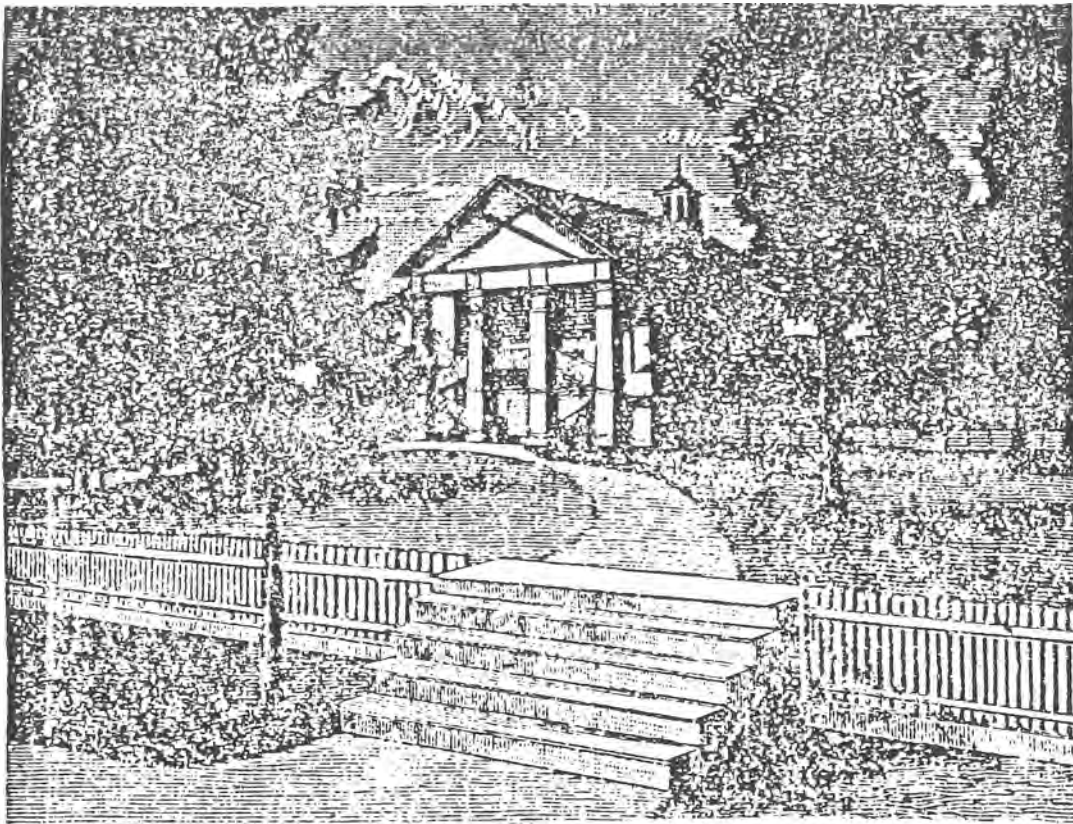Figure 25.   Matthews Baptist Church, Matthews, 1929.

Figure 26.   Huntersville High School Academy, Huntersville, ca. 1888.

The symbolic power of pillared temple-form architecture
was not new to the county's towns. When, in the 1880s,
Huntersville High School Academy was rebuilt on present-day
Gilead Road, the ambitious new facility was rendered in a
two-story temple form (Figure 26). No longer in existence,
the structure was most likely inspired by Eumenean and
Philanthropic Halls, the pair of handsome Greek Revival
debating halls erected at Davidson College in 1849-1850.
Like these buildings, it featured a prostyle pedimented
portico, with four colossal pillars that enclosed twin
stairways rising to the auditorium. The academy, to be
sure, was a far less refined version of these collegiate
temples, substituting, for instance, functional, square
brick posts for the elegant stone columns that grace the
Davidson College buildings. Nevertheless, it presented the
town of Huntersville with its first architectural landmark,
that was hailed as "one of the largest and most modern
school structures in the western North Carolina region."[47]

"The Academy," as it was known locally, was the most
significant of a host of private academies that existed in
the small towns during the late nineteenth century.
Huntersville alone contained three at various times before
1900, and Matthews and Pineville had at least one
apiece.[48] The role of the private school, however, began
to diminish when Mecklenburg County instituted public
education in 1895.

