

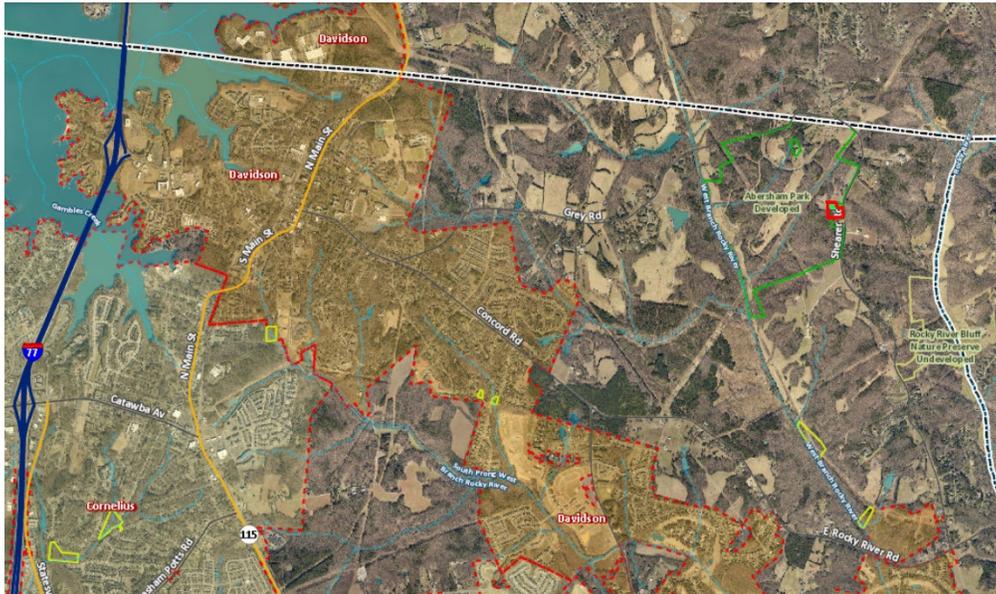
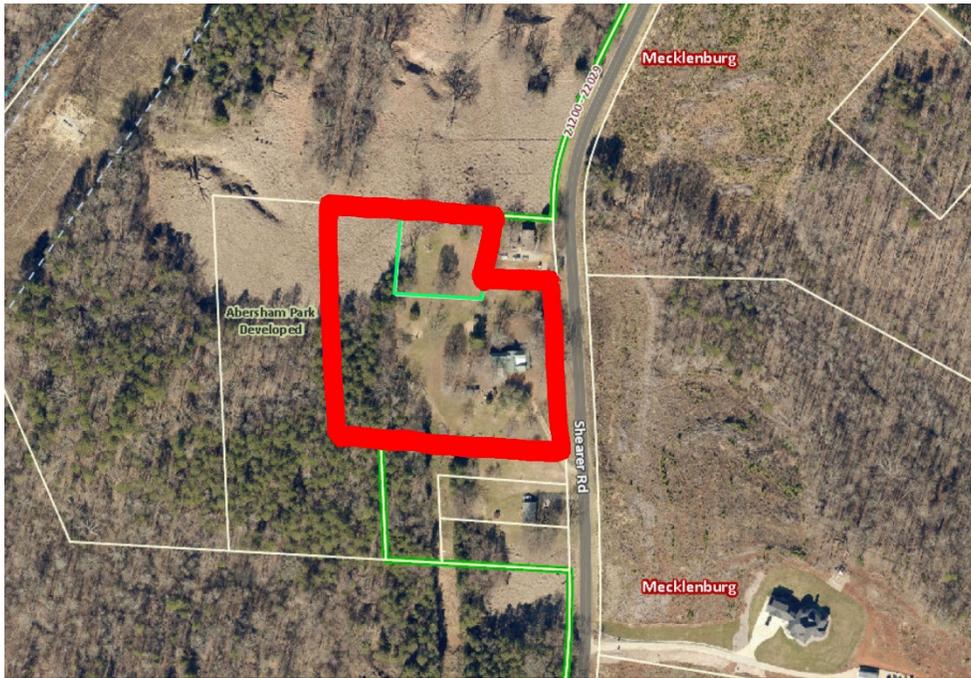
**Designation Report on the
Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse**



1. **Name and location of property:** The property known as the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse is located at 21525 Shearer Road, Davidson, North Carolina.
2. **Name, address, and telephone number of the current owner of the property:**

Rosie Lee Sherrill and Allen Sherrill
21525 Shearer Road
Davidson, NC 28036
3. **Representative photographs of the property:** This report contains representative photographs of the property.

4. A map depicting the location of the property:



5. **Current Tax Parcel Reference and Deed to the property:** The tax parcel numbers are 00305103 and 00305104. The most recent deed to the first parcel is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 17108, Page 681. UTM coordinates are 3928484.69 N and 518467.95 E. The most recent deed to the second parcel is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 2374, Page 241. UTM coordinates are 3928550.37 N and 518431.58 E.
6. **A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Susan V. Mayer of SVM Historical Consulting.
7. **A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural description prepared by Susan V. Mayer of SVM Historical Consulting.
8. **Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S 160A-400.5.**

Special significance in terms of its history, architecture and/or cultural importance:

The Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse is the oldest remaining family farm dwelling on Shearer Road in Mecklenburg County. Built in ca. 1902 expanded in ca. 1920s and ca. 1950s, the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse retains a high degree of integrity as an early-twentieth century farmhouse.

Integrity of location, design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:

- 1) Location: The Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse was constructed approximately three miles east of Davidson on Shearer Road (then Grey Road) ca. 1902, and the house has remained in that location since construction.
- 2) Design: The Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse has grown in size since being constructed as a hall-and-parlor house ca. 1902. It was expanded to the front and rear ca. 1920s, creating a cross-gabled roof plan, and the back porch was enclosed ca. 1950s. These changes and expansions were made to accommodate the growing Johnson family and to modernize the house. No changes to the home's plan have been made since the last expansion ca. 1950s. Through this growth, however, the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse has retained its integrity as a modest family farm dwelling of the first half of the twentieth century.
- 3) Setting: Set upon 4.27 acres of land, the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse retains its original rural setting. Neighboring houses were added ca. 1960s by descendants of Charlie and Carrie Johnson, serving to demonstrate the traditional rural settling of extended family in a concentrated area.

