

Addendum to the Survey and Research Report on the Harry Arthur Ziem House

Susan V. Mayer, Principal
SVM Historical Consulting
September 21, 2023

Note: The 1986 report on the Harry Arthur Ziem House cited oral histories from property owners and neighbors. Recent research conducted by Susan V. Mayer for the Beard-Rogers-McConnell House in Huntersville has found new information that contradicts the previous report.

The Harry Arthur Ziem House in Elizabeth is likely the only remaining structure in Charlotte that was built by James C. Herring, a local innovator in concrete block construction in the early 1900s. In November 1909 Ziem contracted Herring to build an eight-room concrete block house on 8th Street Extension in Elizabeth Heights.¹

A native of Pender County, J. C. Herring worked as a brick manufacturer and builder in Wilmington. He moved west to Charlotte in 1889 after eloping with Cornelia “Carrie” Grady, the daughter of wealthy Wilmington landowner and politician Atlas J. Grady. She died six months later of measles, and their infant child Samuel passed in June of cholera. Herring remarried in 1892 to Mrs. Scenie A. Abbott, who died in 1901. Despite his personal misfortune, he expanded his contracting business, constructing numerous frame and brick residences and other buildings in Charlotte.²

Herring’s business in concrete block manufacture and construction was part of a trend sweeping across the country. In 1887 Harmon S. Palmer filed for a patent for a *Machine for Moulding Brick Blocks*. His machine was an improvement upon one created by Thomas J. Lowry in 1868, which incorporated handles and wheels to ease removal of the molds from the freshly formed blocks. Palmer continued to develop his concrete block technology, and in 1902 he founded the Hollow Block Building Company in Chicago.³ Palmer’s concrete block machine inspired a multitude of imitators across the country, including Herring. He expanded his business to artificial stone manufacture in 1902 with the purchase of the Holder Bros. tiling plant in Statesville. He relocated the business to Charlotte as the Herring Artificial Stone Co. at the corner of East 8th Street and the railroad, where he manufactured “pretty much everything in the way of cement, building blocks, paving blacks (sic),

¹ “Building in Elizabeth,” *Charlotte News*, November 12, 1909.

² “Their Honeymoon Here,” *Charlotte Observer*, September 1, 1889; *Wilmington Morning Star*, February 15, 1890; “Brief Local Items,” *Charlotte Observer*, June 5, 1890; “Married,” *Charlotte Democrat*, August 26, 1892; *Charlotte News*, February 11, 1901.

³ Hall, 30-40; H. S. Palmer, *Machine for Moulding Building Blocks*, U. S. Patent No. 375,377 (December 27, 1887).

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GREENSBORO, N. C.

Figure 1 Greensboro Daily News, June 13, 1906.

prominent in realty circles are watching the operations closely and if the experiment proves the economy and desirability of the new material, it will doubtless be largely used in the near future.”⁹ The Piedmont Industrial School at Hoskins, under leadership of J. A. Baldwin, manufactured cement products using two of the Herring machines and a shingle mold—“The training of these boys in cement work will be a great advantage to the country as there are very few who are familiar with the cement work.” The school had a production capacity of 500-600 blocks per day.¹⁰

⁴ “Another Enterprise for Charlotte,” *Charlotte News*, March 4, 1902.

⁵ “Large Contract on Hand,” *Charlotte News*, December 22, 1904.

⁶ J. C. Herring, *Block Molding Machine*, U. S. Patent No. 850,368 (April 16, 1907).

⁷ “Will Manufacture Concrete Building Block Machine,” *Greensboro Daily News*, November 4, 1906.

⁸ “The Herring Hollow Block Machine,” *Charlotte News*, May 25, 1907.

⁹ “Use New Building Blocks,” *Charlotte News*, May 4, 1907.

¹⁰ “The Herring Hollow Block Machine,” *Charlotte News*, May 25, 1907.

curbing stones, etc.”⁴ By 1905 he moved to Greensboro, where he had received a large contract to pave sidewalks, though he maintained his business in Charlotte.⁵

In April 1906 Herring applied for a patent for a *Block-Moulding Machine*, which “relates to machines employed in the manufacture of blocks or bricks from concrete or other plastic material, and has for its principal object to provide a machine of simple construction which will admit of ready adjustment for the manufacture of blocks of different size.”⁶ The patent was granted May 1907. He returned his business operations to Charlotte and formed the Southern Concrete Machinery Company “for the purpose of taking over the patents of J. C. Herring for his hollow concrete building block machine.”⁷ Herring also founded the Charlotte Concrete Hollow Block Company with T. J. Gattis as manager. The company used two Herring Hollow Block machines with a production capacity of 600 blocks per day.⁸

