

# **SURVEY AND RESEARCH REPORT**

## **THE SILOAM SCHOOLHOUSE**



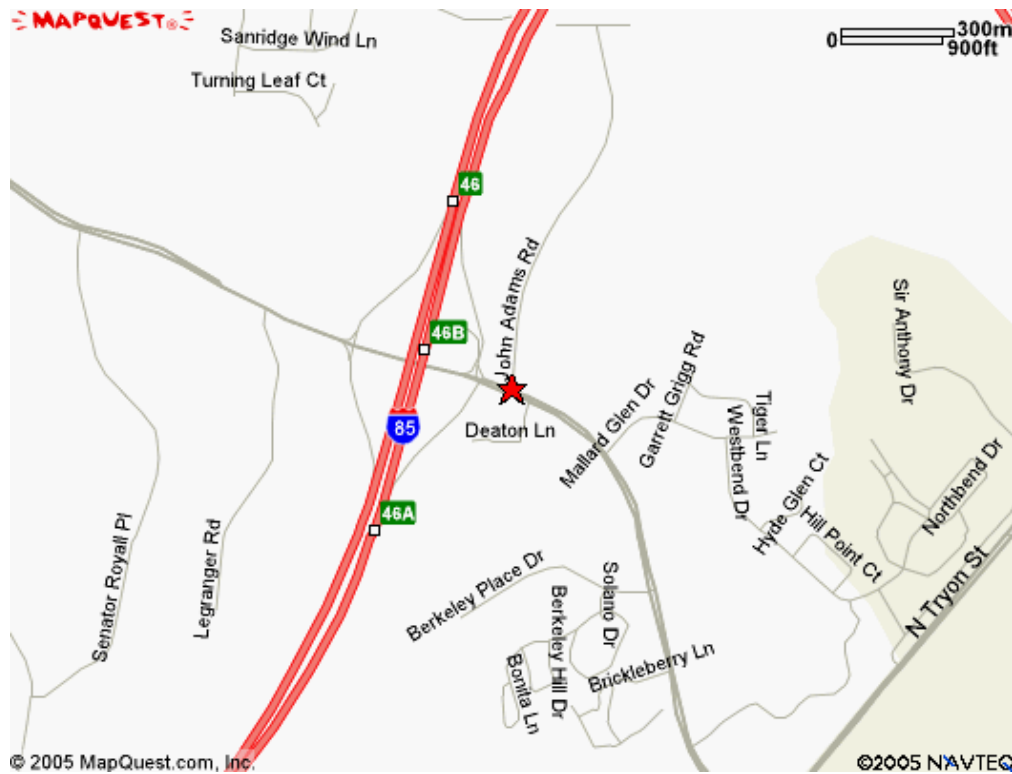
1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Siloam Schoolhouse is located on John Adams Road in Charlotte, North Carolina.
2. Name and address of present owner of the property:

Young Properties of Charlotte, LLC

1510-A Third Street, Wilmington, North Carolina 28402

(910)-251-5030

3. Representative photographs of the property: This report contains representative photographs of the property.
4. Map depicting the location of the property:



5. UTM coordinates: 523505 E, 3909964 N.
6. Current deed book and tax parcel information for the property:

The tax parcel number of the property is 02965105. The most recent reference to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg Deed Book 19115, page 559.

7. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property.
8. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property.
9. 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 Commission judges that the property known as Siloam Schoolhouse does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte –Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1. The Siloam Schoolhouse, a rural primary school for African Americans in northeast Mecklenburg County, is a rare surviving example of the institutions built by newly-freed blacks after the Civil War. The school stands as a testament to the perseverance of Mecklenburg's black residents, who were willing to undergo severe hardships in order to obtain a basic education.
2. The Siloam Schoolhouse was built in the 1920s and replaced an earlier schoolhouse on the site and is a rare surviving example of the institutions built during the Jim Crow era; and
3. Siloam Schoolhouse is a physical legacy to a rural lifestyle that is fast disappearing as development expands to that portion of the County where Siloam is located, Mallard Creek.