- 4) **Workmanship:** The construction of the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse reflects the workmanship of early twentieth century carpentry and rural home construction.
 - 5) **Materials:** The Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse abounds with original materials dating to the construction of or additions to the house ca. 1902, ca. 1920s, and ca. 1950s.
 - 6) **Feeling:** Remaining relatively unchanged since ca. 1950s, the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse retains the feeling of a modest family farm dwelling of the early twentieth century.
 - 7) **Association:** The Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse does not claim historic relevance based on association.
- 9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal:** The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes a designated "historic landmark."
- 10. Portion of the Property Recommended for Designation:** The interior and exterior of the house and the property associated with the tax parcels are recommended for historic designation.

Date of preparation of this report: July 31, 2020

Prepared by: Susan V. Mayer, SVM Historical Consulting

Abstract

The Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse is historically relevant for its scarcity as an early-twentieth century farmhouse in a decreasingly rural landscape. The Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse is one of the few farmhouses remaining from the family-owned farms which made up the majority of residences in the Davidson vicinity and northern Mecklenburg County in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Built ca. 1902, the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse was once part of a tract of approximately 170 acres of land that produced cotton, corn, wheat, and other crops as well as livestock. Through familial division of property and land sales over the years, the size of the Johnson Sherrill land shrank to its now current size of 4.27 acres. It is the oldest farmhouse remaining on Shearer Road in Mecklenburg County, which is increasingly beset by suburban sprawl that has crept into northern Mecklenburg County over the past thirty years.

Historical Essay

Johnston/Johnson Family and Farming in North Mecklenburg County

While most of numerous creeks coursing through Mecklenburg County fall within the Catawba River watershed, a small portion of the county drains into the Rocky River, which forms the border with Cabarrus County east of Davidson. Early settlers to Mecklenburg County were drawn to its many creeks and built mills and other establishments along these waterways. Scots-Irish immigrants, including the Johnston family, migrated from across the Atlantic Ocean and south from Pennsylvania and Virginia to the fertile piedmont region of North Carolina. These early Mecklenburg County settlers kept small subsistence farms, though large royal land grants would see the establishment of some plantations.

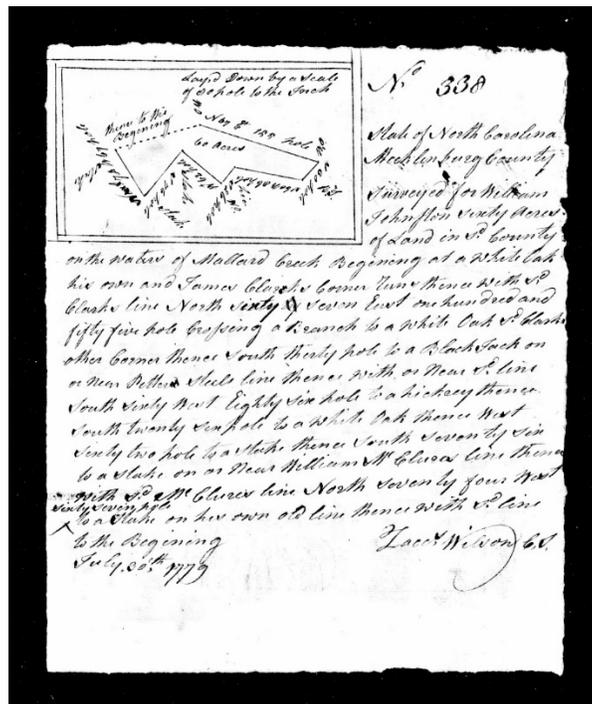


Figure 1 Land grant to William Johnston on Mallard Creek by the state of North Carolina in 1779.

Agriculture in northern Mecklenburg County was operated largely on the family farm scale during the antebellum period, though there were a few larger plantations with

many slaves. The family of William Johnston was comfortable. Born in North Carolina of Scots-Irish heritage, William Johnston (1741-1812) married Mary Ann Parks (1742-1806) in 1762, and they had eleven children. He was granted by the state a plot of sixty acres along Mallard Creek and adjacent to the lands of William McClure in July 1779. During the Revolutionary War, he supported the colonial cause, providing in February 1780 to Mecklenburg County 400 pounds of beef valued at 22 Spanish milled dollars. In his will, William bequeathed his “negro woman Sally” and “negro man Joe” to two of his sons. Items bequeathed from William’s estate included 200 acres of land, two slaves, horses, wagons, farming implements, livestock, furniture, and crops to be sold, with any remaining property to be sold at private or public sale and split between his heirs.¹

By contrast, William’s grandson John Calvin Johnston (1808-1850) met with less success. Born October 4, 1808 in Mecklenburg County, John Calvin married Margaret Black in April 1833, but she died two years later. He then married Annis Deweese, a member of the namesake family of Deweese Township, in January 1836. John Calvin purchased around 200 acres land in Cabarrus County between 1835 and 1839. He and Annis lived next to his brother David and near another brother Marcus for several years. Cabarrus County records show that John Calvin was heavily in debt, though it is unclear whether this was due to poor business practices by John Calvin or simply bad luck. By February 1847, John Calvin owed \$626 to 11 creditors, and he signed an indenture to James L. Johnston with his younger brother Milas Watson Johnston as witness. John Calvin ceded a 145-acre tract on the Rocky River in payment as well as the sale of livestock, farm equipment, and household

¹ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 12, Page 91; DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) Ancestor # A204540; “William Johnston,” North Carolina Revolutionary Pay Vouchers, 1779-1782, <http://www.familysearch.org>, accessed January 17, 2020; Mecklenburg County Will Book D, Page 97.

