



**Survey and Research Report  
On The  
Cornelius High School Agriculture Building**

**October 30, 2018**

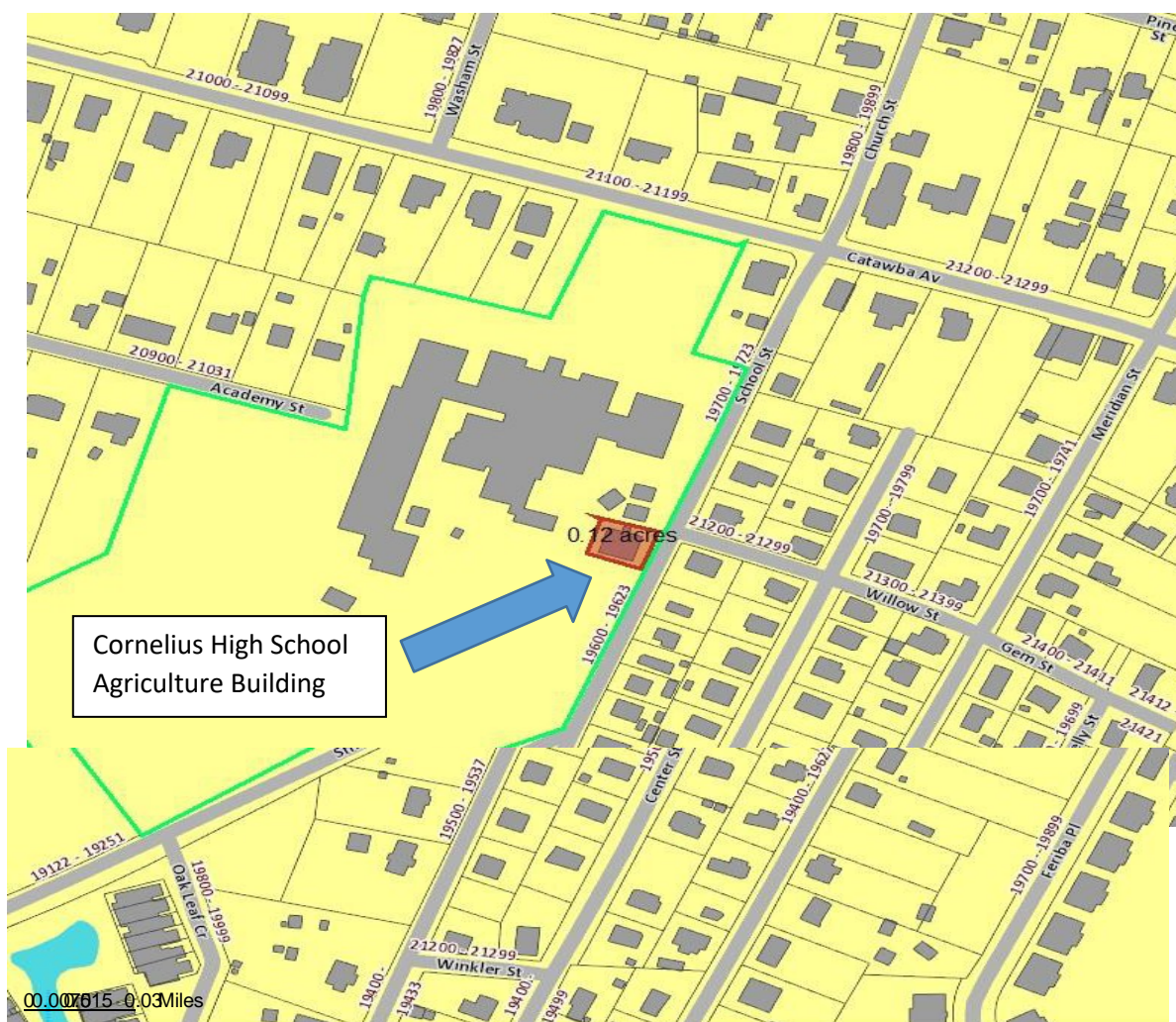


**Cornelius High School Agriculture Building (c. 1960)**



**Cornelius High School Agriculture Building (2018)**

1. **Name And Location Of The Property.** The Cornelius High School Agriculture Building is located on the Campus of the Cornelius Elementary School at 21126 Catawba Avenue in Cornelius, North Carolina.
2. **Name And Address Of The Present Owner Of The Property.**  
  
Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education  
P.O. Box 30035  
Charlotte, N.C. 28230
3. **Representative Photographs Of The Property.** The report contains representative photographs of the property.
4. **Map Depicting The Location Of The Property.** This report contains a map depicting the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference To The Property. The most recent deed to the property is recorded in Deed Book 22025 at Page 514. The tax parcel number of the property is 00520129.

6. A Brief Historic Sketch Of The Property. The report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

7. A Brief Physical Description Of The Property. The report contains a brief physical description of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

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.

a. Special Significance In Terms Of Its History, Architecture, And/Or Cultural Importance. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the Cornelius High School Agriculture Building possesses special significance in terms of Mecklenburg County. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

- 1) The Cornelius High School Agriculture Building is one of two surviving agriculture buildings of the four that were erected in Mecklenburg County in 1937-38 and funded by the P.W.A.
- 2) The Cornelius High School Agriculture Building illustrates the efforts of the Mecklenburg County School System to assist farmers and aspiring farmers to gain the knowledge and skills demanded by an increasingly complex era of agricultural practice.
- 3) The Cornelius High School Agriculture Building was designed by Willard G. Rogers, an architect of local and regional importance.
- 4) The Cornelius High School Agriculture Building is a sophisticated example of a Classical Revival style institutional structure used for educational purposes in Mecklenburg County.

b. Integrity Of Design, Setting, Workmanship, Materials, Feeling, And/Or Association. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the physical description of the Cornelius High School Agriculture Building included in this report demonstrates that the Cornelius High School Agriculture Building meets this criterion.

- 1) Location: The Cornelius High School Agriculture Building retains a degree of integrity in reference to its location, as the building remains at its original site of construction.
- 2) Design: Changes to the exterior of the Cornelius Agriculture Building have affected the building's historical integrity. The original front door and sidelights have been replaced with a slab door and brick in-fill. Of the original six windows on the upper story of the façade of the building, three have been removed along with their masonry sills and in-filled with brick. The opening for a fourth window has been partially in-filled with brick to accommodate a shorter window. On the basement level, six short windows along with sills have been removed and in-filled with brick. Despite these changes, the façade retains a good degree of its historic character. Most notable is the surviving hipped-porch supported by original tapered posts and pilaster, with surviving brick cheek walls. The west elevation is largely intact, with the exception of the northmost window opening on upper story, which has been in-filled with brick. On the east elevation the northmost window opening on upper story has been in-filled, and a large opening in the basement level has been partially in-filled with brick and a modern slab door. On the rear elevation all of the windows and sills have been removed and the openings have been in-filled with brick. The third window opening from the east elevation on the upper story has been expanded to contain a metal door connecting to a fire escape. Four large HVAC grills have been

cut into the rear elevation. Despite these changes to the building, the Cornelius Agriculture Building has retained sufficient design integrity for local historic landmark status. The building's materials and form have largely been retained. Even in-filled, the window openings convey the original design of the fenestration.

3) **Setting:** The Cornelius High School Agriculture Building is located on the campus of the Cornelius Elementary School. While the other buildings on the campus date from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Cornelius High School Agriculture Building is somewhat isolated to the south of the newer buildings and the streetscape along School Street has retained a reasonable degree of historic integrity.

4) **Workmanship:** The Cornelius High School Agriculture Building retains its primary form and many of its exterior architectural features demonstrating workmanship.

5) **Materials:** The Cornelius High School Agriculture Building retains many of its exterior architectural features demonstrating a good retention of historic materials.

