

Slavery at Edgewood Farmhouse
Designation Report Addendum
Stewart Gray and Tommy Warlick
July 2021

The history of the Edgewood Farmhouse is intertwined with the history of slavery in Mecklenburg County. The original owner of the Edgewood Plantation, Robert Davidson (R. D.) Alexander, was a member of Mecklenburg County's slave-owning planter class. Examining the life of R. D. Alexander illustrates the position the planter class had in Mecklenburg County in the early republic up until the time of the Civil War. R. D. Alexander was the son of William Bain Alexander who owned a 6000-acre plantation and served as a postmaster and the county's recorder of deeds. In 1830 R. D. Alexander received 400 acres of his father's property, which was to become Edgewood Plantation. Like his father, R. D. Alexander held positions of authority in his community, serving as the local Justice of the Peace and as a member of the county court. As the owner of a "well-run and prosperous farm which boasted a productive orchard, livestock ... in addition to the feed crops,"¹ R. D. Alexander's wealth partly consisted of and relied on the ownership of enslaved people.

According to the 1830 Census report, which is the first such report in which R. Davidson Alexander appears as the head of a household, he owned four enslaved people: one man aged between 24 and 36, one woman aged between 24 and 36, and two children under the age of 10.

In 1833 R. D. Alexander was named trustee in an indenture for debts owed to four creditors by his brother-in-law Dr. David T. Caldwell, who was the owner of the Rosedale Plantation in Charlotte. Per the indenture, R. D. Alexander was to hold all of Caldwell's property, including eighteen enslaved persons, in trust until January 1, 1834. If Caldwell failed to satisfy the four outstanding debts in full by that date, R. D. Alexander was bound to sell Caldwell's property, including the enslaved persons, to satisfy the outstanding debts, with any residual amounts to revert to Caldwell. If Caldwell timely satisfied his debts in full, R. D. Alexander was to return the enslaved persons and other property to Caldwell. There are no documents filed with the Register of Deeds indicating the final disposition of that indenture.²

The 1840 Census lists eight enslaved persons in R. D. Alexander's household. This included two enslaved males under 10 years old and two enslaved males between 10 and 23 years old, and three enslaved females who were between 10 and 23 years old.

The 1850 Census Slave Schedule, an innovation first adopted by the Census Bureau for the 1850 Census, indicates that R. D. Alexander owned fourteen enslaved persons: eight males aged 4 to 50, and six females aged 2 to 75. The 1860 Census report shows that he owned fifteen enslaved persons as of that time, including a five-month-old girl. The report also indicates that the

¹ "Designation Report on the Edgewood Farmhouse, 1984" (<http://landmarkscommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Edgewood-Farmhouse-SR.pdf>: 15 July, 2021)

² Mecklenburg County Deeds Books, Book 22, Page 513 (May 23, 1833).

Edgewood Plantation included three dwellings for enslaved persons. None of the Census reports identifies the enslaved people by name.³

According to the estate inventory conducted immediately following his 1863 death, R. D. Alexander owned fifteen enslaved persons. The inventory identifies those individuals as: Joe, Tom, Elam, Mark, Pender (sp?), Sally, Harriet, Hanah, Delphia, Eliza, Sam, Nancy, Charles, Ann, and Sue. Joe, Tom, Elam, Mark, Pender (sp?), Sally, Harriet, Hanah, and Delphia were bequeathed to Alexander's widow, Abigail. Eliza, Sam, Nancy, Charles, Ann, and Sue were left to his two children.⁴

³ "United States Census (Slave Schedule), 1860," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:WZBJ-1R2M> : 16 October 2019), Robt D Alexander, 1860.

⁴ "North Carolina Estate Files, 1663-1979," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:KDGJ-4QR> : 8 March 2021), R. D Alexander, 1863; citing Mecklenburg, North Carolina, United States, State Archives, Raleigh; FHL microfilm 1,986,538.