While local communities funded modest weatherboarded

public schoolhouses shortly thereafter--Matthews, for
example, had a three-room school with a two-person staff in
1895--it was not until 1907 that large and stylish public
schools appeared. In that year the General Assemby passed a
bill to help finance rural high schools for white students
throughout North Carolina, and Matthews and Huntersville
were designated as the Mecklenburg sites. In Huntersville
Orr's academy was expeditiously converted to a state high
school. But in Matthews a "modern brick building" was
planned, one that would stand out as the town's largest
structure. Completed in 1907, the impressive two-story
schoolhouse, crowned by a cupola that rose above the
treetops, was a pledge to Matthews' white citizens of
quality public schooling.[49]

Currently a community center, the Matthews School exists
largely as it appeared following remodellings and expansions
that occurred in 1912 and the mid-1920s (Figure 27). The
building's facade features an impressive entrance portico,
with hollow fluted columns supporting a broad cornice and
pediment. Added during the latter phase of renovations, it
attests to the enduring appeal of classically inspired
scholastic architecture in the county. Other elements
reflect more practical considerations in the planning of the
modern public schoolhouse. The banks of large multi-paned
windows across the facade provided natural light and
ventilation for the classrooms and main stairway. The
interior of the main block consisted of classrooms,

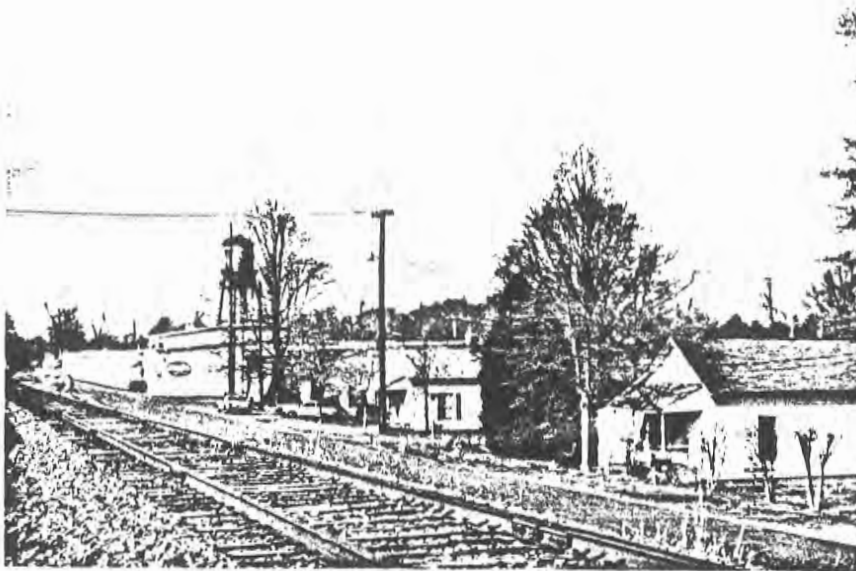Figure 27.   Matthews School, Matthews, 1912, ca. 1925.

Figure 28.   Anchor Mills and mill village, Huntersville, 1898.

restrooms, and offices conveniently arranged along center
and side halls. At the back, a substantial multi-purpose
auditorium wing was constructed to serve the needs of the
school as well as the community.

MILL AND MILL VILLAGE

Situated apart from uptown was the landscape of the
textile mill. In Huntersville its realm was a tract of land
at the north end of town, east of the railroad. Pineville's
cotton-mill community was confined to the south end of town,
behind Main Street. In Cornelius the geographical pattern
was not as discrete, as the Cornelius Cotton Mill adjoined
commercial buildings, and worker housing for the Gem Yarn
Mill spilled over onto Main Street. Even so, the majority
of mill cottages was clustered around the town's two textile
plants, behind the uptown houses that lined Catawba Avenue
and Main Street.

