

Information regarding, the James Jones Akers House
Located at, 6501 Sardis Road, Charlotte 28270
Prepared for, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission

Since it is far easier to destroy than to build, and since preservation of what was built in the past is critically important for those who will occupy the future, we who are in the present must be very intentional regarding the preservation of historically-significant artifacts which have been entrusted to our care; the James Jones Akers House is undoubtedly one of those historically-significant artifacts, and it is vital that the governing authorities of Charlotte-Mecklenburg act to recognize it as such, bestowing on it landmark status, and protecting both it and its historically-significant setting from material modification or disturbance.

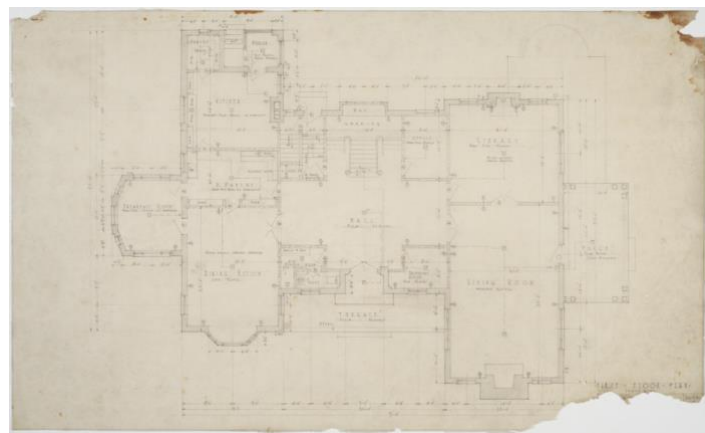
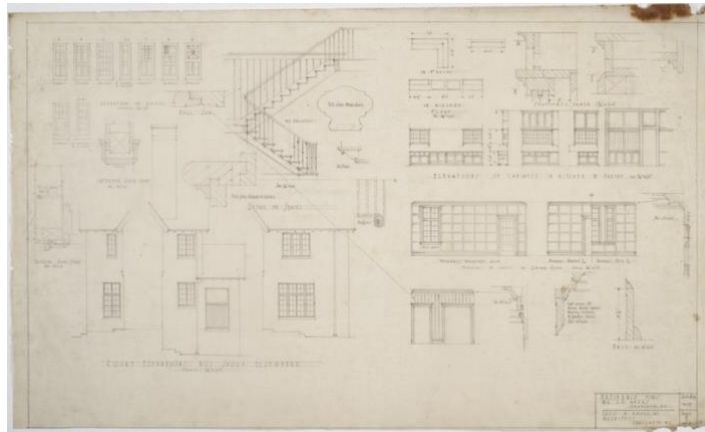
This document will describe no fewer than three reasons why the J.J. Akers House should receive landmark status: (1) The J.J. Akers House was designed by Louis Asbury, Sr., and as such it is historically-significant, (2) The J.J. Akers House is a unique example of what remains of the historic Sardis Community, and as such it is historically-significant, (3) The J.J. Akers House is itself a unique example of a Depression-era building, and as such it is historically-significant. For any of these reasons the J.J. Akers House is historically-significant and should receive landmark status, but the J.J. Akers House is historically-significant for all of these reasons combined, and should then enthusiastically receive landmark status.

This document will expand upon these reasons the J.J. Akers House is historically-significant, and should then enthusiastically receive landmark status:

(1) The J.J. Akers House was designed by Louis Asbury, Sr.:

The historical significance of architect Louis Asbury, Sr. in Charlotte can hardly be overstated; physical and digital objects of Asbury's work are currently housed in a special collection at UNCC's Atkins Library, and include over 11,000 items and over 300 architectural drawings.¹ Buildings designed by Asbury include churches (such as Meyers Park Methodist Church), government buildings (such as the Mecklenburg County Courthouse), office buildings (such as 112 S. Tryon) and private residences (such as the J.J. Akers House).² Original plans for the J.J. Akers house are available as part of this special collection, and examples of original 1937 Asbury drawings from this collection can be found below:³





The recognition of the work Louis Asbury, Sr. as historically significant is beyond question, as evidenced by his work currently being housed in a special collection at the UNCC Library; if then Asbury's work is deemed historically-significant and worthy to be afforded protections by being housed in a special collection at UNCC, how much more significant is the actual home that was built from Asbury's work, and how much more worthy of preservation is the actual home that was built from Asbury's work? It is a simple logical step to move from what is undeniable regarding the work of Louis Asbury, Sr., to what is then the case regarding the product of Louis Asbury, Sr.'s work, *i.e.*, the J.J. Akers House. As there is no doubt that Asbury's work is historically significant and should be protected, there can be no doubt that the home built from Asbury's work is historically significant and should be protected. Because of its connection with Louis Asbury, Sr., the J.J. Akers House is historically significant and should receive landmark status, protecting both it and its historically-significant setting from material modification or disturbance.