10. Ad Valorem tax appraisal: The Commission is aware that the designation would allow the owner of the property to apply for an automatic deferral of 50 percent of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes a "historic landmark." The current appraised value of the 1.12 acre lot is \$20,000, the building has no appraised value.

### **Historical Overview**

Prior to the 1880's educational opportunities for all but the most elite children of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's were non-existent. Though the Freedmen's Bureau had established schools for black children at the end of the Civil War, there was little local or state government support for public education in the first decade after the War. Growing concern over the lack of educated workers to staff Charlotte's rapidly expanding economy, led the City's civic leadership to weigh in on the issue of education. Among these men was Charlotte Observer Editor Charles R. Jones. In March of 1880 Jones submitted a petition to the Charlotte Board of Alderman demanding the establishment of a public school in accordance with the North Carolina State School Law (1874). He additionally called on the Board to find funding for schools and proceed

with the election of an eight member school board.<sup>[1]</sup> In 1882 the City of Charlotte established its first graded schools, one for white children and another for black.

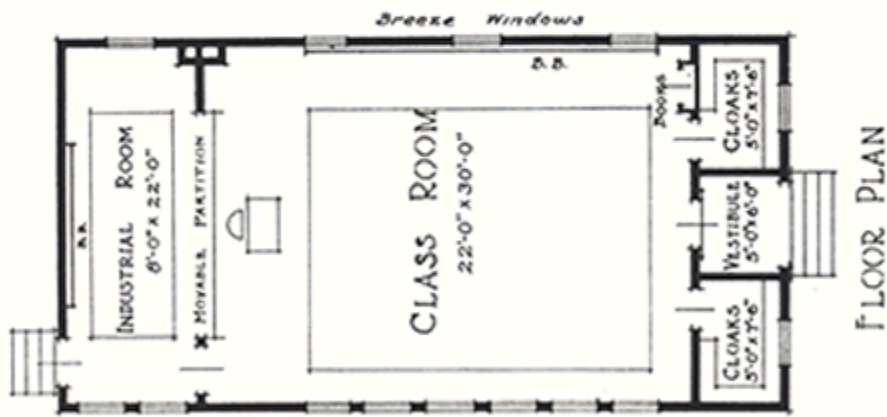
By the 1890's Mecklenburg County began to buy land for county schools for the education of black children. All school buildings were locally funded, with the county school board paying for teacher salaries and supplies such as wood out of local tax revenues, which led to disparities between the quality of education in wealthier communities and poorer rural ones.<sup>[2]</sup>

In 1890 there were 43 public school buildings in the county for the education of black children. Most of these schools were located on the grounds of local churches. They were originally built and financed by African American churches in response to newly freed black's ardent desire for education. The census for that year shows that there were 6,617 black children between the ages of six and twenty-one in the County. Though most Blacks recognized a link between freedom and literacy, the difficulty of county rural life meant that only about half of county children were enrolled in school by their parents in 1890. White children of the area also attended school in similarly bleak numbers.<sup>[3]</sup>

Though the county school board provided operating costs disparities in funding, teacher training, and lack of general support for black education, on the part of the all white school board, led blacks to seek control over their own schools. In 1890 a petition by the "Colored Citizens" of Mallard Creek, the location of Siloam, was brought before the Mecklenburg County Board of Education. These civic minded men, ignored Jim Crow race etiquette, and asked the Board to appoint a "committee of colored men to look after the interests of the colored school in said district." Like Blacks throughout the Reconstruction South this group sought control over its own institutions, believing that "the present committee of white men fail to take that interest in the welfare of their school"<sup>[4]</sup>

On September 11, 1903 the County Board of Education purchased an acre of land from F.C Query, for \$101.00.<sup>[5]</sup> The lot, located on John Adams Road, a dirt road off of Mallard Creek Church Road, became the site for the Siloam School. The school is named after the Siloam Presbyterian Church, located 1.5 miles north of the school. This church at one time educated newly freed blacks at a school building on church property<sup>[6]</sup>