Cotton mills were a powerful presence in these small
towns. "'The Mill,'" reflected a lifetime resident of
Huntersville, "was known just as that--'The Mill.' It was
there all my life, and even before."[50] Textile companies
were the towns' primary employers and builders. They
created signature landscapes, replete with large brick
factories and tall watertowers symbolizing "progress," and
scores of recognizable mill houses that were badges of
social class. "The Mill" in Huntersville (Anchor Mills)
manufactured dress ginghams and chambrays in a long brick

structure adjacent to the railroad (Figure 28). The
building's functional design is a simple representation of
mill architecture constructed throughout the Piedmont in the
late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It consists
of brick exterior walls pierced by rows of long arched
windows (now bricked in) and capped by a low, bracketed
gable roof. In 1915 Anchor Mills employed 176 men, women,
and children, who operated 10,700 spindles and 400 looms,
and lived in rows of look-alike houses beside the mill.[51]

Mill-house architecture in the county's towns conformed
to standardized forms and arrangements that were found in
most Southern textile villages. Housing reflected common
folk as well as industrial vernacular types, many of which
were promoted by the influential mill engineer Daniel
Augustus Tompkins in his 1899 Cotton Mill: Commerical
Features.[52] A typical mill house in Huntersville and
Cornelius is the one-story, side-gable cottage, with two
front rooms, rear kitchen ell, and shed front porch (Figure
-29). Anchor Mills also put up a number of shotgun houses,
distinguished by their narrow, linear forms and gable-front
roofs. Perhaps adapted from the three-room shotgun house
design depicted in Tompkins' book, these cottages were
marched down straight streets directly south of the mill.

The largest mill village among the towns took shape at
Pineville, under the successive ownerships of Dover Mill
and, in 1902, the Chadwick-Hoskins Company. By the 1920s
the electric-powered Chadwick-Hoskins Mill No. 5 at

Figure 29.   Mill houses, Anchor Mills, Huntersville, 1898.

Pineville was employing over two hundred workers,
manufacturing gingham in addition to new lines of assorted
"cotton goods."[53] About 1920, on the eve of the plant's
expansion of its product line, Chadwick-Hoskins commissioned
planner Earle S. Draper to redevelop the mill village
(Figure 30). Based in Charlotte, Draper was a major figure
in the field of mill village design, as well as a prominent
city planner. Between 1917 and 1933 his firm designed
nearly one-hundred-fifty villages in the South.[54] Draper
advertised his services in the region's leading trade
publication, Southern Textile Bulletin, stating simply that
he was qualified in "laying out new villages, improving old
mill villages, and beautifying mill grounds. . ."[55]