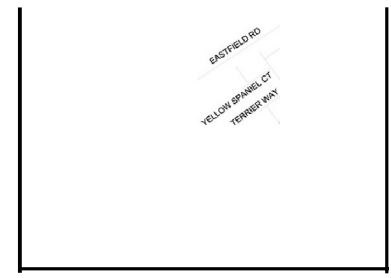
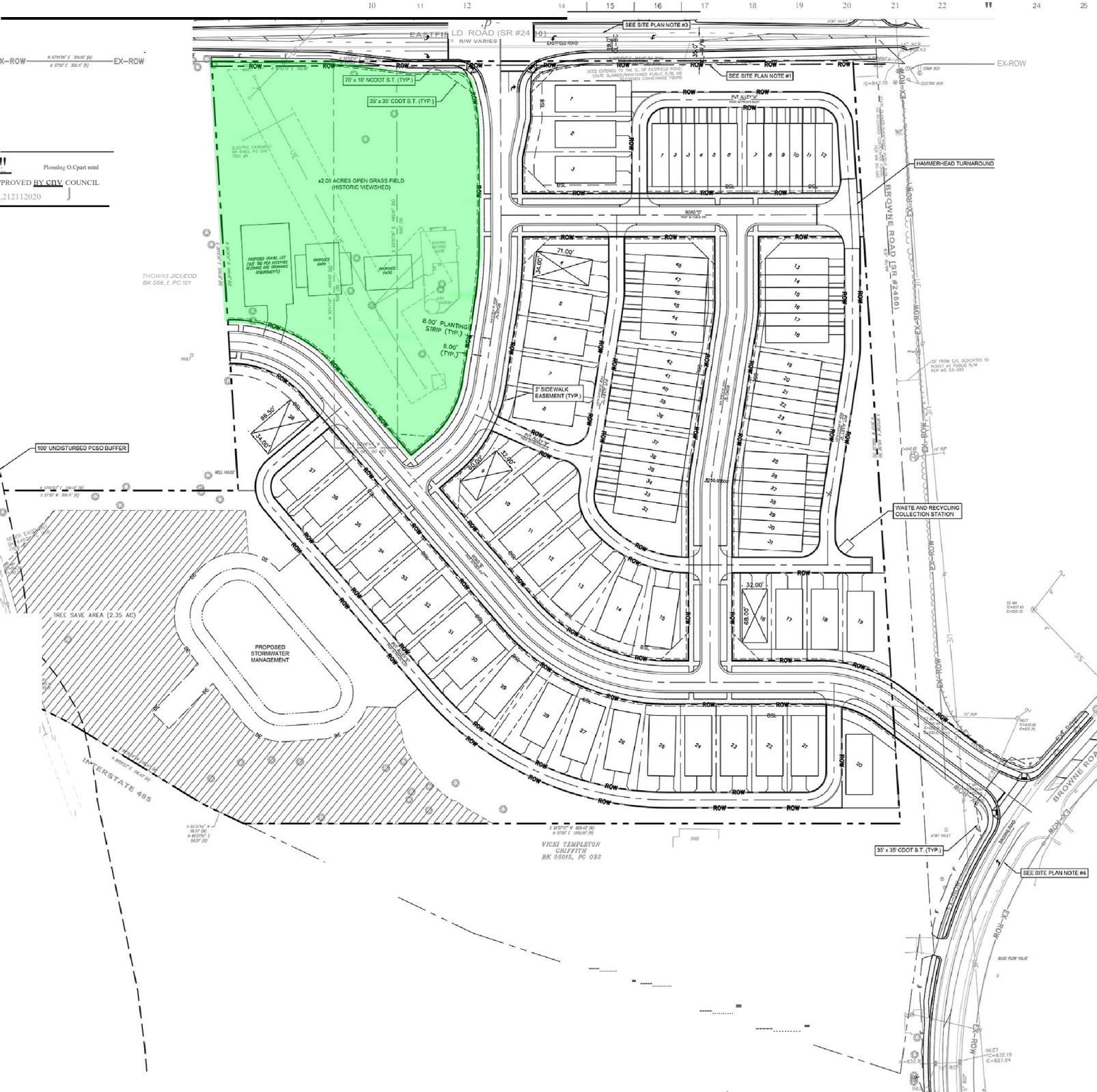
**Update on Amount of Property Included in the
Edgewood Farmhouse Designation**
Designation Report Addendum
Stewart Gray and Tommy Warlick
April 2021

