

Historic Designation for 2143 Sherwood Avenue

We and our children would love to see this house preserved as an example of the early days of Myers Park. The trend in our neighborhood is to rebuild, tear down, gut the old houses and change the interiors, and add on to such an extent that the original inhabitants would think they were lost! We have lived in our house at the above address for over forty years, and here are the reasons we believe make it worthy of historic designation. We do know that one earlier resident had the last name of Morrill, and there is an old doorknocker with initials DLM.*

The house was built in 1925, it is the only frame house on our street, and as far as we can see the original house has never been expanded, certainly not in our time. It is a 1920's cottage style home, possibly even a pattern house. (Photo 1) Nothing on our street is anything like this style, and most have been either demolished and rebuilt or expanded greatly. It is possible that long ago a kitchen back porch may have been opened up to enlarge the kitchen, but we are not sure, and in any case that did not expand the outside walls.

There is a small entrance vestibule with a coat closet. (Photo 2) The living room fireplace has original tiles around the sides and forming the hearth. There is a trap door for ashes to fall down a chute into the basement to be discarded. There are electrical outlets on the mantel, often used for lamps in the 20's. The living room includes a bay window with radiator (covered with seat cushions).

In our den, which is pine paneled, there is a fake fireplace, built during prohibition times as a liquor cabinet. (Photo 3) In Photo 4 you can see that the sides and top open out into shelves, backed by original wallpaper of pine branches.

Most of the original plumbing is still in use as you can see from photos, including a double kitchen sink designed for doing laundry on one side. (Photos 5, 6, 7) The ironing board still folds down from the wall and is usable.

A few lumps of coal are still visible in the basement coal bin (Photo 8), and on the adjacent wall is a small metal door where the ashes from the fireplace end up. (Photo 9). There is a basement toilet, plumbed but never fully finished, most likely for use

by servants. We are still heating with a steam boiler, and our radiators are always in use. (Photo 10)

Disconnected buzzers under the dining room table and in the master bedroom were used to summon the servants. There is a functioning breakfast room with built-in glass front cabinets for china. All the bedrooms have original closets, much smaller than those today. One bedroom has a built-in wall of drawers and two tiny closets under the eaves--the ceiling is slanted and there is a gable window. Several people we have met over the years have told us they remember visiting the house and playing in that room, hiding in the closets as did our children. There is a full attic with a pull-down staircase and a working attic fan.

Beside the driveway is a very old quince bush. We were told by an elderly lady some years ago that long ago the garden club gave one to each home in the neighborhood. Ours has grown into a hedge, but we don't see any others. We have filled our yard with what some might call old-fashioned planting: azaleas and rhododendrons, bulbs, crepe myrtle, redbud, and butterfly bushes. Please come visit!

*Note: If the Morrill family who lived here is any relationship to Dr. Dan Morrill he is welcome to the doorknocker!

This report was written on July 24, 2014 by homeowners Watson and Jane Leighton Burts.

1. Name and location of the property:

The property known as the Dixon House is located at 2143 Sherwood Avenue, Charlotte, NC.



2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner of the property.

The current owners of the property are

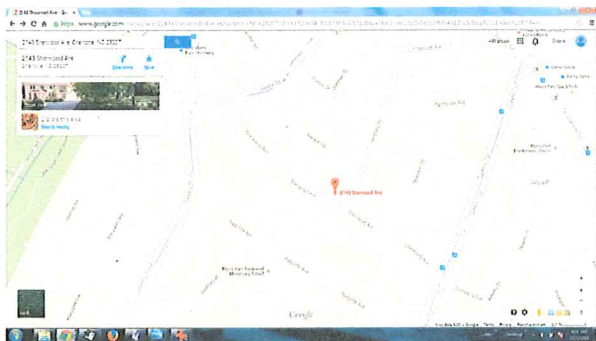
Watson and Jane Leighton Burts

2143 Sherwood Avenue, Charlotte, NC

704-376-2859

3. Representative photographs of the property are included in this report.

4. Maps 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 current deed reference is Mecklenburg County Deed Book 3588, page 327. The tax parcel number is 15305216.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property.

The property first appears as belonging to The Stephens Company which sold it to the Southern Realty Company in 1925. These companies were developing new streets in Myers Park with a variety of homes suitable for families of different income levels, and the early days of this house appear to have been a period of being bought and sold rapidly. The first owners were Sadie and J. J. Harrill, the second J. H. and Charlotte Carson, and in 1928 Robert and Helen Dixon bought the house. In 1944 the house was sold to Dayton and Thelma Morrell; Mrs. Morrell lived there until the time of her death in 1969. We have called this the Dixon House after the early owners; the Burts family bought it in 1973 and has owned it for 40 years.