goods in repayment of his debts. By 1850, the Johnstons moved back to Mecklenburg County. John Calvin died September 28, 1850, leaving Annis and their six living children—plus another with whom Annis was pregnant.²

The probate of John Calvin Johnston's estate provides insight into the functions and possessions of a Mecklenburg County family farm just before the Civil War. Widowed women were legally entitled to a year's support in provisions. For Annis, this included 175 bushels of corn; four barrels of flour; 1,000 head of pigs and cows; coffee and sugar; two sacks of salt, and spices consisting of pepper, allspice, and ginger; a work horse and two dairy cows along with 500 bundles of fodder and 20 dozen oats for feed; farm implements; furniture including beds and cupboards; cooking utensils; a spinning wheels and cotton cards; and \$5 for contingencies. The remainder of John Calvin's estate was sold to cover his debts and any expenses. Annis had to purchase any additional items outside her entitled allotment. She spent \$73.50 for her side saddle, bed and other furniture, more livestock, a loom and gear, and other small or personal items. This also include the hire of Bob, a "negro boy," through the beginning of 1852. Annis and the children moved near her brothers Alfred and Henry Deweese in the Huntersville area.³

² Cabarrus County Deed Book 14, Page 158; Cabarrus County Deed Book 14, Page 153; 1840 U. S. Census; Cabarrus County Deed Book 17, Page 235.

³ "John C. Johnson, "North Carolina Estate Files, 1663-1979," FamilySearch.org, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-997J-ZKP8?cc=1911121>.

The Johnson Family on Shearer Road



Figure 2 William Hugh Johnston and Mary Jane Andrew Johnston. From Ancestry.com.

William Hugh Johnston, the seventh child of John Calvin and Annis, was born January 1, 1849 in Mecklenburg County. He moved to Cabarrus County around 1868 and married Mary Jane Andrew on July 16, 1872. Hugh and Mary Jane had nine children, eight of whom lived to adulthood—Charlie, Lizzie, John, Smiley, Frances, Ed, Arthur, and Houston; son William died at age one in 1874. The Johnstons likely moved back to Mecklenburg County after marrying and may have rented a farm until purchasing 53 acres of land on Grey Road in January 1881 from Burwell and Catherine B. Cashion. They mortgaged the land to Sarah E. McKnight, a member of Coddle Creek Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church where Hugh and Mary Jane attended, then after repaying the debt that year remortgaged the land to William Maxwell. A crop loan by Hugh with George Graham McKnight in December 1886 stated that “cotton, corn, fodder, peas, rice & other agricultural products” were grown on the Johnston farm. Hugh had a successful crop, repaid the loan of \$16.97, and sold a bale (450 lbs.) of cotton to McKnight. While this continuous use of credit by the Johnstons may seem alarming, research into farm

ownership published by the North Carolina State Board of Agriculture in 1922 showed that this practice was not uncommon among farmers, both owners and tenants, and had been for many years.⁴

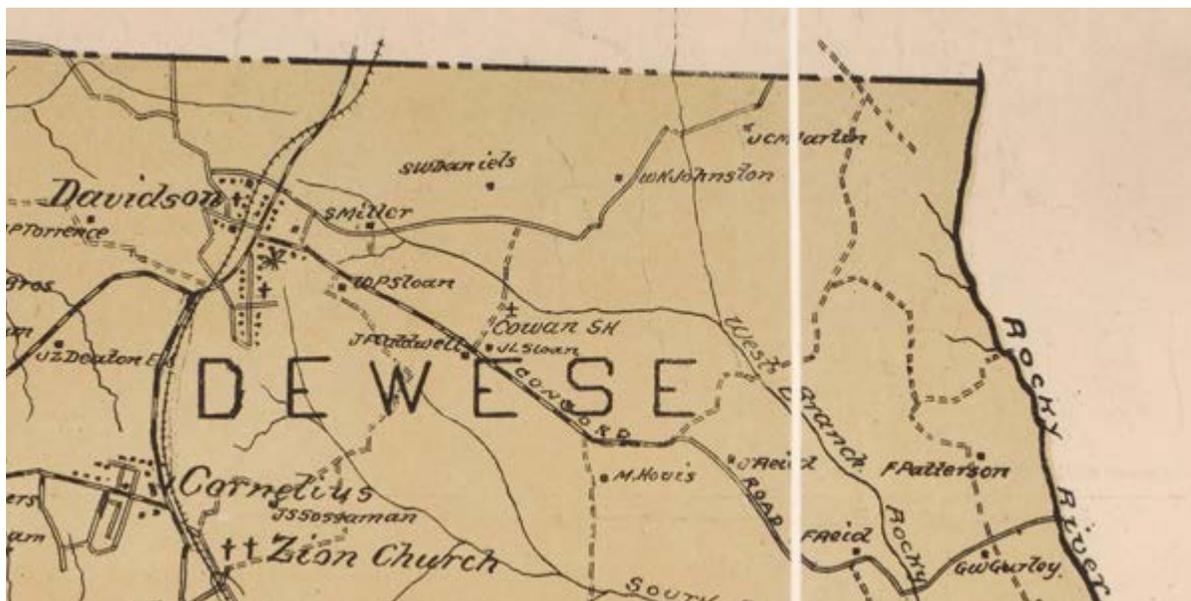


Figure 3 This 1911 map of Mecklenburg County shows the homeplace of William Hugh Johnston on what is today Grey Road in the northeastern corner of Mecklenburg County. Just down the road is his brother-in-law and sister John C. and Frances Johnston Martin.