There is anecdotal evidence that the original structure built on the land acquired from Query was log.<sup>[7]</sup> Oral history suggests that the current building was constructed in the 1920's, after the demolition of the original log structure. The current building is similar to the Rowenwald School Plan No. 1-A. However there is no indication that the school building



ONE-TEACHER  
 COMMUNITY SCHOOL PLAN NO 1-A  
 TO FACE NORTH OR SOUTH ONLY

### Rosenwald School Plan 1-A

was constructed using funds from the Rosenwald program. Rosenwald plans were widely published, and it is likely that these published plans influenced the design of this particular

building. Attendance and budget records exist for the 1922-23 and 1924-25 school years. Children attended school for a six-month term during the 1920's, and Siloam was one of five schools for the education of African-American children in the Mallard Creek district. Though it housed grades one through seven the school employed a single teacher. During the 1922-23 school year Margaret Gilliard was the teacher at Siloam, the following two years Mattie Osborne taught. Gilliard was paid a monthly salary of \$50.00; the next years Osborne earned \$55.00 a month.<sup>[8]</sup> The 1930 Charlotte City Directory lists both women as residents of the City of Charlotte. It is likely that during their tenure they lived in the city, and made the long commute out to the County.



**Julius Rosenwald**

Eighty-seven year old local white resident Jean Kirk recalls seeing the teachers of Siloam on their way to and from work. He recounts that from his family's property he often saw Siloam teachers disembarking the bus that made the 15-mile journey from the city each morning. They would arrive between 9:00 and 10:00 in the morning, depending on conditions. The teachers

then walked three miles from the bus stop to the school, the last leg on the dirt John Adams Road. The last bus left at 3:30 from the rural community, with these women on board.<sup>[9]</sup>

Between 1938 and 1952 many of Mecklenburg's rural schools were closed as part of an effort to consolidate students into more modern and centralized locations. Though it is not clear which year Siloam ceased to operate, beginning in 1947 the County School Board sought an owner for the Siloam School property. In 1951 The Young family purchased the one-acre lot and schoolhouse.<sup>[10]</sup>

The Young family already had an extensive historical attachment to the school. Eighty-year old Reverend James Young, the most recent private owner, attended school there in the 1930's. Young's father, Nelson, worked as the school's janitor. The elder Young's duties included maintaining the property, starting the fire in the coal stove that served as sole heat sourced for the building, and obtaining water from a spring located a quarter mile away. During the building's use as a school it never had indoor water and plumbing.<sup>[11]</sup>

Young's family initially lived five miles away from the schoolhouse, and as a boy as young as six he would walk five miles each way to attend school.<sup>[12]</sup> Under such difficult conditions it is not surprising that while in 1924, 72 African-American school age children lived in the school's zone, only 63 children registered and the average daily attendance was 39 for that year.<sup>[13]</sup> Lack of transportation, the demand for child labor in agriculture, and poverty conspired to prevent higher attendance. While limited economic and social mobility was possible for blacks in the nearby city of Charlotte, most county blacks faced limited employment opportunities primarily as domestics, laborers, or agricultural workers. The hardships rural Blacks were willing to overcome, in the face of such bleak prospects, to educate their children is astounding.



When the Young family purchased the property they made internal structural changes. Initially used by the family as a residence, Nelson and his wife Cora added the wall at the rear of the building in order to accommodate a kitchen, and walls for bedrooms. The Youngs lived in the tiny residence with their three youngest children, nine others including James had left home by this time.<sup>[14]</sup>

By 1973 Nelson and Cora had moved into the city of Charlotte. It was then that they conveyed the property to Reverend Young and his wife Vera. Young converted the property to an auto shop. He demolished most of the internal walls and built the large garage door that now exists on the east side of the property. Young closed his shop in the 1980's, and the property began to serve primarily as a dumping ground.<sup>[15]</sup>

### **Architectural Description**



West Elevation

The Siloam Schoolhouse is located near the intersection of John Adams Road and West Mallard Creek Church Road. It stands on a one-acre lot approximately 150 feet from John Adams Road, at the top of a steep hill. The schoolhouse is a one-story front gabled wood

shingled structure. The building rests on rectangular brick piers, which run in five rows, each containing five piers for a total of twenty-five. The moderately sloped roof is covered with 3-v metal sheets, with exposed rafter ends.