The Draper Plan blended elements of the typical
semirural mill village with features that reflected modern
trends in city planning. In customary fashion, he arranged
the main section of the village in a functional grid pattern
of streets, with housing neatly distributed on half-acre
parcels, spacious enough for home gardens, chicken coops,
and other outbuildings. A cluster of houses for black
workers was set aside in a segregated "colored section."
Draper's scheme, however, also included "self-conscious"
planning concepts adapted from suburban developments of the
period.[56] He envisioned tree-lined streets, landscaped
green space for parks and a community building, a boulevard
anchored by the baptist church at one end and a rotary at
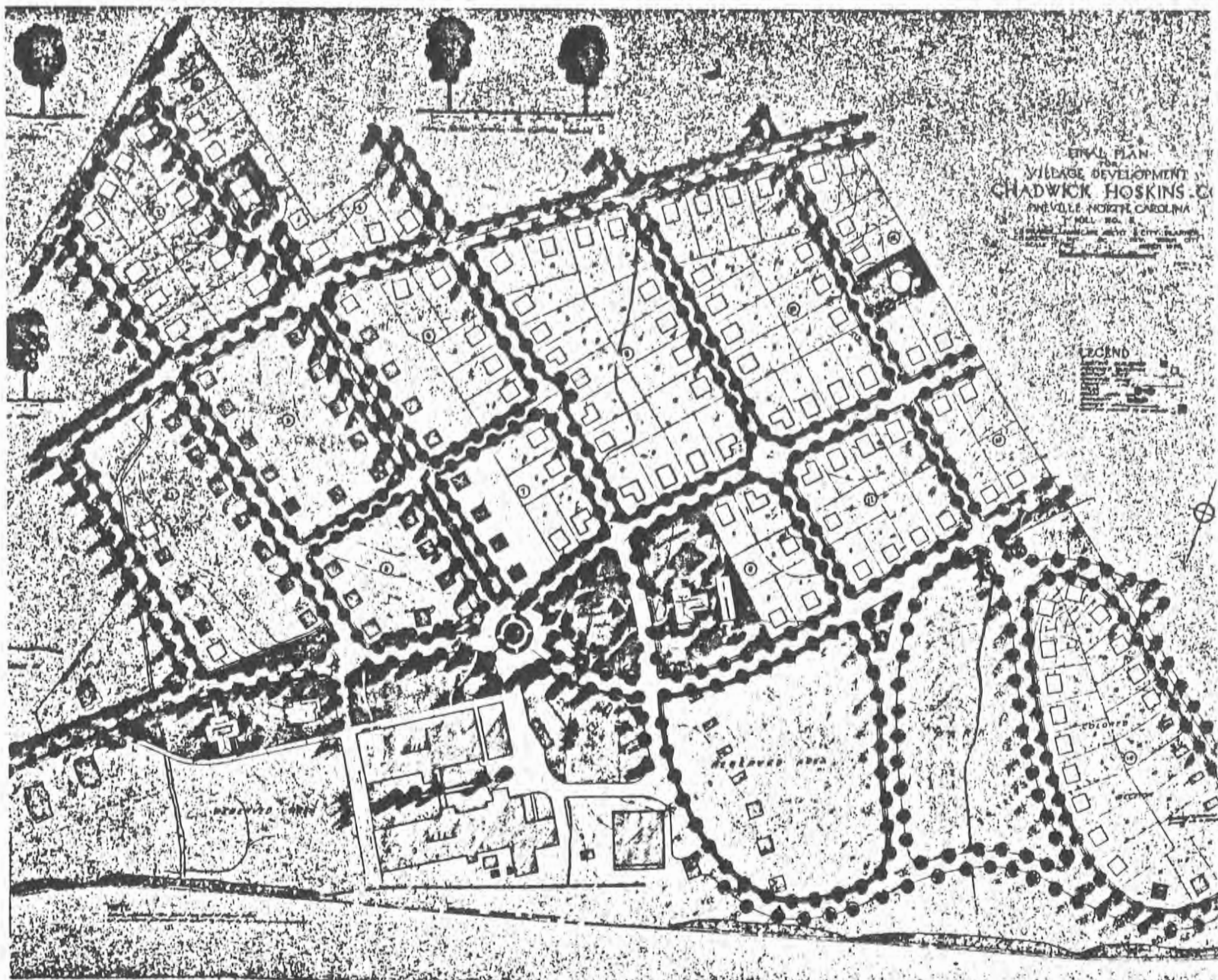the other, and, on the north side, winding roadways.

Figure 30. Earle S.Draper Plan for Chadwick-Hoskins
Mill No. 5, Pineville, 1920. (North Carolina Collection,
University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill)

Although this design was never fully realized--the ambitious landscaping, for example, did not occur, and the rotary and community building never left the drafting board--the mill village at Pineville exists today in many ways as it appeared following its 1920s expansion. Park Avenue features a grassy median flanked by straight rows of worker housing (if not the shade trees Draper had intended) (Figure 31). Portions of the plan's curvilinear street pattern are also visible, but the dwellings for blacks that it encircled have disappeared.