The ca. 1853 Edgewood Farmhouse, 11124 and 11132 Eastfield Road, was designated as a local historic landmark in 1985, including the interiors and exteriors of the farmhouse and an earlier log outbuilding and the approximately 26.610 acres of land upon which the farmhouse and associated structures are located. The designated property currently consists of three tax parcels: parcel numbers 02761104 and 02761105 (owned by Bowman Sumner LLC) and parcel number 02761106 (owned by Melanie Jones McLeod), all as recorded in the Mecklenburg County tax office.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission was contacted in 2016 by the property's previous owner and informed that the property was going to be offered for sale. The owner committed to finding a buyer who would preserve the historic house and as much of the historic setting as possible. Over the next three years the Commission's staff met with numerous potential buyers and reviewed several development plans. In 2019 the development group Bowman Sumner LLC proposed a subdivision plan that was approved by the Commission through its Design Review process on November 4, 2019.

The approved site plan calls for residential development of the east and southeast portions of the designated property into eighty-six residential lots, as shown on the attached site plan. The approved development is limited to tax parcel numbers 02761104 and 02761105. The owner of those two tax parcels is requesting that the historic designation be removed from those portions of the overall property, with the designation being retained for the remainder of the property. The property retaining the historic designation consists of the historic farmhouse (interior and exterior), the log outbuilding (interior and exterior), and associated structures, the approximately two-acre parcel on which those structures sit (designated by the green shaded area on the site map and labeled "±2.00 Acres Open Grass Field (Historic Viewshed)"), and an approximately 4.75-acre parcel (tax parcel number 02761106) immediately to the west of the historic farmhouse. The owner of the third tax parcel (02761106) offered no objections to the approved site plan, asking only that that her parcel retain its historic designation. On April 12, 2021, the Commission voted to recommend amending the original ordinance to reduce the amount of land included in the designation as represented by the attached site plan.

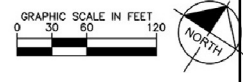
With the removal of the historic designation from the area shown on the attached plan, the remaining designated property would still retain special significance as one of the few extant antebellum plantation houses in Mecklenburg County and as a compelling embodiment of the transitional Federal/Greek Revival style, as well as the property's historic association with Robert Davidson Alexander (1796-1863) and his wife, Abigail Bain Caldwell Alexander (1808-1889), both members of prominent pioneer families of Mecklenburg County. Retaining the designation on the two acres on which the farmhouse sits, as well as the immediately adjacent 4.75-acre parcel, preserves the historic viewshed of the farmhouse and would ensure that the Commission would have design review control over the development of those parcels.