East Elevation

The front façade of the building, which faces north, is three bays wide. The front entrance, currently without a door, is reached by three-riser high set of stairs, which is currently in very poor condition. A small wood awning covered with green roof shingles shelters the doorway. A small louvered vent is located above the doorway. On either side of the door are six-over-six double-hung windows. Most of the glazing is missing.



Rear Elevation

Originally the east elevation of the building contained five large fixed-pane windows, approximately eight feet in height. These windows are typical of schoolhouses of the era and would have provided light to the un-electrified school. Of the original six windows only three are extant. The center of the wall currently has a large opening. The opening at one time accommodated a large wooden garage-type door, which was installed by James Young in the 1970's to accommodate his automotive business.<sup>[16]</sup> Currently the door is all but gone, with the exception of a few panels that hang from the top of the doorframe. A brick chimney flanks the north side of the doorway.

The east façade of the building has more random fenestration, with two levels of irregularly placed windows. A window, now boarded, is located in the middle of the lower level. Near the rear/south end of the facade is a doorway. The doorway is sheltered by a shed roof. Closer to the roofline are three small fixed-pane windows. The south façade of the building is the simplest and contains one window and a door that is also sheltered by a corrugated metal awning.

The interior of the building measures approximately 22 feet across and 40 feet in length. Originally a single room, the interior of the building has undergone a number of renovations. Currently the front of the building has a small vestibule that is formed by the walls of two small rooms, which flank either side of the front entrance. It is not clear when these rooms were added, or what their purpose was. Their dimensions preclude their use as sleeping quarters, and were probably used by either the Young family or James Young's automotive business as storage space. Both rooms originally opened into the large main room, and had doors, which are currently missing. The exterior door and that between the vestibule and the main room are no longer present.

The large main room measures 22 feet wide by 29 feet in length. In the 1950's the room was divided into living and sleeping quarters. When James Young turned the dwelling into an automotive garage in the 1970's he removed those dividing walls. In the southwest corner of this room is a chimney that vented a coal-burning stove. At the rear of the building is a 22 foot wide by 8 foot deep room. The partitioning wall that forms this room was not part of the original schoolhouse structure. Nelson Young partitioned the room from the rest of the buildings space when he bought the house in 1951 to accommodate a kitchen.<sup>[17]</sup>





Interior

The wooden floors of the building are in varying states of disrepair. While intact in much of the building, in other places the floor has rotted out. Most of the interior walls are covered in beadboard, as is a portion of the ceiling. In much of the building however the ceiling has been removed and the space is open to the rafters.

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[\[1\]](#) *City of Charlotte Board of Aldermen Minutes*, Book 5, page 127, March 23, 1880

<sup>[2]</sup> Thomas Hanchett, “Rosenwald School Survey,” Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

<sup>[3]</sup> *Minutes, Mecklenburg County Board of Education*, July 7, 1890 and August 16, 1890.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Ibid.*, September 1, 1890.

<sup>[5]</sup> *Mecklenburg County School Property*. University of North Carolina at Charlotte Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library.

<sup>[6]</sup> *Map of Mecklenburg County, 1911*. The Carolina Room, Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

<sup>[7]</sup> Interview with James Young, December, 2005.

<sup>[8]</sup> *Revised and Final Budget of Mecklenburg County Schools (Colored)*, 1922-23 and 1924-25. The Carolina Room, The Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. For information on Rosenwald Schools in Mecklenburg County see: [Rosenwald Schools](#)

<sup>[9]</sup> Interview with Jean Kirk, December 2005.

<sup>[10]</sup> Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1648, page 109.

<sup>[11]</sup> Young Interview.

<sup>[12]</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>[13]</sup> *Revised and Final Budget*, 1924-25.

<sup>[14]</sup> Young Interview.

<sup>[15]</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>[16]</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>[17]</sup> *Ibid.*