The great majority of mill houses, however, remain. They make up an array of types and styles revealing occupational status in the mill as well as their particular dates of construction. At the north end of the village, near Main Street, stand a pair of handsome, turn-of-the-century Queen Anne cottages that housed overseers of the spinning and weaving rooms (Figure 32). From their verandahs facing Cone Street, the village's major artery, these men could keep a watchful eye on the comings and goings of millhands. The nearby lanes hold rows of white frame hip-roofed and T-plan workers' cottages--forms that were repeated in Southern industrial landscapes throughout the early twentieth century (Figure 33). Other areas of the village are filled with housing erected during the mill's post-World War I expansion. Here story-and-a-half frame bungalows were erected for foremen, while one-story square cottages with hip roofs, shed
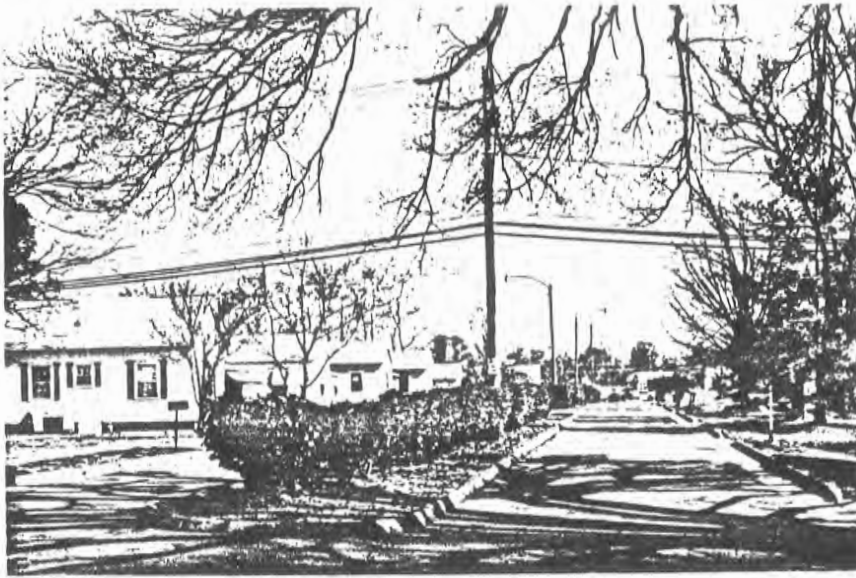
Figure 31.   Park Avenue, Dover Mills/Chadwick Hoskins Mill No.5, Pineville, 1890s, 1920s.

Figure 32.   Overseers' houses, Dover Mills/Chadwick-Hoskins Mill No. 5, Pineville, 1890s.

Figure 33. Mill houses, Dover Mills/Chadwick Hoskins Mill No.5, Pineville, 1890s.

Figure 34. Mill houses, Dover Mills/Chadwick-Hoskins Mill No. 5, Pineville, 1920s.

dormers, and inset porches housed operatives (Figure 34).
In all likelihood these dwellings were part of the advancing
mail-order housing market, whose influence in mill villages
and suburbia alike soared in the 1910s and 1920s. If so,
then Draper ordered the plans and materials from a firm such
as "Quick-bilt Bungalows" of Charleston, South Carolina,
which specialized in "attractive homes" for "industrial
villages." The dressed lumber and fixtures were then
delivered by rail, "cut-to-fit," and quickly assembled at
the site.[57]

For those who worked at Mill No. 5 in the 1920s and 30s,
the pattern of everyday life was one experienced by
millhands across the Piedmont. A rural bred
self-sufficiency permeated the village. Families cultivated
vegetable gardens, planted chinaberry trees for shade, and
swept their yards. They raised chickens behind their
quarters and kept cows and hogs in stalls and pens located
in a pasture not far from the mill. The pasture and
livestock shelters were furnished to the workers by the
Chadwick-Hoskins Company.[58]

The company also supplied its labor force with a variety
of other basic services and facilities--for ultimately the
village, like the factory, was ownership's domain. The mill
provided housing, which it rented out for about one dollar a
week, or twenty-five cents per room. The mill sold workers
ice, coal, and stove wood, and supplied water at community
pumps along the streets. (Until the 1940s, when Cone Mills

acquired the plant and extended water and sewer lines through the village, none of the households had running water or indoor plumbing.) The mill also wired operatives' homes for electricity; but until the 1930s furnished power only on Thursday afternoons, the time delegated for washing and ironing.[59]