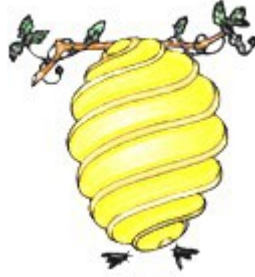


SITE DATA TABLE	
DEVELOPMENT DATA:	
TAX PARCEL ID:	027-611-04 & 027-611-05
LAND USE:	185.00 - 47
TOTAL SITE AREA:	20.1 ACRES
TOTAL LOT AREA:	7.1 ACRES
TOT-1, R.O. W. AREA:	28.14 ACRES
TOT-1, O.P.E. SPACE AREA:	1.1 ACRES
TOTAL DISBURSED AREA:	1.1 ACRES
100' UNDISTURBED PCBO BUFFER:	
ZONING DATA:	
FEMA FLOOD PANEL:	3710456900
WATERSHED:	MALLARD
PC DISTRICT:	YADKIN SOUTHEAST CATWANS
CURRENT IM-1 IN-10:	
PROPOSED IM-1 IN-10:	
MIN. LOT SIZE:	
MIN. SINGLE-FAMILY LOT SIZE:	1.00 AC
MIN. MULTIFAMILY LOT SIZE:	1.75 AC
MIN. LOT WIDTH:	
MIN. SINGLE-FAMILY LOT WIDTH:	40 FT.
MIN. MULTIFAMILY LOT WIDTH:	40 FT.
MAX. HEIGHT:	
MAX. DENSITY:	
SETBACKS:	
FRONT YARD:	
REAR YARD:	
SIDE YARD INTERIOR:	
SIDE YARD EXTERIOR:	
REAR YARD:	
PROMISED:	
RECEIVED:	
IMPROVED:	
PROPOSED:	

TOTAL BOUNDARY ACREAGE:		120.74 AC
AREA TO BE SUBTRACTED FROM TREE SAVE:		
EXISTING SANITARY SEWER EASEMENT:		
MULTIFAMILY AREA (15% OF 4.92 ACRES):		
SINGLE FAMILY AREA (10% OF 15.82 AC - 0.10 AC):		
TOTAL TREE SAVE REQUIRED:		
TOTAL TREE SAVE PROVIDED:		
COMMON OPEN SPACE:		
COMMON OPEN SPACE REQUIRED (10% OF 21.54 AC):		2.15 AC

- SITE PLAN NOTES:**
- SITE IMPROVEMENTS TO INCLUDE DEDICATION OF 35' OF NCDDOT RIGHT OF WAY FROM CENTERLINE OF EASTFIELD ROAD. DEDICATION AND FEE SIMPLE CONVEYANCE OF ALL RIGHTS OF WAY LOCATED WITHIN THE SITE SHALL OCCUR PRIOR TO THE ISSUANCE OF THE FIRST CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY FOR A BUILDING TO BE CONSTRUCTED ON THE SITE.
 - ALL TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS WILL BE APPROVED AND CONSTRUCTED BEFORE THE SITE'S FIRST BUILDING CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY IS ISSUED. THE PETITIONER MAY PHASE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS IF SITE IMPROVEMENTS AND PHASING ARE EXPLICITLY DESCRIBED IN SITE PLAN NOTES.
 - DEVELOPER SHALL CONSTRUCT A LEFT TURN LANE ON EASTFIELD ROAD INTO ROAD "A".
 - DEVELOPER SHALL CONSTRUCT A LEFT TURN LANE ON BROWNE ROAD INTO ROAD "B".
 - RIGHT OF WAY SET 2 BEHIND BACK OF SIDEWALK WHERE FEASIBLE. IF UNFEASIBLE, A SIDEWALK EASEMENT SHALL BE PROVIDED TO MAINTAIN THE 2' BEHIND BACK OF SIDEWALK SEPARATION.





