HISTORIC LANDSCAPES OF MECKLENBURG COUNTY:
THE SMALL TOWNS

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July 1991
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 accommodate 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 strongest 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 known 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. 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." 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, liverys, 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 synonymous 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.  

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 panacea. 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.  

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."  

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. 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.
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 accommodating 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.\textsuperscript{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 amidst 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 coincided 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.  

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 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. 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.

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 Mecklenburg'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. Exuberant in detail, the porch is trimmed with brackets with a pinwheel design, turned pendants, 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 superintendent 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 beffited 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 disguise 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." 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.\footnote{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.\footnote{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.  

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.  

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 its citizens.\textsuperscript{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 respectability and practicality of purpose through a gable-front design, usually equipped with a gallery, one or two main aisles, and a platformed altar and pulpit opposite the entrance.\textsuperscript{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 predecessors. 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 Assembly 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.

Currently a community center, the Matthews School exists largely as it appeared following remodelings 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." 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 gingham 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.\(^5\)

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*.\(^5\) 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." 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. 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 proscripted by social customs that townsfolk rarely questioned. 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. 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. 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 domesticos 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. 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 sporadic 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." 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.

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.
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.
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44. J. W. Russell, "The First One-Hundred Years': A History of the Matthews Presbyterian Church," available at the Matthews Presbyterian Church, Matthews, N.C.

45. Ruth B. Gardner, "Matthews Baptist Church, Matthews, North Carolina," available at the Matthews Baptist Church, Matthews, N.C.


47. Ibid.; Branson, 1900.


49. Ibid.


58. Rhetta May McCoy interview; Hall, et al., 66-85.

59. Rhetta May McCoy interview.


66. Interview with Jesse Johnson Bell, April 2, 1991, Matthews, N.C.

67. Ruby Alexander interview; Sam and Viola Boyd interview; Interview with James Derr, July 24, 1991, Cornelius, N.C.


69. Sam Boyd interview.


71. Ibid., 437.


73. Hanchett, "Rosenwald Schools," 401-406.