In December 1890 Hugh purchased adjacent property of 43 acres with a two-story log house, barn, and corn crib from Hanson Helper, the proprietor of the Helper Hotel and a merchant in Davidson. Viola Johnson Boyle, a granddaughter of Hugh and Mary Jane, remembers that her grandmother had used inheritance money, likely from her maternal grandfather Joseph Samuel Isenhour, to purchase this property. Hugh and Mary Jane added to their land holdings in December 1894 with the purchase of 85 acres from Hugh and Hattie Sloan on the west branch of the Rocky River in Mecklenburg County. This land was

⁴ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 51, Page 314; Mecklenburg County Deed Book Mecklenburg County Deed Book 27, Page 4; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 51, Pages 315-316; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 52, Page 295. George Graham McKnight was a brother of Sarah E. McKnight and an elder of Coddle Creek Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. Later, William and Mary Jane would be founders of Shearer Presbyterian Church; Carl C. Taylor and C. C. Zimmerman, *Economic and Social Conditions of North Carolina Farmers* (Raleigh, NC: U. S. Bureau of Agricultural Economics, North Carolina Tenancy Commission, 1922), <https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/ncfarmers/menu.html>.

south of Hugh's home place and adjoined the farm of Alfred Fisher on what is today Shearer Road.

Their oldest child was Charles McAuley Johnson⁵, born March 3, 1872 in Mecklenburg County. Known as Charlie, he married Carrie E. Winecoff on December 4, 1902. Carrie was a native of Cabarrus County, born July 25, 1881, and her family lived near Mary Jane's brother Smiley Andrew. Charlie and Carrie had nine children—Annie, James, Lewis, Susie, George, Rosie, Ruth, Kenneth, and Melvin, all born in the hall-and-parlor house their parents built ca. 1902 on 85 acres of land that belonged to Hugh and Mary Jane. Charlie and Carrie eventually grew their farm to approximately 170 acres. They did not own their farm and house until early 1914. Just before Hugh died, he and Mary Jane deeded the tract to them. They expanded their land holdings in 1918, when Carrie purchased 30 acres across the road from C. A. and Katie Mayhew, and again in 1945 with an additional 56 acres.⁶

⁵ It is unknown why this generation of family used the Johnson surname rather than Johnston.

⁶ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 76, Page 607; Viola Boyle, "Memories of William Hugh and Mary Jane Andrews Johnson for All Their Grandchildren," (unpublished manuscript, n.d), 2; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 52, Page 295; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 101, Page 309; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 322, Page 344; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 391, Page 188; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1146, Page 178.



Figure 4 The photo shows the L-shaped back porch which was enclosed in the 1950s. Jimmie Sherrill is holding the bike. Ca. late 1940s.

The growing Johnson family expanded the hall-and-parlor house in the 1920s, adding three rooms and a porch to the front and two rooms and a large L-shaped porch to the back. Jimmie Sherrill, the son of Charlie and Carrie's daughter Rosie, remembers that the underside of the farmhouse was open, and he would play underneath. A wood porch ran the entire length of the front of the house, and an L-shaped porch was located at the back facing the southwest. There was no interior toilet, so the family used an outhouse located out from the back porch. The house was heated with wood stoves in two rooms, and a third chimney and stove were added later.⁷

⁷ Susan V. Mayer interview with Jimmie and Allen Sherrill, June 27, 2020.

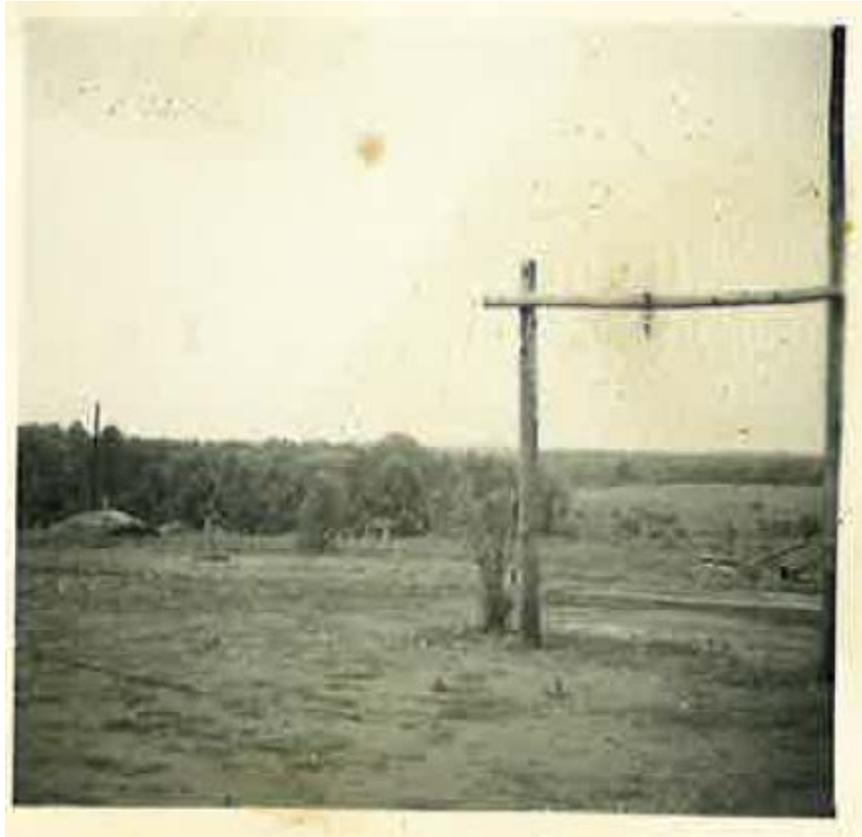


Figure 5 Looking south from near the house toward the boulders near the modern-day property line. The pole structure was used for processing slaughtered hogs.