7. A brief architectural description of the property.

The house is architecturally significant as the only wooden clapboard house on Sherwood Avenue between Queens Road and Kings Drive. It is built of wood and has never had any major structural alterations; it represents a home intended for a middle class family in contrast to the larger brick homes in the neighborhood. It is built in a cottage style with side porch, traditional main floor, four bedrooms and two baths upstairs, a full attic and a partial basement.

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

Culturally it represents an era whose memories are fast being eradicated by families who are moving into Myers Park, demolishing or gutting houses that were originally intended for middle class homes, and building them into enormous houses which no longer fit the lots where they are situated or the style they once represented. We believe this house survives as an example of life as it was in the roaring twenties in Myers Park for families who could afford to live in Myers Park but not to live in the grander style of the first mansions.



Addition being made to a house across the street.

9. Ad valorem tax appraisal: The Commission is aware that an historic 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. The current value of the lot is \$529,900, the improvements are valued at \$205,500, the total value is \$741,600.

History of Sherwood Avenue

Sherwood Avenue was developed as part of the entrepreneurial designs of George Stephens who had married the daughter of John Springs Myers. (1) Myers had a large farm where he built an elegant home and moved his bride out to the country; thus were the beginnings of Myers Park. Mr. Stephens and the subsequent companies he developed began eventually to lay out curved streets, bring in landscape developer John Nolen to design the tree canopy and the attractive layout which still exists, with a goal of a neighborhood with economically diverse housing. In 1925 the property containing the Dixon house was sold by the Stephens House to the Southern Realty Company. For the next few months the property changed hands several times but ended up with J. H. Carson who was developing houses in the vicinity, some of which were "spec" houses, probably including the Dixon house.

Sherwood Avenue in the 1930's as described by current residents who moved there in 1935 was a happy place for children. (2) Myers Park had been designed as an area without fences where neighbors could freely come and go. Children skated and rode their bicycles to school. Neighborhood children cut through the back yards of Sherwood residents to Radcliffe Avenue to go to Myers Park Elementary School. At that time there were many vacant lots on Radcliffe where the neighborhood boys got up to all sorts of mischief. The girls were more carefully supervised. The Dixons had two little girls described as "always beautifully dressed by their mother." One exciting event on Sherwood Avenue during the World War II years was a visit from Eleanor Roosevelt. Ms. Roosevelt, who at that time was actively working for peace, human rights, and women's rights, came to see Ms. Gladys Tillett who had been appointed as a delegate to the United Nations Status of Women Commission. The former Tillett home is across the street and slightly further east than the Dixon house.

The Morrells purchased the Dixon house in 1944, and although Mr. Morrell died five years later Mrs. Morrell continued to live in the house until her death in 1969. Perhaps because she felt unsafe alone she rented rooms in her home to FBI agents--an exciting fact known to all her neighbors.

The Burts family moved in during 1973 and have loved the house for 40 years. When they arrived they painted the previously white outside yellow. Next door lived A. G. (Goulie) Odell and his wife. Mr. Odell came to call on the Burts family; brilliant architect though he was, socially he was quite uncomfortable. During his visit the main thing he thought of to say was that he liked the color of the house; in fact he said it three times. Ms. Odell (Johnny) was a loving neighbor who made friends with the Burts children and allowed them to swim in her pool. She even asked them to set up a lemonade stand outside her house when it was on the tour of homes, slightly thumbing her nose at what was supposed to be an elegant social event.

Although the Burts family has painted, papered, built in bookcases and made other interior design enhancements, they have not altered the structure of the house at all. Their children and grandchildren have grown up there, and hope the house can continue to be the welcoming place it is now for a long time to come.

Architectural Report

In the 1920's we find various new styles of architecture being built in Charlotte often with a mixture of styles. Victorian architecture was out, some colonial and Georgian styles remained, as well as other newer ideas. Although many Myers Park houses were designed by noted architects for prominent and well-to-do families, the trend was to also include homes that were smaller and available to middle class families. The Dixon House is in the modified cottage style. Cottage houses were supposed to be reminiscent of cottages in England, or even of fairy tale dwellings. Originally they were supposed to be small and inviting. Often in use were pattern houses from Sears Roebuck and other companies where one could pick a style from a pattern book and order the house plans. (3) This was one manifestation of the beginning of mass culture, a new trend in the 20's. It is possible that this was a pattern house which was modified to suit the builder. Some typical cottage style features are sharply pointed roofs, rounded door openings, gables, large chimneys on the front near the entrance, and other whimsical details. The Dixon House has rounded doors both inside and out, straight and curved roof lines, and a large chimney in the front, all cottage features.