6) **Feeling:** The Cornelius High School Agriculture Building retains a high degree of historic feeling as an early-twentieth-century school building.

7) **Association:** The Cornelius High School Agriculture Building 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 that becomes a designated "historic landmark." The Cornelius High School Agriculture Building is exempt from the payment of Ad Valorem taxes.

**Date Of The Preparation Of This Report:** October 30, 2018 (updated 12-01-19)

**Prepared By:** Dr. Dan L. Morrill (updated by Stewart Gray)



## **A Brief History Of The Cornelius High School Agriculture Building**

**Dr. Dan L. Morrill  
October 30, 2018**



The special significance of the Cornelius High School Agriculture Building is best understood within the context of major changes that were impacting agricultural education in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s. Educators could not ignore the technological innovations that were transforming the rural landscape. Because of the introduction of mechanized farm equipment, such as International Harvester's Farmall tractor in 1924, agriculturalists, to be successful, had to broaden and deepen their understanding of mechanics and other scientific and technological subjects.<sup>1</sup> The discovery and production of chemical fertilizers and herbicides meant that farmers could no longer rely exclusively upon the techniques for preparing and enriching the soil that had been passed down from generation to generation. "The new tools required more specialized skills from farm operators," writes historian Paul K. Conkin.<sup>2</sup> Rural electrification also had a profound impact upon the daily routine of farm life and contributed greatly to the need for new learning. In 1935, three percent of North Carolina farms had electricity. By 1940, the number had risen to twenty-four percent.<sup>3</sup> School systems had no choice but to prepare farmers for this novel age. Educators throughout North Carolina and the United States as a whole responded to the need for curricular adjustments in agriculture. They erected buildings to accommodate the students, both teenagers and adults, who needed to learn how to survive in the modern era. The Mecklenburg County Schools was no exception. On June 8, 1936, the Mecklenburg County Board of Education approved the creation of an Agricultural Department at Cornelius High School.<sup>4</sup>



President Roosevelt's New Deal programs assisted local school systems by co-funding the construction of schools, including agriculture buildings. On February 20, 1937, Charlotte businessman John L. Grice, Director of the Fourth North Carolina District of the Public Works Administration (PWA), announced that the PWA had approved Federal funding for "four new agriculture buildings" in Mecklenburg County. The Mecklenburg County Schools would contribute \$4,299 in money and materials for each building, and Washington would provide \$3,084 for each. The agriculture buildings would be erected at Berryhill High School, Matthews High School, Derita High School, and Cornelius High School. "The

buildings," said the *Charlotte Observer*, "will be the first of their kind to be constructed in Mecklenburg County, though many have been erected in various parts of this district and others.<sup>5</sup> Only the Cornelius and Matthews buildings of the original four are extant.

The architect of the Cornelius High School Agriculture Building was Willard G. Rogers (1864?-1947).<sup>6</sup>

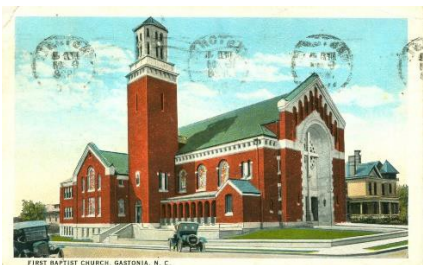


Interestingly, the contract approved by the Mecklenburg County Schools was not with individual architects. It was instead with Charlotte Architects Associated (CAA), an organization that included all architects in the city.<sup>7</sup> The Board of Education left the selection of architects for each project to Charlotte Architects Associated. One can infer that the Mecklenburg County Schools were seeking to assure that all architects would be awarded an equitable share of the work at a time of severe economic distress such as the Great Depression. Contractual arrangements stipulated that architects would receive four percent of the total construction costs for design and two percent for supervision.<sup>8</sup> Construction of the Cornelius High School Agriculture Building began in September 1937.<sup>9</sup>