(2) The J.J. Akers House is a unique example of what remains of the historic Sardis Community:

The historical significance of the Sardis community is well-established. Preserve Mecklenburg, Inc. has researched the community back to at least 1887.⁴ Examples of historically significant homes from this community include the Isaac-Grier House and the John Hunter House;⁵ both of these homes have been designated historic landmark status: the Isaac-Grier

House being named the Grier-Rea House (tax parcel 21306114) was designated a historic landmark 2002-10-28, and the John Hunter House (tax parcel 18514239) was designated a historic landmark 1982-09-20.⁶ Both of these homes are unique examples of the historic Sardis community, and there is no question the J.J. Akers House is as well. Both of these homes have been recognized as historic landmarks, and there is no question the J.J. Akers House should receive that recognition as well.

Preserve Mecklenburg, Inc. research regarding the historic Sardis community reveals a great deal of Charlotte Observer articles describing the J.J. Akers House in the context of the Sardis Community;⁷ these include the following, quoted from the PMI research document:

- “J. J. Akers buys land from A. B. Hood on Sardis Road (Charlotte Observer, October 25, 1930)”
- “Article about A. B. Hood (Charlotte News, February 22, 1932)”
- “Photograph of A. B. Hood and wife (Charlotte Observer February 28, 1932)”
- “As you like it meets at Akers home (Charlotte Observer, April 19, 1934).”
- “Same bookclub [*sic*] again (Charlotte Observer, February 28, 1935).”
- “Visitors at home of Akers who go on to High Hampton. Akers House is on Sardis Road (Charlotte Observer, July 28, 1935).”
- “As-You-Like-It book club meets at “country home” of Mrs. Akers (September 29, 1935).”
- “Contract awarded to Little Building Company to build new home for \$40,000. Planned by Louis Asbury (Charlotte News, February 19, 1937).”
- “Luncheon and picnic for book club by Mrs. Akers at Akers’ Acres (Charlotte Observer, May 27, 1938).”
- “Liberty Hall Chapter of DAR met at home of Akers on Sardis Road (Charlotte Observer, June 9, 1940).”

Preserve Mecklenburg, Inc. research regarding the historic Sardis community reveals the degree to which the J.J. Akers House was a part of the historic Sardis Community. As such, the J.J. Akers House is historically significant and should receive landmark status, as similar homes from the historic Sardis community have received; the J.J. Akers House and its historically-significant setting from material modification or disturbance.

(3) The J.J. Akers House is itself a unique example of a Depression-era building:

At first glance the J. J. Akers House may appear to belong to a different era, and this is simply due to the fact that it does come from a different era; it does not though come from so far back as the Tudor era, but in fact comes from the Depression era. The home was constructed toward the end of the Depression era, but constructed with commitments to Tudor Revival architecture; as the home is distinctly Tudor Revival in architecture, it would have appeared to belong to a different era in 1937 as it does today. The home does come from the Depression era, and it is a unique example of a Depression-era building in different ways. In addition to the house itself, there are at least two additional structures on the property which predate the house, which have historical significance in their own right; these include the current garage and the ‘Summer House’. These – and their historical significance – will be described below, following a description of the historical significance of the J. J. Akers House itself.

The J.J. Akers House Itself:

As stated previously, the J.J. Akers House was constructed toward the end of the Depression era, and it is a unique example of a Depression-era building in different ways; this uniqueness lies in the fact that the home was constructed in a way that was perhaps unique to the Depression era, that the home has many instances of the incorporation of Art Deco architecture, and in the general manner of construction employed in the home that would not be possible today.