EDGEWOOD FARMHOUSE



This report was written on Oct. 3, 1984

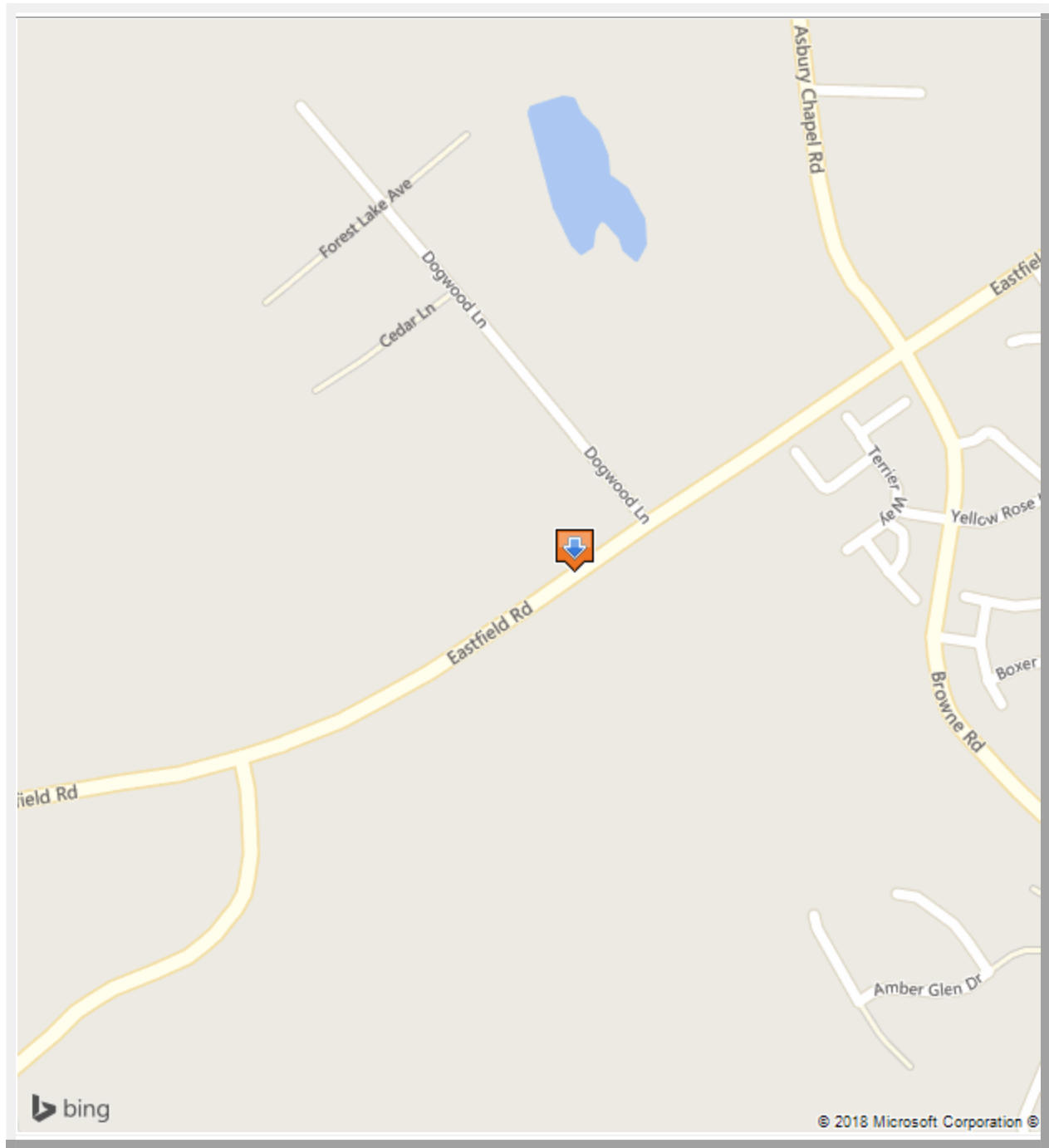
1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Edgewood Farmhouse is located at 11124 Eastfield Road in Mecklenburg County.

2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property:
Margaret Darden McLeod
Route 1, Box 580
Huntersville, N.C., 28078

Telephone: 704/875-2534

3. Representative photographs of the property: This report contains representative photographs of the property.

4. A map depicting the location of the property: This report contains a map which depicts the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 4555, page 746. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 027-171-21.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. William H. Huffman, Ph.D.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Joseph Schuchman.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-399.4:

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Edgewood Farmhouse does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the structure is one of the few, relatively intact ante-bellum plantation houses extant in Mecklenburg County; 2) the structure, built c. 1853, was the home of Robert Davidson Alexander (1796-1863) and his wife, Abigail Bain Caldwell Alexander (1808-1889), both being members of prominent pioneer families of Mecklenburg County; 3) the transitional Federal/Greek Revival plantation house is an imposing example of this motif in Mecklenburg County; and 4) the structure retains a mostly undisturbed rural setting.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the attached architectural description by Mr. Joseph Schuchman demonstrates that the property known as the Edgewood Farmhouse meets this criterion.