Herring’s hollow concrete blocks drew much interest in Charlotte. In May 1906 Thomas J. Hawkins, who would later serve as mayor, commissioned a concrete block apartment building at the corner of Mint and Hill Streets. As reported by the *News*, “A number of people

Herring ardently promoted his building material. He displayed his machine at the Jamestown Exposition in Virginia in 1907, receiving first place for his concrete block machinery exhibit in the Machinery and Transportation Building.¹¹ In Greensboro, he completed a concrete-block house with concrete tile roof which he touted as, except for the windows and doors, “the only all-concrete house, to his knowledge, in the United States.” He said it was all concrete save the windows and doors.¹² Herring was also featured in the *News* in their December 1909 anniversary issue, which called him “a man of originality of mind and aggressiveness of policy, who does not hesitate to lead instead of following meekly along the paths of orthodox method.”¹³

However, Herring’s concrete blocks failed to become the standard of building in Charlotte, a trend many promoters across the country found to be the case. While he had provided blocks for at least ten large residences in the city, he found concrete paving products to be a more profitable venture. In 1910 he was among the incorporators of the Piedmont Concrete Company, formed to “mix, mine and manufacture all kinds and forms of material into cement to construct, blocks, bricks, tile and all articles for decorations of buildings, or like purposes, made of cement, stone clay, mortar, glue or other materials for buildings” with a specialty of “royal burial cement vaults, holding the patent rights on this work for both North and South Carolina.”¹⁴ The following year he returned to his roots in Wilmington, where he purchased a lime and brick plant. He died in 1921 in South Carolina and was buried in Charlotte.¹⁵

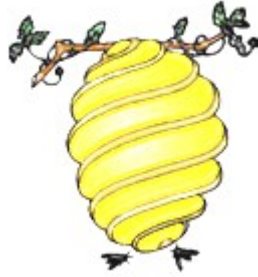
¹¹ *Charlotte News*, November 8, 1907; “Medals for Tar Heels,” *Charlotte Daily Observer*, November 8, 1907; “At Jamestown,” *Charlotte News*, May 30, 1907.

¹² “House of Concrete,” *Lexington Dispatch*, January 30, 1907.

¹³ “J. C. Herring,” *Charlotte News*, December 21, 1909.

¹⁴ “Piedmont Concrete Company,” *Charlotte News*, July 4, 1910.

¹⁵ “Establishes Plant Here,” *Wilmington Dispatch*, April 24, 1911; “J. C. Herring,” *Columbia State*, December 31, 1921.



Survey and Research Report On The Harry Arthur Ziem House



This report was written on October 7, 1986

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Harry Arthur Ziem House is located at 1812 E. Eighth Street, Charlotte, North Carolina.

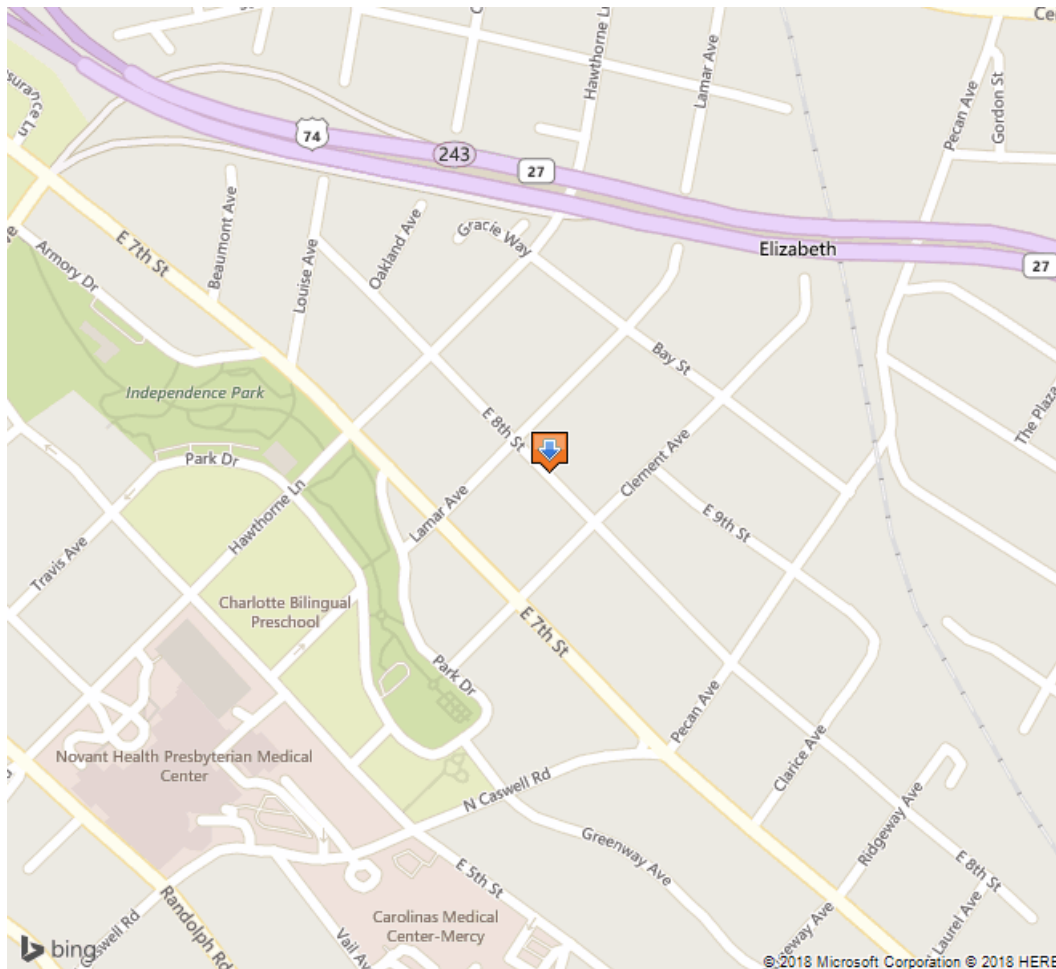
2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property: The owner of the property is:

Mr. John William Burkhead, Jr.
1812 E. Eighth St.
Charlotte, N.C. 28204

Telephone: Unlisted

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 5074, Page 808. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 127-032-10.

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

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Mr. Joseph Schuchman, edited 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-399.4:

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Harry Arthur Ziem House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Harry Arthur Ziem House erected c.1910, is the best-preserved example in Charlotte of early cast concrete block residential architecture and, therefore, occupies a significant place in the architectural history of this community; and 2) the Harry Arthur Ziem House is the only structure of its type in Elizabeth Heights, one of Charlotte's oldest streetcar suburbs.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description included in this report demonstrates that the property known as the Harry Arthur Ziem House 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 improvement is \$39,430. The current appraised value of the .201 acres of land is \$8,000. The total appraised value of the property is \$47,430. The property is zoned R6.

Date of preparation of this report: October 7, 1986

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission
1225 S. Caldwell St.
Charlotte, N.C. 28203

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Historical Overview

Dr. William B. Huffman
October, 1983

Situated on a slowly rising street in a serene but eclectic area of the Elizabeth neighborhood is an unusual two-story house that is quite unlike those around it, but is nonetheless perfectly in harmony with its surroundings. It was built about 1910 by Harry Arthur Ziem (1865-1941) according to his own design.

Ziem was born in Chicago, Ill in 1865, the son of Charles Frederick Ziem, a brother of German artist Felix Ziem, and Countess Johanna Ziem, both of whom left Germany as a result of the revolutions there in 1848. When he was a boy of six, Ziem witnessed the great Chicago fire in 1871 (his family only lived four blocks from Mrs. O'Leary famous barn).¹ There is no record to show when Harry Ziem came to Charlotte, since he does not appear in the city directories until 1912, but he purchased a building lot from the Highland Park Company on East Eight Street in July, 1909, for \$550.²

The Highland Park Company, headed by banker-developer Peter Marshall Brown (1859-1913), with Walter S. Alexander (1858-1924) serving as secretary developed the Elizabeth section of Charlotte. It was originally organized in 1891 by Edward Dilworth Latta, W. S. Alexander, Walter Brem, Heriot Clarkson, P. M. Brown, E. M. Andrews and others, and went out of business in 1915 when development was basically completed.³ Brown and Alexander were also the founders of the Southern Real Estate, Loan and Trust Company (1899) and the Southern Loan and Savings Bank (1901), which made loans to the purchasers of Highland Park property.⁴ Although originally laid out as Highland Park, the area became known as Elizabeth Heights after the establishment of Elizabeth College, a Lutheran affiliated college for women, on the site where Presbyterian Hospital now stands in 1897. The name derives from Anne Elizabeth Watts, the wife of Gerard Snowden Watts, a tobacco magnate from Durham who was the principal benefactor of the institution, and whose son-in-law, Dr. Charles B. King, was the school's first president. To help the development of their property, Highland Park gave the new school \$3600 as an inducement to locate on the hilltop site just south of the city.