Millhands had little time for household activities or leisure, as most of their waking hours were consumed by the mill. To be sure, workers created lives beyond the mill and village, but twelve hours of each workday and a half-day on Saturday were spent in the factory. By the 1920s a week's work brought the most skilled male employees twenty-eight dollars "cash wage," and unskilled laborers eleven dollars. Women, who were often channeled into jobs in the spinning rooms, usually earned less than the men. Black men were shut out of most textile jobs, and labored mostly in the "yard" hauling cotton bales and loading boxcars for a survival wage. Black women were excluded from mill work altogether.[60]

AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

The African-American district at Chadwick-Hoskins Mill No. 5 was unique in the small towns. The black who toiled in the mill yards in Huntersville or Cornelius never inhabited the mill villages there. Instead, most African Americans in Huntersville and Cornelius, as well as Matthews, were concentrated in distinct enclaves at the

outskirts. These were racially segregated places, born of
obdurate racial prejudice and proscribed by social customs
that townsfolk rarely questioned.[61] Living conditions in
black districts, which were often poorly drained lowlying
areas, could be undeniably harsh. For example, in 1909 the
county's health director ordered the Town of Huntersville to
destroy five "colored" dwellings because tuberculosis was
"raging" there.[62] Nonetheless, over time blacks
established solid communities, erecting houses, churches,
and schools along the red clay roads that dipped and turned
through the landscape (Figure 35).

Black districts grew in tandem with the towns. Across
North Carolina and the South during the late nineteenth and
early twentieth centuries, African Americans quit
sharecropping for a better chance in towns and cities.[63]
In Mecklenburg County, by the 1910s substantial black
settlements, had developed at the outskirts of the three
towns. At the south end of Huntersville, blacks inhabited
Pottstown, an area named for its leading resident, brick
mason Otho Potts. Smithville, Cornelius' principal
African-American settlement, grew up at the west end of town
on land belonging to white farmer George Smith. Smith sold
lots to blacks, who paid cash for parcels and secured loans
at the Cornelius Savings and Loan to build their houses. At
the eastern border of Matthews, spanning both sides of the
railroad, Tanktown was that town's black community.
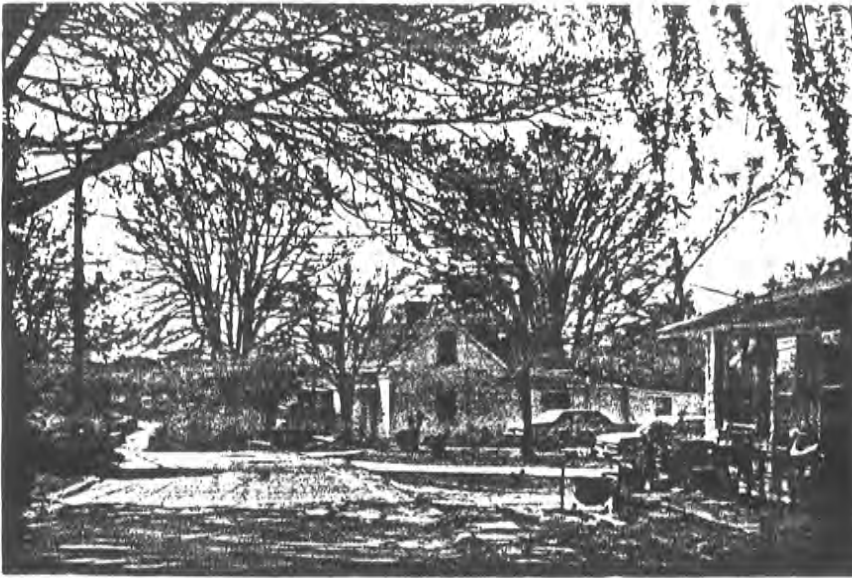"Tanktown" (today known as Crestdale) referred to the

Figure 35. Smithville, Cornelius.