Willard G. Rogers had a long and distinguished career in Charlotte and its environs. A native of Cincinnati, Ohio, Rogers first worked in his father's firm, lived for several years in Atlanta, and came to Charlotte in 1900. In 1905, he joined with Charles Christian Hook (1870-1938) in forming the partnership Hook & Rogers. In 1916, Rogers established his own office and continued to design notable structures throughout the Piedmont.<sup>10</sup> They included the Catawba County Court House in Newton, the Haywood County Court House



in Waynesville, the First Baptist Church in Gastonia, a remodeling of the Charlotte Masonic Temple on South Tryon Street, and the Wilder Building and the Southern Manufacturers Club in center city Charlotte. Rogers also prepared plans for noteworthy homes, including the Lemuel Harvey House in Lincolnton, the B. G. Thompson House in Greensboro, and the A. E. White House in Lumberton.<sup>11</sup>



First Baptist Church In Gastonia.



Catawba County Court House.



Haywood County Court House.

W. G. Rogers had ancestors who had been important architects, even nationally. His grandfather, Isaiah Rogers, had played a major part in designing the U.S. Treasury Building in Washington, D.C.<sup>12</sup> It is not surprising that Rogers excelled in drawing plans for structures in revivalist and traditional styles, such as the Classical Revival style Cornelius High School Agriculture Building. Certainly, the fact that W. G. Rogers was the architect contributes to the special historical and cultural significance of the Cornelius High School Agriculture Building.



Cornelius Elementary Class 1948.



Cornelius High School Graduating Class 1948.



**Celebration Of Rural Electrification In North Carolina During The Great Depression.**

Four New Deal agriculture buildings survive in Mecklenburg County. In addition to the Cornelius High School Agriculture Building, there is one at the former site of the Huntersville High School, one at the former location of the Long Creek High School, and another at the former site of the Matthews High School. The form, features, scale, and style of these four structures are strikingly similar. All are one-story, frame buildings, clad in brick laid in running bond. All have raised basements. All have entrance porticos in the middle bay of the front facade. All have regularly punctuated double hung sash windows. All are Classical Revival style. Archival photographs of destroyed Mecklenburg County agriculture buildings reveal that they too were similar architecturally. One might argue that the Public



**Huntersville High School Agriculture Building**



**Long Creek Agriculture Building**





**Matthews High School Agriculture Building**



**Pineville High School Agriculture Building**



**Derita High School Agriculture Building**



**Oakhurst High School Agriculture Building**

Works Administration provided a standard plan for buildings it co-funded. Disproving that contention was architect Charles Connely's design for the Berryhill High School Agriculture Building.<sup>13</sup> It resembled a residence. A more likely explanation for the similarity of design of all but one of the agriculture buildings erected in Mecklenburg County was the influence exercised by Charlotte Architects Associated and the Mecklenburg County Board of Education. Not allowing architects to bid individually for projects increased opportunities for standardization.



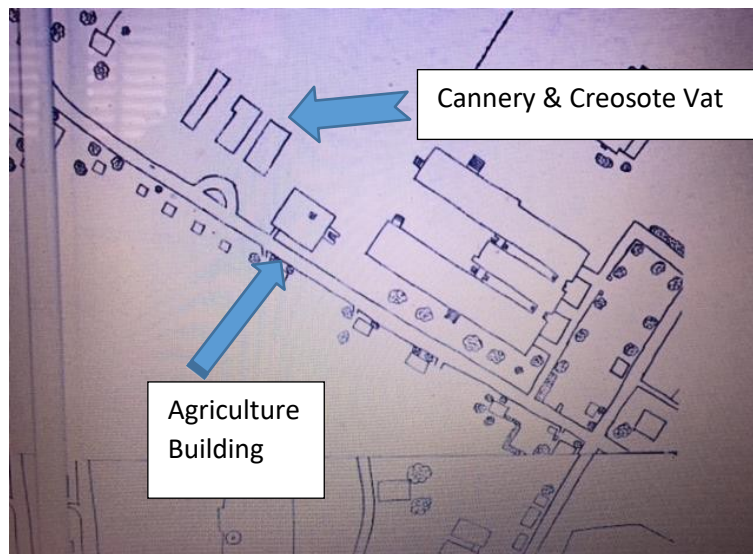
**Berryhill High School Agriculture Building**

