Historic Preservation Opportunities in The River District
The History Of The Land That Will Become The River District Is Rich And Varied.

• Indigenous peoples lived and hunted here for generations
• Settlement by Scotch-Irish immigrants in the 1750s.
• Gold Mining in the first half of the 19th Century
• Plantations worked by enslaved people until the Civil War
  • Sadler Plantation (c.1840s) was relatively large, with 20+ slaves by 1850
  • Numerous other “plantations” as well, including Alex. Cooper; James Marshall; Wm. and James Porter; Margaret, Robert, Geo. Sloan; and more.
• Yet, much of the area (especially the northern part) was somewhat integrated.
  • “Equality” Community in late 1830s to c.1850 (lower Paw Creek and upper Steele Creek).
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- After the Civil War, formerly enslaved people started Mt. Olive Presbyterian Church (c.1865).
- Many became tenant farmers on the former plantations.
- “Dixie” becomes associated with community by 1885
- Community of Black Americans grew along the Dixie-River Road, Sadler Road, Mt. Olive Church Road and their environs.
  - School established for Black children on Mt. Olive Church Rd.
  - Several of these families still live along Sadler and Mt. Olive Church roads
- As Charlotte grew, this area was largely ignored from the 1930s onward (except along the Catawba River itself).
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- As Charlotte grew, this area was largely forgotten and changed little from the 1930s onward (except along the Catawba River itself).
Old Maps shed some light on what was here in the past ...
1911 Spratt Map of Mecklenburg Co.
1912 Map of Postal Routes in Mecklenburg Co.
1938 Highway Map of Meck. Co.
Unfortunately, most of the historic structures in the River District have been lost ...
Deese House
c.1880/90
North Side, Dixie River Road

LOST
House
c.1880/90s
North Side, Dixie River Road

LOST
Vinson House
C.1900
East Side
Dixie
River Rd.
Roosevelt Neal House c.1900 (Dixie River Rd. opposite Sadler Rd.)
LOST

House
first ½ of 20th C.

Dixie River Rd.
at River District
entry from
Garrison
A few survive however ...
Cooper Log House c.1780
Johnston Farm c.1900
Sadler Road Houses (early 20th C.)
Sadler Road Houses (early 20th C.)

4814 Sadler Rd. c.1910

4818 Sadler Rd. c.1920
SURVIVING

Ruins and Archaeological Sites

Dam (c. early 19th C.)

Hand-Dug Well
Rooting the River District in this History

• The plans for the River District do an admirable job of protecting and highlighting the **NATURAL** environment.
  • Both practical and pragmatic reasons for this.

• **Highlighting the** **HISTORICAL** environment is equally important and for the same reasons.
  • Appeal to Millennials and younger generations
  • Sense of place
    • Connecting residents to what came before
    • Acknowledging the past (both good and bad)
    • Creating destinations within the River District
Rooting the River District in this History: Opportunities

• Partnering with the Landmarks Commission (and, potentially, Preserve Mecklenburg) as you are partnering with Catawba Land Conservancy.
  • Preserving remaining historic structures
  • Potential to relocate significant historic structures threatened by the Airport’s expansion
    • Wm. Grier House (c.1825)
    • Steele Creek Manse (c.1910) and (potential) Schoolhouse (c.1900)
    • John Douglas House (c.1870)
    • Spratt-Grier House (c.1850) [potential house for enslaved people]
Rooting the River District in this History: Opportunities

• Work with long-time residents along Sadler and Mt. Olive Church on Oral History (similar to Brooklyn/Pearl Street Park uptown)

• Educational Signage along sidewalks to tell the story of the area

• Using Crescent’s Archaeological Survey (and County LiDAR data) to identify historic sites to preserve and/or celebrate
  • Dam/Mill Ruin near Little Paw Creek could be a hiking destination (with signage)
  • Gold Mining sites and former plantation/homestead sites
  • Potential for ongoing archaeological excavations (w/UNCC or other university)

• Turn historic farmstead(s) back into working farms for River District Farmers Market.
  • Johnston Farm would be perfect for this
Thoughts?

Questions?

CONTACT INFO:

• Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission
  • Jack Thomson, Exec. Director (Jack.Thomson@mecklenburgcountync.gov)
  • Brian Clarke, Commissioner and Vice-Chair (briansclarke1972@gmail.com)