9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal: The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes "historic property." The current appraised value of the .899 acres of land is \$3600. The current appraised value of the improvements is \$35,940. The total current appraised value is \$39,540. The property is zoned RU.

Date of Preparation of this Report: October 3, 1984

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission

1225 S. Caldwell St.
Charlotte, N.C. 28203

Telephone: 704-376-9115

Historical Overview

The Edgewood Farm house on Eastfield Road north of Charlotte is one of the few relatively intact large antebellum houses left in the county. It is a legacy of Robert Davidson Alexander (1796-1863) and his wife, the former Abigail Bain Caldwell (1808-1889), who built it around 1840. Robert Davidson Alexander was the third child (of fourteen) of William Bain Alexander (1764-1844) and the former Violet Davidson (1771-1821), who was a daughter of Major John Davidson, both families being pioneers of what was known as the Hopewell section of the county around the Hopewell Presbyterian Church. William Bain Alexander owned a 6000 acre plantation in the area, upon which he grazed cattle, horses and sheep until they were changed over to the production of cotton, and he was also for many years the county recorder of deeds and postmaster, for more than fifty years at his homestead, "Alexandria." Abigail Bain Caldwell was the daughter of Rev. Samuel Craighead Caldwell, the pastor of Hopewell and Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Churches. ¹

The two were married on February 12, 1829, and built a one-story log house (which is still extant behind the present one) about one mile east of Alexandria on 400 acres given to them by William B. Alexander in 1830. ² What is now Eastfield Road was at the time known as the Salisbury Road, and the log house was about a hundred yards back to the south from the road. About 1840, the Alexanders built their roomy, two-story frame plantation house in which they raised their five children, Rev. S. C., Dr. J. Brevard, William Davidson, Lottie and Agnes Alexander. ³

Edgewood, as the plantation was known, was reportedly a well-run and prosperous farm which boasted a productive orchard, livestock and even honeybees in addition to the feed crops. The fine hospitality at Edgewood was legendary. "Squire" Robert Alexander, who served almost forty years as the local Justice of the Peace and was a member of the county court, was known for his love of reading and discussion rather than the traditional fox and deer hunts of the other planters. His interest in education was shown by his support of the Alexandria Academy and being an early trustee of Davidson College, from which his three sons graduated, and he was a longtime elder

of the Hopewell Church. Squire Alexander died in the midst of the raging War Between the States, and shortly thereafter there was a brief contemporary mention of the house by a refugee kinsman from Tennessee, Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey:

We stopped at night at Mrs. A. B. Alexander's, the bereaved widow of another kinsman. Her sons were all in the Southern army - as Chaplin, surgeon and commissary...the house was large, some better supplied with provisions and servants than we had met with. Mrs. Alexander proposed to board us for my daughter Mrs. Breck's services as governess of her daughter. I had to stay, of course, in Charlotte.