In the first phase of development, Highland Park, later Elizabeth Heights was built up along Elizabeth Avenue and along its side streets. A number of substantial houses, including that of William Henry Belk, one of the founding partners of Belk Brothers Department Stores, were built in the section.⁵

When the trolley line was completed to Elizabeth College in 1902, and extended along Hawthorne to the entrance of Independence Park in 1907, development could be pushed further out. Indeed, it was in 1907 that Elizabeth Heights became part of the city, and the section bounded roughly by Hawthorne, Fifth, Caswell and halfway between Eighth and Ninth Streets was platted for development.⁶ By the time Harry Ziem bought his property in 1909, the streetcar line would have passed Independence Park (which was designed by John Nolen, the designer of much of Myers Park) and turned south on Seventh, then back east on Clement, only a half block from his house.

In November, 1909, Ziem was given a water connection permit, and therefore it must have been about 1910 that he built his house.⁸ Although there are no extant records or surviving relatives to confirm the information, folklore from present and former neighbors has it that Ziem, whose second wife was Nancy Dilling Ziem (1877-1962) of Gastonia, built the house according to his own design, and had the principal materials, including the block and interior decoration, shipped from Chicago, his original home.⁹

In the early Teens, both Harry and Nancy Ziem worked for the Hamilton Millinery Company at 223-233 S. Tryon Street, he as a traveling salesman, and she as a milliner. From 1914, on, however, he spent most of his working years as a decorative painter of signs, automobiles and ornamental designs, while Mrs. Ziem remained a milliner for many years.¹⁰ Harry Ziem apparently always retained an interest in art as part of his heritage, and in the home on Eighth Street is held many works of art, including painting and sculpture, some executed by Mr. Ziem himself.¹¹ After Harry Ziem's death in 1941, Nancy Ziem lived in the house until she herself passed away in 1962. Thereafter it was owned for the next thirteen years by a neighbor who did some renovation, and thereafter by six different proprietors, but it was not until 1979 that the present owner undertook extensive restoration efforts, which will do much to preserve this unusual house as part of Charlotte's unique turn-of-the-century streetcar suburb heritage.¹²

NOTES

¹ *Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 2, 1941, p. 2.

² Deed Book 246, p. 534, 12 July 1909.

³ Record of Corporations, Book A, p. 235; *Ibid.*, Book 4,

⁴ William R. Huffman, "Historical Sketch of the Southern Real Estate Building", February, 1983, Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission; Deed Book 250, p. 678; Ibid., Book 255, p. 616.

⁵ "New South Neighborhoods: Elizabeth", Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, May, 1981.

⁶ Map Book 224, pp. 202-3.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Water Connection Permit No. 2785, 4 November 1909.

⁹ Interview with George B. Johnston, Charlotte, N.C. 14 October 1983; Interview with Fred L. Thompson, Charlotte, N.C., 14 October 1983; Interview with Mary Voorheen, Charlotte, N. C , 14 October 1983; Certificate of Death, Reg. No. 875.

¹⁰ Charlotte City Directories, 1913-1940.

¹¹ See note 1.

¹² Interview with Mary Voorhees; interview with George B. Johnston.

Architectural Description

Joseph Schuchman
Edited by Dr. Dan L. Morrill

The Harry Ziem House is one of Charlotte's most interesting residences. It occupies a narrow lot in Elizabeth, a turn of the century streetcar suburb. The two story house was built about 1910. Esthetically, the Ziem House is a typical early twentieth century residence. The double pile main block is square shaped with no eaves or projections. The exterior is largely devoid of ornamentation, possibly a reaction against the fussiness of late nineteenth century Victorian and Queen Anne architecture.

The house's significance derives largely from its building material. The Ziem House is of cast concrete construction; it is one of the oldest examples of cast concrete residential architecture in Charlotte. According to local tradition, Harry Ziem was long interested in fireproof construction and undoubtedly utilized his

beliefs in the planning of this house. Concrete block is one of the most important building materials developed in the nineteenth century. It was perfected in the century's closing years and achieved its greatest popularity between 1900 and 1910, as it was both fireproof and inexpensive to produce. Molds gave the block a variety of surfaces resembling cut stone; three variations are present in the Ziem House.

The Ziem House is faced in a rough faced block. Quoins and a string course are of a smooth finished block; the string course is level with the first story window sills and runs across the side and rear elevations. Openings are also formed by alternating bands of the finished block. Plain concrete block is utilized for the foundation and belt course. According to local tradition, the blocks were manufactured in Chicago, Ziem's childhood hometown.