The remembrances of Viola Johnson Boyle (1901-2005), written in an unpublished manuscript, paint a picture of farm life in rural Mecklenburg County during the 1910s when she was a young girl. Although she describes the farm of Hugh and Mary Jane, the same activities also occurred at other nearby Johnson farms. Crops grown included cotton, corn, sorghum for molasses, sweet potatoes, and Irish potatoes. There were numerous fruit trees—apple, peach, pear, damson plum—as well as concord grape vines. Blackberries and strawberries were also grown. Poultry included chickens, guineas, and ducks. Dairy cows produced milk used to make buttermilk and butter. Lizzie, Charlie’s sister who never married, would take the extra dairy products along with some live chickens and eggs to Davidson to sell to boarding houses and trade with stores. She brought home “sugar, coffee, spices, rice, oatmeal and some few things that could not be produced on the farm” as well

as cash. Mary Jane kept busy keeping the house as well as other domestic activities. She made sauerkraut kept in the wellhouse and smoked meats. She baked pies and canned using fruits grown on the farm. Mary Jane made lye soap using ash stored in a hopper. Water was added to the hopper and mixed with the ash, and lye poured out a spout. This was mixed with fat and scraps of fat meat in an iron pot to make soap. She also made yarn for socks using cotton grown on the farm. Mary Jane would card the cotton fiber into bats and spun it into yarn on her small spinning wheel. She and Lizzie would piece quilt tops and hand quilt them. Lizzie also tended the chickens, ducks, and guineas.⁸

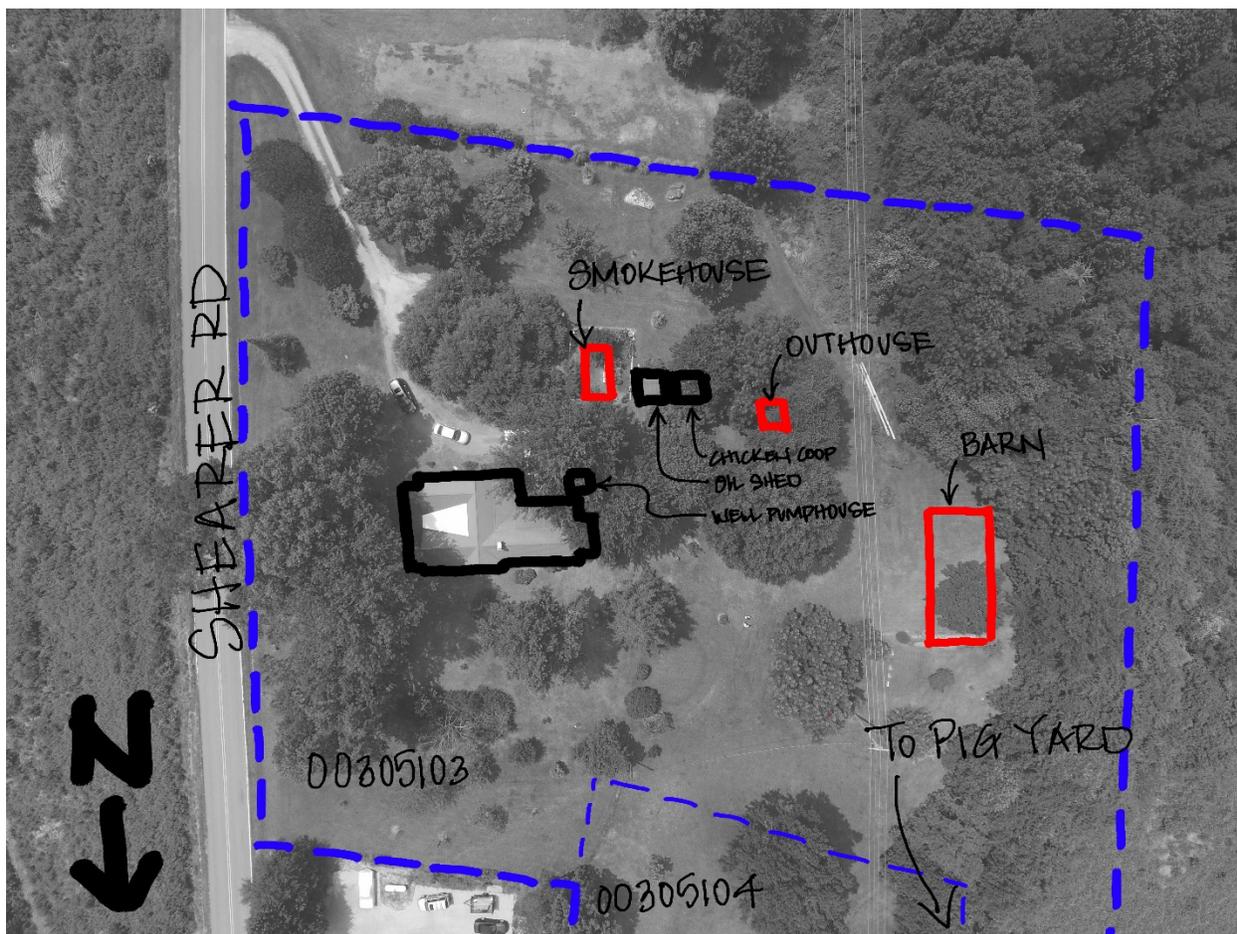


Figure 6 Site plan showing the extant (black) and former (red) building at the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse.

⁸ Boyle, 2-7, 9.

Jimmie was born in 1936 at the farmhouse and grew up there. He remembers his grandfather Charlie, like Hugh, primarily grew cotton, corn, and wheat as well as sorghum for molasses. Livestock included dairy cows, pigs, chickens, and two big horses. There was a large barn behind the house. It had been rebuilt in the 1920s after a suspicious fire destroyed the original structure (along with a neighbor's barn that same night). The new barn was wood frame built upon a concrete knee wall. Other farm buildings included a smokehouse, oil shed for tractor fuel and later heating oil, and chicken coop southwest of the farmhouse. A corn crib was located to the north of the barn. Wood piles for cooking and heating fuel were located out past the corn crib and near the rear porch. A dinner bell was located in the backyard, and Carrie or another family member would ring it to alert those out around the farm to come eat. Jimmie remembers that neighbors would also listen for the Johnson bell for their own meals. South of the house were two large boulders, one nicknamed the "family rock" since family members over the years would pose for photos upon it.⁹

⁹ Jimmie and Allen Sherrill interview.