At the time, Dr. Ramsey had possession of the Tennessee funds of the Confederate treasury, which he was trying to keep from seizure by Federal troops. ⁴

When Robert D. Alexander died in 1863, Edgewood Farm was willed to son William D. Alexander.⁵ During the latter's long ownership of Edgewood (sixty-three years), both the county and the city of Charlotte underwent tremendous changes. When W. D. Alexander inherited the plantation, it was a part of the slave-owning, cotton-growing South, and the Civil War was raging, the aftermath of which would have a profound impact on the old system. Following the Reconstruction era, when much farming was done by tenants on a sharecropping basis, the New South industrialization of the Piedmont Carolinas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries forever changed the rural way of life. W. D. Alexander himself moved to Charlotte in 1911, where he bought a house in Fourth Ward on W. 5th Street.⁶ At his death in 1927, the home place was willed to his wife, Harriet Alexander, and upon her death in 1934, the farm house and 50 acres were sold by the heirs to a real estate concern, the Commonwealth Land Co. ⁷ The remainder of the Alexander estate was divided into five tracts, and sold individually, thus subdividing the century-old plantation.⁸

In recent times, the farmhouse has had several owners (Sarah W. Tate, 1936-42; Victor and Elizabeth Templeton, 1942-64; T. Bragg and Margaret D. McLeod, 1964-82).⁹ The present owner, Margaret Darden McLeod has taken great care to decorate every room in the house so as to continue its legacy of charm, comfort and hospitality. As one of Mecklenburg's fine antebellum plantation houses in superb condition, the county is fortunate to be able to retain such a site of clear historic value.

NOTES

¹ Charles W. Summerville, *The History of Hopewell Presbyterian Church* (Charlotte: Hopewell Presbyterian Church, 1939), pp. 97-98.

² Ibid.; Old Deed Book 22, p. 17, 17 Sept. 1830.

³ Summerville, p. 98; interview with Margaret Darden McLeod, 20 Dec. 1983.

⁴ Chalmers G. Davidson, *The Plantation World Around Davidson*, 2nd ed. (Davidson, N.C.: Mecklenburg Historical Association, 1973), pp. 73-75.

⁵ Will Book J. p. 164, July 1863.

⁶ Deed Book 277, p. 231, 30 March 1911.

⁷ Will Book U. p. 18, probated 11 May 1927; Deed Book 854, p. 234, 1 August 1934.

⁸ Map Book 4, p. 581.

⁹ Deed Book 886, p. 142, 4 May 1936; Ibid., 1075, p. 497, 28 August 1942; Ibid., 2580, p. 270, 21 October 1964.

Architectural Description

Joseph Schuchman
June, 1984

Edgewood Farm is one of the more significant antebellum plantation houses in northern Mecklenburg County. This transitional Federal/Greek Revival house was constructed by Robert Davidson Alexander(1796-1863) and his wife Abigail Bain Caldwell Alexander(1808-1889). Local tradition maintains that the house was constructed about 1840. Author Chalmers Gaston Davidson, in *The Plantation World Around Davidson*, states that the house was built about 1853.¹ Edgewood Farm presents a double pile arrangement, a two story center-hall plan two rooms deep on either side of the hall, and possesses paired interior chimneys. The existence of both of these elements is rare in surviving Mecklenburg County homes of this period. The

exterior has witnessed some alteration including the replacement of the original windows and porch supports; the interior is largely intact.

The house is set back from Eastfield (formerly Salisbury) Road and sits at the head of a curved drive. The double pile main block is of mortise and tenon construction. As is typical with classically inspired homes, fenestration is symmetrically arranged. Front and rear elevations are three bays wide while side elevations are two bays wide. Exterior openings are framed by simple two-part surrounds. 8/8 sash, the primary glazing arrangement, date from the 1950's and replaced the original window lights. The louvered window shutters were installed by the present owner, Margaret Darden McLeod; a turn of the century documentary photograph indicates the presence of louvered shutters. Corner boards rise to a boxed cornice on the front and rear elevations. Side elevations are nearly flush with the exterior wall. A cornice, narrower than the typical Greek Revival cornice, returns on the eaves. The central one-story porch is believed to be original; wrought iron supports, added by an earlier owner, replaced the wood columns. The entrance is flush sheathed and delineated by wood piers. The double leaf entrance door is flanked by symmetrically arranged ten pane side-lights, which are located above recessed molded panels. The entire composition is set in a molded splayed surround. The entrance door is noticeably narrow; according to local tradition, the narrow width was meant to discourage visits from strangers traveling on the Salisbury Road stagecoach, which ran past the house. The paired interior chimneys are of brick, arranged in a stretcher bond, and rise to a corbled top.