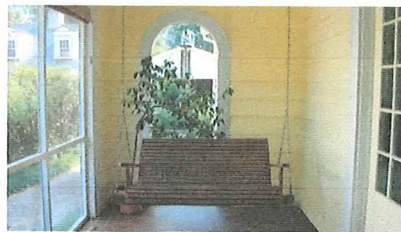
As cottages were usually supposed to be cozy one-story homes, the Dixon house designer has modified the style to make a two story house look like a one story house. (3) Cottages often had one or two steeply pitched gables on the front, but using a gable on a house this size would have limited the interior of the second floor to provide little living space. Dormers are usually just the width of a window, but in this case the solution was a steeply pitched gable roof which faced the front, treating the entire second floor as a shed dormer which runs the length of the house. Below this dormer appears a curved roof line which is simply decorative until it reaches the side porch and curves over the porch. Often these curved lines were used for a gate which led to the garden, but this house has used the motif to finish the front roof, the porch roof, the back roof, and the kitchen. The gables, dormers, and curves have produced the whimsical effect of a cottage while including significant living space upstairs.

At both front and back doors we find original iron lanterns with amber glass; a similar lantern is in the screened porch. The front door over door treatment (4) is a Colonial Revival style, its swan neck pediment is centered with an urn, and the door itself contains a fanlight. The front windows on the first floor are flanked by decorative shutters. All doors inside and outside are cased.

Upon entering the front vestibule we find the living room on the left and dining room on the right with stairs straight ahead leading to the upstairs bedrooms. The vestibule itself has a coat closet on the right and space for a small piece of furniture on the left, and is framed by one of the two interior plaster arches as we enter the entrance hall. The staircase itself has a simple curved railing supported by curved balusters. A hall leads back to the kitchen with a small telephone nook which can be seen from the entrance to the hall. The living room contains a working fireplace with a Georgian style mantel. The trap door at the back of the fireplace dumps ashes down a chute into the basement where it can be emptied from time to time, making cleaning much easier. There is a window alcove with the second rounded plaster arch, and the wide radiator cover makes a comfortable window seat. The living room opens onto the screened side porch, a must for any house before air conditioning. The porch has curved arches in both the front screen door and the back screen window opening. When the house was built it would have been a lovely cool place to sit in the evening and watch the comings and goings on the street. One proceeds back from the living room into a small pine-paneled den with an imitation fireplace which opens to reveal a liquor cabinet--an exciting feature during prohibition. The original pine paneling surrounds the fireplace and is



continued around into built-in cabinets and a lovely radiator cover. Interior of these cabinets contains original wallpaper of pine branches. Bookcases were added later and built by Mr. Burts, but do not affect the integrity of the house and could be easily removed.



The dining room is a comfortable room with four large windows; behind it is the breakfast room with an original built-in china

cabinet, upper glass-front doors to display the china, and drawers for silver and napkins. The kitchen is fairly small but had evidently been opened out to enclose what would have been a small back porch. Outside the kitchen is a brick terrace. The original plumbing fixture is still in use, featuring a double sink with one deep side for laundry. There were originally two buzzers, now disconnected, that rang in the kitchen to summon the servant--one was controlled by a bell under the dining room table which the lady of the house could press with her foot, and the second was upstairs in the master bedroom. The fold-out ironing board can be opened and used, and the powder room comes next to the kitchen. The small powder room has an original sink and toilet with floor tiled in one-inch squares.



Upstairs are four bedrooms and two baths: a large master bedroom, two good-sized bedrooms, and a small room, probably designed as a nursery. The master bedroom has three large windows, two small closets, and adjoins a bath which also opens into the hall. That bath has original plumbing including a large bathtub with hot and cold water pipes and drain located outside the tub with pipes next to the tub. The second bedroom adjoins a bath with the original shower and sink and has one closet. The third room is smaller, and the fourth which may have been a nursery features slanted ceilings, a small dormer window and one large side window, tiny closets under the eaves, and a wall of built-in drawers. Hiding in the closets has been a favorite pastime for children. . The attic stairs pull down and open into a full attic with a fan which still works to cool the house.



There is a basement with the steam boiler still in use as the house is heated by radiators; a bathroom for servants was plumbed but never finished; coal is still visible in the former coal bin.

References

Design and architectural assistance from **Ruth Burts Interiors**.

- 1, Mary N. Kratt and Thomas W. Hanchett: **Legacy, the Myers Park Story**
 2. Conversations with current and former Sherwood residents Amelia Hunter Roddey, Sarah Hunter Wade, Oliver Roddey, Lindy Wilson.
 3. Harris, McHenry & Baker Co.: **101 Classic Homes of the Twenties: Floor Plans and Photographs**
 4. Conversation with Michael Johnson, Architectural Historian, Charlotte, NC
 5. Calloway and Cromley, editors: **Elements of Style**, Simon and Schuster
- Conversation with Bill Valentine, Architect, HOK, San Francisco, CA
- General background from works by Dan Morrill and Mary Kratt
- Photography by Watson Burts