One/one sash is the primary glazing format; several single light casements and single pane windows are also present. Exterior openings are set in molded surrounds and placed between a cast concrete lintel and projecting sill. Fenestration on the front, rear and side elevations is asymmetrically arranged; the symmetrical side is two bays wide. The steeply pitched hip roof is sheathed in pressed tin and displays exposed rafters. A central chimney is laid in stretcher bond; its top is corbeled.

The Ionic porch columns and oval glass entrance door allude to the Neoclassical style; the remainder of the exterior is devoid of any historical detail. Three centrally placed cut and dressed stone steps lead to the hip roof porch, which covers the first story. Pressed tin covers the porch roof. End piers are of finished block. Rectangular finished block bases support the Ionic columns which flank the porch entrance; each column has an egg and dart molded capital. A plain entablature encircles the porch; the underside of the porch roof is sheathed in tongue and groove ceiling. A plain rectangular balustrade is set between the porch supports on the front and side. The balustrade was installed by the present owner, George Johnston, who purchased the house in 1979. It replaced a similarly designed existing balustrade. The side leads to concrete steps which run off the driveway; an existing balustrade may have been removed when the driveway stairs were installed. The porch foundation is of finished concrete block.

The off center entrance door displays a single paneled door; the oval glass is set within a floral border and placed within a rectangular molded panel. As was typical with turn of the century entrance doors, fine oval glass was beveled. The present straight edge glass was installed by the present owner. Single pane lights, typical Neoclassical motifs, flank the entrance. The shutters which frame the second story sash were added by the present owners.

Single pane casements are rhythmically placed along the foundation on the side elevations. At the rear, a shed porch, with exposed rafters, shelters the entrance and an adjacent window opening. A straight run open string stairway leads to an

off center kitchen door. Plain rectangular banisters support a simple rail. The face of the stairwell is covered in weatherboard, which may be a later addition. As the house occupies a sloping lot, a raised basement is present on the rear elevation. A vertical paneled entrance door at the rear is the only means of access to the basement and adjacent crawl space.

The interior is handsomely detailed and largely intact. But typical of the period, ornamentation is kept to a minimum. The first story follows a Four Square plan, with rooms flowing into each other, eliminating the need for a center hall. The Four Square plan came into widespread use during the late nineteenth century.

Interior detail is simply executed. Rooms are encircled by a molded baseboard and a rounded cornice. Though a variation exists, the majority of interior openings are set in plain surrounds with a crown molding. Window openings have a molded sill. The double hung sash are set in plain frames with a beaded edge.

Each first story room is encircled by a pressed tin floral and garland frieze; the frieze in each room is identical. First story pressed tin ceilings were removed by the present owner; pressed tin light panels, each a variation on a floral and garland theme, are centrally placed in three first story rooms. Each panel is square and framed by a molded surround.

The living room is the house's most elaborate interior space. Paired doors provide access to the room from the entrance hall, at the side, and the dining room at the rear. On each door, rectangular beveled glass is placed above a recessed panel. A two pane transom is set above each entrance. The mantle is typically Neoclassical. Ionic columns rest on a rectangular base and support a molded shelf. The overmantle was removed by the present owner. At the time of the house's completion, each room had a coal burning fireplace. All other mantles have been removed by previous owners.

A quarter turn stairway rises from the entrance hall. The lower portion of the stairway is open string; the remainder rises enclosed. Rectangular newel posts and banisters support a molded handrail. On the main newel post, floral and garland plaster decorations are set in a recessed panel framed by a beaded surround. The capital of the post has an egg and dart molded cornice. The inner wall of the enclosed stair is sheathed in a tongue and groove wainscot. The second story landing is delineated by a balustrade. Plain banisters are set between chamfered piers, which support a molded rail. A wooden globe surmounts the piers.

Three bedrooms and a front bathroom, the latter believed to be a later addition, open off the irregularly shaped center hall. Ceilings are of pressed tin. The six panel doors appear original. Molded baseboard encircles the hall and bedrooms. Each of these rooms has a molded cornice, although a slight variation exists from room to room. Openings are set in plain surrounds. Crown molding and molded sills are present in what appears to be, by virtue of its size, the former master

bedroom and are also randomly placed on other openings, indicating perhaps some alterations. It is possible that the room size of one or both of the adjacent bedrooms has been altered, perhaps to allow for the installation of closets. The appearance of a pressed tin frieze in the two closets may indicate the one-time existence of a frieze throughout the second floor. A single pane transom is located above the entrance to the largest bedroom. The attic is unfinished.

The house lot is well landscaped; a sunken birdbath is located in the rear yard.