Edward Basil Bost (1933-Present) graduated from Cornelius High School in 1951, which was its final year of operation. All male students, including Bost, had to take four years of classes in the Agriculture Building. Bost remembers his teacher, C. O. Davis, with great respect. According to Bost, “C. O. Davis knew everything, and he taught it to us.” “Mr. Davis prepared us for life as we live it.” “It was not just agriculture,” says Bost, “in the bottom of the building, that was all shop.” Woodworking, welding, and other trade skills were part of the curriculum. The shop had band saws, lathes, joiner planers, whole board planers, metalworking tools. “I probably learned more in that building,” declares Bost, “than I did in all of the high school buildings.” Bost established and maintained a vegetable garden as a class project. He even learned how to castrate pigs and cows. In the shop he learned how to build cedar chests and other woodworking projects.<sup>14</sup>

Behind the Cornelius High School Agriculture Building was a cannery. Mr. Davis and the students ran the facility. Farmers would bring vegetables and fruits there to be canned. This was the only way to preserve perishables in the days before home freezers. “The cannery had the whole setup,” explains Bost, “with the steamers and cookers, peelers and cutters, and everything; and the farmers would bring their goods in and can right there.” Mr. Davis and the students also operated a Creosote Vat. Its principal purpose was the production of durable fence posts for enclosures on the farm.<sup>15</sup> The 1947 *Cornelian*, the yearbook of Cornelius High School, reported the accomplishments of the Agriculture Department that year. Among them was: “Sponsored and financed a 20-foot creosote vat for constructing building materials and posts.” The Agriculture Building is “where we were prepared for life,” says Bost.<sup>16</sup>



**C. O. Davis, Agriculture Teacher at Cornelius High School (1948).**



**Map of Cornelius High School (1947).**





Cornelius High School. Auditorium Center. Elementary School Right. High School Left.



Freshman Class Picture (1948). Edward Basil Bost Is Second From Left On First Row.

**Note:** *Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools did not provide permission for access to the interior of the Cornelius High School Agriculture Building nor did the owner give written permission for landmark designation for the interior of the building. Staff recommends historic landmark designation of the*

*exterior of the Cornelius High School Agriculture Building and a parcel of land running along the western edge of right-of-way of School Street, extending from the School Street right-of-way in perpendicular lines that are 15 feet from the southernmost and northernmost portions of the Cornelius High School Building and that extend 15 feet beyond the westernmost portions of the Cornelius High School Agriculture Building, and a line connecting the western ends of the aforementioned perpendicular lines.*



**Physical Description  
Of The Cornelius High School  
Agriculture Building**



The Classical Revival style Cornelius High School Agriculture Building is located on the campus of Cornelius Elementary School at 21126 Catawba Avenue in Cornelius, N.C. It originally stood to the immediate rear of the building that housed high school classrooms at the Cornelius School.<sup>17</sup> The main or upper floor contained two classrooms. The shop occupied the entire basement level.<sup>18</sup>

The Agriculture Building occupies a gently eastward-sloping, mostly treeless, site to the immediate west of School Street. It is a north-facing, one-story, wood-frame, red brick-clad building laid in running bond. It is surmounted by a hipped roof of architectural shingle. The Agriculture Building has deep soffits. It is seven bays wide and seven bays deep. All windows are double-hung sash. Those on the first floor are 6/6, have masonry sills, masonry keystones and lentils, and are topped by brick laid in a soldier course with a masonry keystone at the center. The windows on the raised basement are smaller. They are also 6/6. A soldier brick course marks the dividing line between the main floor and the raised basement and circumvents the entire building.