Figure 36. Jesse Johnson Bell House and Yard, Tanktown (Crestdale), Matthews.

railroad water tank that originally stood at heart of the
district, near the tracks. The men who operated the tank
and lived nearby made up the settlement's earliest
residents.[64]

Black men were engaged in an assortment of jobs both
within and outside their community. Many performed odd jobs
in the towns, or worked as field hands at neighboring farms.
Others held steadier employment as laborers in the local
mills or railroad yards, skilled artisans, Main Street
barbers, ministers, or maintenance men for uptown
institutions and business establishments. Tanktown's Robert
Kirkpatrick, for example, was the janitor at the Matthews
School. Harvey Boyd founded Tanktown's Mount Moriah Baptist
Church and was its first minister. His son Calvin worked in
a brickyard near Matthews, and grandson Sam Boyd was a
maintenance man and later a switchman for the Seaboard
Railroad. I. A. Withers in Smithville was a house
carpenter, while neighbor James Derr worked at both of
Cornelius' textile mills. A number of men in Pottstown were
employed as janitors, yard men, and kitchen help at the
Mecklenburg Sanitorium, which opened directly across the
railroad tracks from the community in 1926.[65]

Many of the women of Pottstown also worked at the
sanitorium, while females in each of the all-black districts
made the daily trip uptown to jobs as domestics for white
households. In Tanktown, for instance, Jesse Johnson Bell,
a sharecropper's daughter and wife to Sanders Bell, who had

also farmed on shares, worked as the cook for the Dr. Thomas
Neely Reid family of Matthews.[66] Although the Bell House
is a new replacement of the original on the site, its
setting reflects the pride of place and self-reliance that
historically characterized African-American communities
(Figure 36). Cedar and chinaberry trees shade the unpaved
lane that winds to the residence, which has ornamental
shrubs and flowers near the foundation, and farther away, a
vegetable garden and sizeable chicken pen.

Early dwellings in Tanktown, Smithville, and Pottstown
usually represented familiar vernacular forms. Typical is
the gable-roofed house with two all-purpose front rooms and
a rear kitchen and bedroom ell that stands among similar
houses in Smithville (Figure 37). Tenuous economic
circumstances rarely allowed residents the luxury of
building dwellings that reflected the latest architectural
trends, or that even rose above a single story. But an
exception is the I. A. Withers House (Figure 38). About
1910, Withers displayed his carpentry skills and social
status in Smithville by erecting this two-story, frame
residence on the most prominent site, at the main entrance
into the district. Though it may not be as grand as the
Colonial Revival residences which appeared uptown in this
period, during its years as the Withers homeplace--when the
wraparound porch featured handsome classical columns--this
house was Smithville's finest example of domestic
architecture.

Figure 37.   House, Smithville, Cornelius, ca. 1900.

Figure 38.   I. A. Withers House, Smithville, Cornelius, ca. 1910.

Churches and schools were other principal elements of the historic black landscape. The churches, in particular, were the focal points of each community. In the face of pervasive racial segregation, they served as favorite gathering places, provided rare opportunities for blacks to exercise leadership skills, and offered social welfare for families in need. Baptist churches arrived in Pottstown and Tanktown almost immediately after the first families. St. Phillip Baptist Church was established in Pottstown in 1876, and in 1879 Mount Moriah Baptist Church held its first services in Tanktown. The Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, founded in 1917, is considered to be Smithville's first religious institution. In the ensuing decades a variety of other churches--Presbyterian, African Methodist Episcopal, and United House of Prayer--were also formed. None of the early church buildings, which long-time residents remember as simple wooden structures, remains. For as these churches have continued to play active roles in the black districts, their congregations have periodically erected new buildings, usually with brick or concrete veneers.[67]

Schoolhouses arose more slowly in these communities, where public money for black school facilities was sorely limited.[68] Before the 1920s, the public education of Mecklenburg's rural black children was mostly a sporatic affair, conducted in substandard structures often located beyond a reasonable walking distance for most children. Sam