Figure 7 The smokehouse, oil shed, and chicken coop southwest of the house. Ca. 1940s-1950s.



Figure 8 A view from the house toward the barn. The well house is on the right. Ca. 1940s-1950s.

During Jimmie’s childhood, Charlie and sons Lewis, James, George, and Kenneth (nicknamed “Shorty”) ran the farm. James also worked in a nearby cotton mill as a sweeper. Jimmie helped out when not in school, plowing with a Ford tractor and performing other needed labor. Charlie farmed into his seventies. An article in the *Charlotte News* in April 1946 solicited responses from Mecklenburg County farmers about soil conservation efforts. The article noted, “Mr. Johnson still gives lots of his thought and time to stopping his land from washing away and improving the soil on his farm,” and that, “It hurts him to see his soil being washed away into the creeks and rivers.”¹⁰

¹⁰ “Conservation of the Soil,” *Charlotte News*, August 29, 1946.



Figure 9 This 1938 aerial shows the Johnson Sherrill farm (three squares in middle of image) and the surrounding rural lands.



Figure 10 The small house at the Johnson farm is shown in the right corner of this photo. Ca. 1940s-1950s.

Jimmie also remembers a small house (Figure 10) was located to the northwest of the farmhouse, shown in the Figure 9 as the top black square. Some family members lived in the house at one time or another, but it is unclear whether it served as a tenant farmhouse for non-family members at any point. Charlie sold the house and 0.68 acres of land to his son George in 1951, who likely lived in the house for a time. George and his wife Sarah sold the land to his siblings in 1962. George died in the following year, and the house was demolished by 1965 according to aerial imagery.¹¹

Charlie died at the farmhouse in August 1953 at age 81, and Carrie passed away there in September 1958. With Charlie's death, farming drew to an end. The barn was

¹¹ Jimmie and Allen Sherrill interview; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1510, Page 100; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 2374, Page 241.

dismantled in the 1970s, and most of the farm equipment was sold or given away by Shorty over the years. The smokehouse and corn crib had also been torn down. Only the oil shed, chicken coop, and well pump house remained, though the family members still maintained a large garden. Parceling of the farmland had begun in 1951, with the 0.68-acre lot sold to George and his wife Sarah. Later that year, Charlie and Carrie split off from the farmland ten acres with the house, which they deeded to James, Lewis, Rosie, Shorty, and Jimmie, who all lived there. After Carrie's death, the family decided to sell most of the farmland rather than split it between the twelve heirs who had interest in the property. In 1961 the Fishers purchased eleven acres of the land adjacent to their own farm to the south. Jimmie and his wife Doris, who married in 1959, purchased a two-acre portion south of the farmhouse that same year to build their own house. The family sold another small tract north of the house to Billy Ray Eagle, Susie's son, and his wife in 1962. The remainder of the land, approximately 93 acres on either side of Shearer Road, was sold to James and Helen Allison in 1970. Lewis, Shorty, and Rosie remained in the house until their respective deaths in 1989, 2000, and 2016.¹²

¹² Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1510, Page 100; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1511, Page 343; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 2301, Page 39; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 2243, Page 344; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 2359, Page 60; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 3189, Page 53.



Figure 11 This ca. 1970s retouched aerial photograph of the Johnson-Sherrill House hangs near the side door entrance.

Decline of Farming and Suburban Growth around Davidson

Though farming at the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse ended in the 1950s, the decline of the small family farm in Mecklenburg County had actually begun in the 1920s. Lands nearer to Charlotte grew in value compared to the smaller profit margins of farming. Many farmers sold their land for development and moved to larger urban areas to work in manufacturing or other industries. During the Great Depression, this rural-to-urban transition accelerated, and by 1940 Mecklenburg County had lost over 27 percent of its farms over the previous three decades.¹³

¹³ Sherry J. Joines and Dan L. Morrill, "Historic Rural Resources in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

After World War II Mecklenburg County grew quickly, anchored by Charlotte which now boasted a population of over 100,000. The increasing urbanization of Charlotte encroached upon the small towns of northern Mecklenburg County, transforming them from previously small hamlets into suburban communities. While the growth of Davidson was slower than neighboring Cornelius and Huntersville, its population had increased from 1,550 in 1940 to 2,573 in 1960. The population growth in northern Mecklenburg County required expanded municipal services, and rural land in the northeastern corner of the county was eyed for several potential infrastructure projects. In late 1967 the Board of County Commissioners announced plans to lease property for the county's first landfill on Shearer Road. Area residents protested the placement of a garbage dump near their lands and asked Frances Martin, Charlie's sister and the owner of the land, to reconsider. Convinced by her neighbors, she promptly refused to lease the land, and plans fell through.¹⁴

While the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse remained largely unchanged, growth threatened its rural setting. In fall 1988, plans were announced for a new country club development with over 700 homes off Davidson-Concord Road. Such a large number of new residents in the area meant new infrastructure would be needed—roads, schools, and utilities in the least. A proposed bypass to divert traffic to Interstate 77 from the north Mecklenburg towns included using Shearer Road as a route, which would have directly impacted the farmhouse. Traffic had increased on the road as the area grew. Allen, Jimmie's youngest son, remembers that in earlier years, "You could roll down [backing out of] the

¹⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, December 19, 1967; *Charlotte Observer*, January 25, 1968. The landfill was placed near Huntersville.

driveway with your eyes closed and not worry about hitting a car.” After 1992, talk of the bypass had faded from newspapers, and rural Shearer Road had been spared from expansion for the moment. But that same year, the Runneymeade equestrian community was announced on 138 acres along the Rocky River off Shearer Road. These large suburbanized neighborhood developments in the rural landscape, meant big changes for northeastern Mecklenburg County would continue. In 2005 the Davidson Town Council approved the Abersham development on former Johnson family land between Shearer Road and Grey Road for 58 single-family homes. Jimmie and Allen also sold a four-acre parcel west of the farmhouse to Mecklenburg County, which would help provide a buffer between Abersham and the house.¹⁵