The one-story rear ell may have originally been a separate structure. It is believed that the gable roofed building was constructed as a kitchen, a function it continues to serve. A turn of the century photograph appears to indicate that this structure was unattached to the main house. A gable end chimney is of brick laid in stretcher bond and rises to a single step shoulder with a freestanding stack. The ell's fenestration has been altered.

A shed roof porch, which runs across most of the rear elevation, was enclosed about 1974 by the present owner. The date of the shed is unknown. The chamfered post supports indicate a turn-of-the-century construction date. The wall surface is flush horizontal board.

In 1965, the house was underpinned with brick, arranged in a stretcher pattern. The main block originally rested on massive blocks of fieldstone, which were incorporated in the underpinning. The main block is roofed with asphalt shingles. The ell and shed porch roofs are of tin.

The well-maintained interior is largely unaltered. Rooms are symmetrically arranged off a handsome center hall, which is ten feet wide. A straight run open string stair rises from the hall. Identical rectangular banisters and a chamfered newel post support the shaped handrail of this simply detailed staircase. A molded baseboard and chair rail frame the stair wall. Each main block chamber is simply detailed and encircled by a molded baseboard and cornice. Pine flooring is used throughout the house; all the flooring, except that in the center hall and one first story room, is original. Walls, which were originally covered with horsehair plaster, have been replastered. Solid brass fixtures remain throughout the main block and appear contemporary with its construction. As on the exterior, interior openings are set within two-part surrounds. Corresponding storage closets, believed to be original, are located in the dining and breakfast rooms, to the right of the center hall. Mantles are located in each of the four first story rooms and second story bedrooms in the main block. Each mantle is of simple pier and lintel construction, characteristic of vernacular Greek Revival motifs. The mantles are nearly identical in execution. First story mantles feature recessed pier detailing while second story mantles display plain piers. The kitchen, located in the rear ell, has been modernized.

A log house, with half-dovetail corners, stands to the rear of the main house. According to local tradition, Robert Alexander constructed this gable roof structure in 1829 to serve as a temporary residence until the completion of the main house. The open spaces between the logs, originally chinked with clay or mud, have been filled with concrete. The house retains some original features, including exposed beams; an exterior gable end wall has been stuccoed. The fieldstone chimney and shed appear to be later additions.

A brick wall and octagonal brick gazebo, off the rear of the main house, was built by the McLeod's and encloses a landscaped garden. Several frame outbuildings stand to the rear and house guest and storage facilities. Two of these outbuildings were moved to Edgewood Farm from nearby Mecklenburg County locations by the present owners.

Since their purchase of the house in 1964, the McLeod Family has undertaken a considerable maintenance effort. Edgewood Farm stands today as a reminder of the antebellum plantation economy. It recalls a lifestyle forever changed not only by the Civil War but also by the forces of technology and urbanization.

Footnote

¹ Chalmers Davidson's claim to an 1853 construction date is based upon the fact that land was willed to Robert Davidson Alexander in 1853, the year of the death of his uncle "Robin" Davidson of Holly Bend Plantation. In a telephone interview with Joseph Schuchman on June 22, 1984, Chalmers Davidson stated that he based the construction date of the house both on the year Robert Davidson Alexander acquired the land and also on the presence of paired interior chimneys, which Davidson claims did not appear in rural Mecklenburg County structures until about 1850. In 1830, Robert Davidson Alexander was given four hundred acres of land, which is believed to have formed the basis of his plantation, by his father William B. Alexander. Chalmers Davidson makes a strong correlation between house construction and the land acquired from "Robin" Davidson in 1853 but appears to make no correlation for the 1830 change of title.