Boyd of Tanktown recalls that the nearest school for blacks
was a converted shotgun house situated miles away, at Hood's
Crossroads. "We didn't go to school but about three months
out of the year. We children had to help our parents on the
land. We were another pair of hands to plant, hoe, weed,
and harvest."[69]   The decade of the twenties, however,
saw a dramatic increase in the number and quality of black
rural schools in Mecklenburg County and throughout the
South. The driving force behind the improvement of black
schooling in these years was the Julius Rosenwald Fund.
Rosenwald, who was president of Sears, Roebuck and Company
and one of America's leading philanthropists, established
the Fund to provide matching grants to Southern, rural black
communities for school construction. The Rosenwald
school-building program was a cooperative effort, combining
Rosenwald money and building designs with the financial and
administrative support of black communities and local school
boards. During the 1920s, when the Rosenwald Fund was most
active, seven hundred and sixty-seven Rosenwald schools were
completed in North Carolina, twenty-six of them Mecklenburg
County.[70]

Smithville, Pottstown, and Tanktown each received a
Rosenwald school. In 1922-23 a three-teacher facility was
built upon a high point of land near the center of
Smithville. The following year Tanktown received a
four-teacher school; and in 1925-26 a Rosenwald school
designed for four teachers was erected in Pottstown.[71]

With the cost of a four-teacher schoolhouse averaging four thousand dollars--equal to a middle-class suburban house--a well-organized local fund raising campaign was essential. In Tanktown, for example, the parents of school children were assessed twenty-five dollars, or pledged to help erect the new "Matthews Colored School." Additional money was raised through community fish fries and a donation from the mission society of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.[72]

Rosenwald designs produced the most up-to-date rural black schools of their time (Figure 39). Each plan incorporated banks of tall sash windows and included siting specifications to maximize natural lighting. Layouts were planned to be "simple and efficient," with classrooms and "industrial room" arranged around a central corridor and cloak room. All buildings were one-story high, and most were sheathed in white weatherboarding.[73]

Despite the physical improvements, educational facilities in the African-American communities remained below the standards set by white schools in the adjacent towns. "There was a thousand miles of difference in the colored schools and the white schools then," recalls Elnora Stitt, who attended the Matthews Colored School. "Our school never had an indoor bathroom. It never had a cafeteria, even when it closed in 1966, and all the black children were sent to Matthews School."[74]. Moreover, the new Rosenwald schools provided, at best, only eighth-grade courses, rather than the high school education offered to white students.
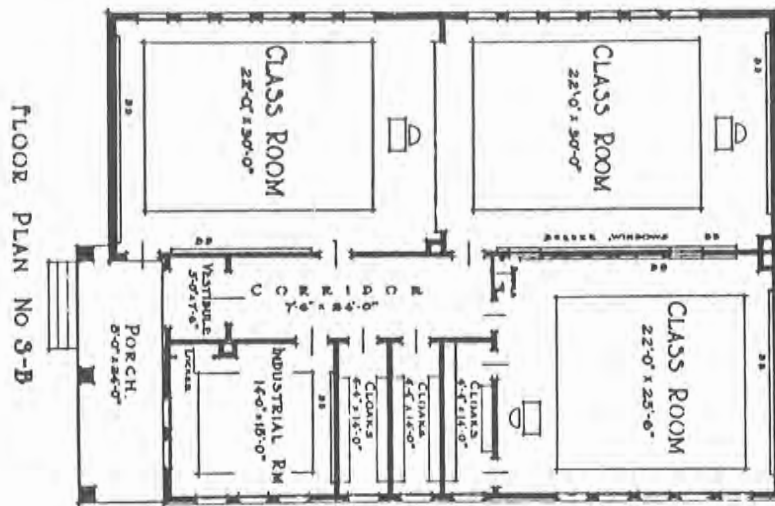
Figure 39.   Three-Teacher Rosenwald School Plan.
(Hanchett, 1988)

Today Rosenwald school buildings survive in both Pottstown and Smithville, where they have been modified over the years and converted to community centers. They represent the most influential early steps taken to elevate the quality of black education in the county, decades before federal intervention and the beginnings of school integration. The Rosenwald buildings also contribute to the historic patterns of land use and significant examples of early architecture that characterize the small-town black districts, even as these communities receive long-overdue physical improvements.[75]

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