Citizen groups worked to protect the rural environment from the seeping suburbanization around Davidson. While a tentative group of north Mecklenburg landowners assembled in 1989, it was not until 2000 that the Davidson Lands Conservancy was formed to purchase land or development rights in exchange for tax breaks for landowners. In 2002 the trust successfully convinced Mecklenburg County to purchase 61 acres on the Rocky River off Shearer Road to create the Bracket Bluff Nature Preserve. DLC was able to protect more land in Abersham, with the developer agreeing to place conservation easements on nearly half the property. Russ Warren, a founder of the Davidson Lands Conservancy who lived near where River Run was built, predicted the “insanity of chasing out the farmers and using tax money to buy parkland for the people

¹⁵ Residents Saying No to Traffic Davidson, Cornelius,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 30, 1989; “Some Residents Wary of Bypass Road Plan,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 2, 1991; Jimmie and Allen Sherrill interview; “Equestrian Community Planned Near Golf Haven,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 24, 1992; “Deal on Green Space OK’d,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 18, 2007; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 24093, Page 97.

who move up here for the rural atmosphere” in 1990. His prediction became reality in 2002, when the Town of Davidson, working with DLC, purchased the Fisher family farm for \$2.5 million with plans to create a passive-recreation park. This county-owned greenspace would be added to in the 2010s with the creation of Abersham Park.¹⁶

By the mid-2000s, the surge in development in northern Mecklenburg County and into Cabarrus County was overwhelming, with nearly 5,000 homes under construction along the N. C. 73 corridor. However, the onset of the Great Recession in 2008 doomed many of these residential developments including Abersham, which was foreclosed upon. Only one house had been constructed, leaving empty paved streets running through the former farmland. In 2011 Mecklenburg County purchased its 243 acres for \$3.7 million. Christened Abersham Park, it linked via the West Branch Greenway with the Fisher Farm Regional Park to create a large passive-recreation area which preserves the historic rural character of the Shearer Road area. The park adjoins the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse land on the west. While the creation of Abersham Park has ensured the former Johnson family land will remain undeveloped, however it is no longer the clear pastureland of its farming days.¹⁷

The Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse is the oldest remaining farmhouse and is the only on Shearer Road in Mecklenburg County. It stands as a reminder of the family farms that once dominated the rural landscape of northern Mecklenburg County through the mid-twentieth century.

¹⁶ “Control North’s Growth, Panel Urged,” *Charlotte Observer*, May 31, 1989; “Land Trust Wants to Keep That Country Feeling,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 8, 1989; “Commissioners OK Budget and 200-Acre Farm Purchase,” *Charlotte Observer*, June 16, 2002

¹⁷ “Once-Bucolic N.C. 73 in Throes of Growing Pains,” *Charlotte Observer*, December 16, 2007; “County Acquires Park Land,” *Charlotte Observer*, September 17, 2011.

Architectural Description



The Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse has evolved over the years as the needs of its residents have changed, yet the property retains its integrity as an early-twentieth century farmhouse in northern Mecklenburg County. Built ca. 1902 for newlyweds Charlie and Carrie Johnson on his father's land, the house was added onto in the 1920s to accommodate the growing Johnson family. After the deaths of Charlie and Carrie in the 1950s, family members remaining in the home expanded its interior space and added some modern features. This included enclosing an L-shaped back porch, adding a bathroom, and updating the kitchen. The bathroom was remodeled in the 1980s which included adding a toilet; before this, residents of the home had used an outhouse. Changes to the farmhouse in the last twenty years to maintain its condition have been sensitive to its architectural and

historical integrity. The Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse exists as a simple dwelling representative of the family farms that were once common in Mecklenburg County but have largely vanished.



The Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse is located on Shearer Road approximately three miles from downtown Davidson. The house is sited upon a hill about 80 feet from the two-lane road and faces east. A series of three small walls, one constructed of brick by the road and the other two closer to the house being stone, form terraces rising from the road to the house. Concrete stairs are at the lower two terraces. Two parcels comprise the property to be designated, and the house is located on the larger 3.6-acre parcel. This property is covered with trees that family members have transplanted from various locations in the

area, creating a pleasant shaded environment around the farmhouse. The gravel circle driveway approaches the house from the south and loops around a live oak tree, though this tree has grown to where the circle will need to be widened. In addition to the house, several farm outbuildings and outbuilding ruins remain on the property. Located southwest of the farmhouse are a pumphouse, an oil shed, and the former chicken coop (now a storage shed for lawn maintenance equipment). The ruins of the barn are west of the farmhouse. South of the farmhouse near the property line are two large boulders. The western edge of the property is wooded. The second parcel of land is largely open.

There are many common elements found on the exterior of the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse. The cladding is ca. 1950s asbestos-cement shingle. The roof is ca. 2000 standing seam metal, which replaced ca. 1920s corrugated tin roofing on the front portion of the house and ca. 1950s asphalt shingles on the cross-gabled rear portion. The soffits and fascia were overlaid with aluminum replacements around the same time the roof was replaced. At each gable are rectangular wood louver vents. The house is built on brick piers with a brick foundation wall around the exterior. This wall is punctuated with metal grates on the south elevation, and openings on the north elevation are filled with metal mesh screening. All windows are double-hung sash windows framed with simple wood trim. Most of the windows are 1-over-1 vinyl-replacement windows, but the ca. 1920s 6-over-6 wood windows at the front elevation have been retained. Masonry elements in poor condition were either repaired or replaced ca. 2000 by Mooresville mason Donald Oswalt.