The entrance to the main floor of the Cornelius Agriculture Building is at the center of the northern façade. Two tapering attenuated wooden columns with Tuscan capitals support a rectangular portico with a hipped roof of architectural shingle. Pilasters of identical design flank a replacement front door. Metal handrails and brick cheek walls with masonry caps flank seven masonry steps that rise to the portico floor.

The Cornelius High School Agriculture Building has experienced some modification since the 1960s, but the overall form and Classical Revival features of the building have been retained. All of the windows on the rear of the building have been infilled with brick, except for one, which has been replaced with a solid door. A metal stairway leads from that rear door to ground level. Four large openings containing metal HVAC grates have been cut into the rear wall. A door near the back of the eastern façade originally provided access and egress to and from the shop. It has been narrowed with brick infill, and a replacement solid door has been installed. The main floor front window on the eastern

façade has been infilled with brick. The main floor front window on the western façade has been partially infilled with brick, and a 2/2 window has been installed. As for the front façade, three windows have been infilled with brick, and the one immediately east of the front portico has been partially infilled with a 3/3 window added. Finally, a wooden panel covers the front basement window on the western façade of the building.







**These Berryhill High School students  
are working in a shop very much like  
the shop that operated at the Cornelius High School  
Agriculture Building.**

---

<sup>1</sup> North Carolina made its first commitment to vocational public education in 1911. The General Assembly provided funding for the establishment of ten "Farm-Life Schools" to teach agriculture and home economics. Between 1911 and 1917, twenty-one Farm-Life Schools opened in North Carolina. A major impetus for vocational education occurred in February 1917, when Congress passed the Smith-Hughes Act, thereby sending Federal money to the States to support instruction in agriculture, home economics, trade and industrial education, distributive education, occupational information and guidance, and vocational rehabilitation. Agricultural classes were not limited to high school students. Instruction was also given to farm children who had dropped out of school and to farmers and farm women who felt the need for instruction and information on farming. Home economics and agriculture science departments were established in existing high schools. Students were encouraged to have joint projects. Educators stressed that a farm family should be a unit working together in the closest harmony. No less important was the establishment of extension programs in institutions of high education, such as North Carolina State. (See "The Federal Government and Vocational Education in the South," *The High School Journal*, Vol. XXVIII, March-April, 1945, No. 2, p. 65-85.

<sup>2</sup> Paul K. Conkin, *A Revolution Down On The Farm. The Transformation of American Agriculture since 1929* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008), 100.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.ncpedia.org/rural-electrification>

<sup>4</sup> *Minutes of the Mecklenburg County Board of Education*, July 8, 1936. Hereinafter cited as *Minutes*.

<sup>5</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, February 21, 1937. There were earlier Agriculture Buildings in Mecklenburg County. These were the first PWA-funded Agriculture Buildings erected in Mecklenburg County. There was an earlier structure erected at Oakhurst High School (see *Minutes*, January 5, 1937).

<sup>6</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, December 25, 1936; April 9, 1937. *Minutes*, March 10, 1937; April 22, 1937. Rogers's death certificate gives birth date as "abt. 1864."

<sup>7</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, November 6, 1936; January 6, 1937.

<sup>8</sup> *Minutes*, January 6, 1937.

<sup>9</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, August 30, 1937.

<sup>10</sup> <http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000246>

<sup>11</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, April 10, 1938. <http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000246>



---

<sup>12</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, April 10, 1938. <http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000246>

<sup>13</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, December 25, 1936; April 9, 1937. *Minutes*, March 10, 1937; April 22, 1937.

<sup>14</sup> Interview of Edward Basil Bost by Dr. Dan L. Morrill, September 18, 2018. Hereinafter cited as *Interview*.

<sup>15</sup> *Interview*.

<sup>16</sup> *Cornelian*, 1947

<sup>17</sup> The Cornelius School contained grades one through twelve.

<sup>18</sup> *Interview*.