The front elevation of the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse faces east toward Shearer Road. Paired gables, added to the original hall-and-parlor house ca. 1920s, extend forward, and paired windows flank the ca. 2005 Craftsman front door. The windows have been covered with acrylic panels for protection and to aid energy efficiency. The ca. 1950s shed-roofed concrete front porch extends nearly the entire width of this elevation; this porch replaced the ca. 1920s wood porch. Four ca. 1950s wrought-iron columns are evenly spaced in pairs on either side of the porch, and wood 4x4s have been placed behind the columns for additional support. The ca. 2000 brick steps leading to the porch replaced ca. 1950s smaller steps in poor condition.



The south elevation of the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse is three bays wide. A small brick chimney, rebuilt ca. 2000, extends into the gabled end that comprises the original portion of the house. The chimney is flanked by a pair of single windows in the center bay. The front bay, part of the ca. 1920s addition, also has a single window set slightly off-center in the space. The rear bay has no fenestration but was formerly part of the L-shaped back porch that was enclosed for the bathroom ca. 1950s. The topography of the property slopes from south to north, and the brick crawlspace wall is shorter on this elevation than on the north side of the house.



The back elevation of the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse faces west. It has two components—an L-shaped portion facing southwest and comprising the former large back porch and the west-facing portion that includes the gabled end of the house with a pair of windows and a shed addition ca. 1950s. The windows in this section of the house replaced ca. 1950s windows and are shorter than their older counterparts at the front of the house. The L-shaped portion consists of two single windows on the west wall and a six-panel door with storm door ca. 2000 and triple windows on the south wall.



The rear-most section of the house is a shed addition. The shed addition has a single window centered in the wall at its north elevation, another single window set to the right in the west elevation, and a half-lite door with storm door in the south elevation. The shed addition is supported by individual brick piers and shelters a door to the crawlspace of the principal section of the house.



The north elevation of the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse clearly conveys the growth of the house over the years. This elevation is four bays wide. The first bay has one window, and the second bay is the cross-gabled section with paired windows. The third bay also has paired windows. The fourth bay has paired windows that are shorter and wider than the others in this elevation, and without thick wood trim between the two windows, indicating that this fenestration was added at a later time.

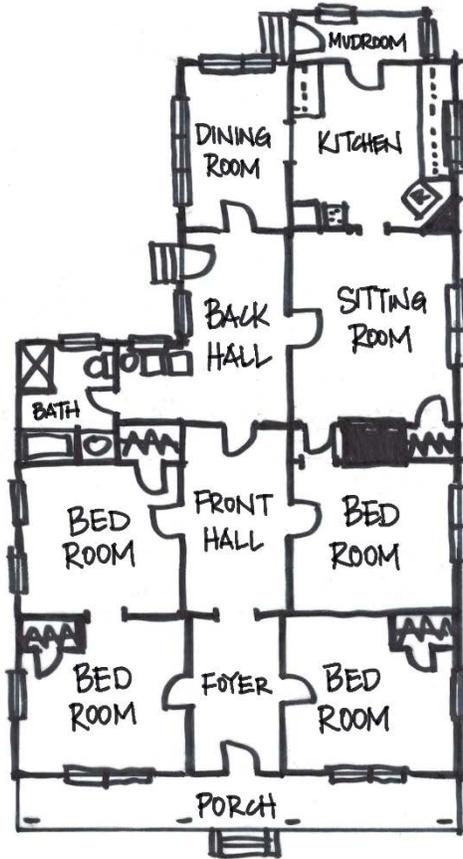


Figure 12 Floor plan of the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse. NTS.

The interior of the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse now consists of twelve rooms. All doors are two-panel solid wood with original hardware. The opening from the foyer to the front hall is an uncased flat arch. There are pine floors throughout, though the back four rooms and bathroom have vinyl flooring placed over them. All walls are gypsum wall board over tongue-and-groove wood boards. The rear south bedroom has linoleum then carpet over the original flooring. The ceilings have a variety of treatments, consisting of exposed tongue-and-groove wood boards in the front right bedroom, 12" x 12" acoustic ceiling tiles in the other three bedrooms and sitting room, wood beadboard in the foyer and front hall, and gypsum wall board in the remaining rooms.



Figure 13 The cased opening between the left two bedrooms has been temporarily removed. Visible are the original ca. 1902 tongue-and-groove wood board walls (right) and the ca. 1920s tongue-and-groove board covered walls (right) covered with ca. 1950s gypsum wall board.



Figure 14 Foyer looking toward front hall.



Figure 15 Front left bedroom looking into back left bedroom.



The ca. 1920s front right bedroom offers the clearest view of the evolution of the interior of the Johnson Sherrill Farmhouse. The unfinished wood floors run parallel to the

front elevation; this is the only room where this occurs. The tongue-and-groove board walls are covered with gypsum wall board, with the seams and nail holes mudded and sanded but unpainted. The ca. 1920s tongue-and-groove board ceiling is visible in this room. A closet was added at a later date. The room has a pair of ca. 1920s 6-over-6 wood sash windows in the front elevation, and a single ca. 2002 1-over-1 vinyl sash window in the north elevation.





The back right bedroom is part of the ca. 1902 hall-and-parlor house. The fireplace in this room was rebuilt ca. 2000 due to its poor condition. The owner noted that the mortar was in poor condition, and when in the attic he could see the sparks going up the chimney. The floors in this room, which are finished, as well as in the two left bedrooms, front hall, and foyer run perpendicular to the front elevation.



The sitting room likely dates to ca. 1920s. The rebuilt fireplace has the stovepipe from an oil burning heater. The fireplace is flanked by doors. The left door is a closet with

attic access, and the right door leads into the back right bedroom. Above the fireplace is an inset display cabinet.





The L-shaped ca. 1920s back porch is now comprised of a ca. 1980s bathroom back hall, and dining room. These rooms all have gypsum wall board walls and ceilings and vinyl flooring.



The kitchen was added ca. 1920s and remodeled ca. 1950s. Solid wood cabinets with slab doors are topped with plastic laminate countertops and backsplash. The

southeast corner of the kitchen where the refrigerator now sits is a 45-degree angled wall that enclosed a flue for a wood-burning stove. The stovepipe thimble is extant.

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