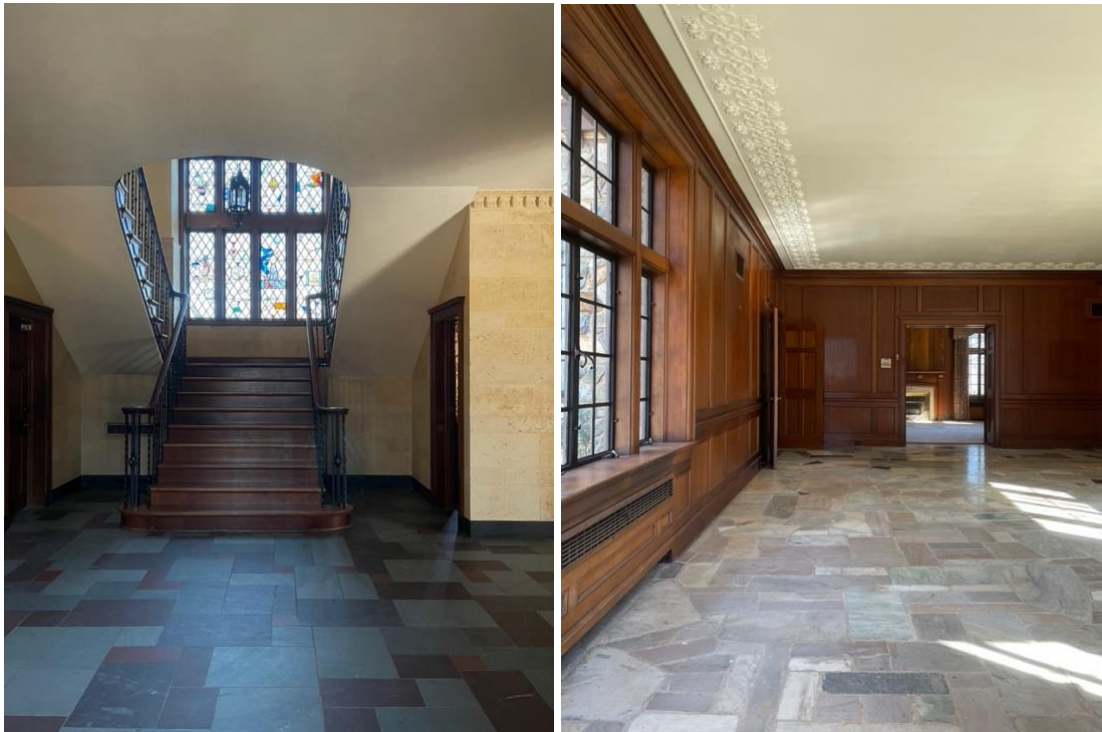
Regarding the first of these, evidence of this is found in a Charlotte Observer article from July 27, 2013, titled 'Charlotte landmark on Sardis Road for sale' by Reid Creager, quotes Charles Senn, a part of the family that owns the J.J. Akers House, as he spoke of the dining room with mahogany walls and plaster ceiling: " 'The (Akers) family brought an artist to do it,' Senn says. 'It's all hand done. This was during the Depression. You could get help cheaply, artisans who were the best at what they did.' " ⁸ An image of the dining room has been included below:



Regarding the second of these, Preserve Mecklenburg, Inc. research regarding the house provides evidence of the J.J. Akers House being a unique example of a Depression-era building, as it describes, "Outstanding original interior features include . . . bathrooms tiled in pigmented structural glass, a higher-end finish than ceramic tile which was popular during the Art Deco period." ⁹ Art Deco describes architectural commitments that were popular in the 1920's and 1930's, perhaps most recognized in the United States by buildings such as the Empire State and Chrysler Buildings. While the current Bank of America Corporate Center and Truist Center in Charlotte both heavily rely on Art Deco design, the commitments of Art Deco are most identified with the Depression era.

Regarding the third of these, despite the homage the J.J. Akers House pays to Art Deco commitments, the home is decidedly Tudor Revival in architecture. Preserve Mecklenburg, Inc. research regarding the house describes, “The James Jones Akers and Nancy Anderson Akers House has extraordinary local architectural significance. The Akers House, completed in 1937, is a Tudor manor constructed of local fieldstone with an English slate roof. Outstanding original interior features include the mahogany paneled dining room . . . The Akers House is one of the best remaining country residences erected in Charlotte in the first half of the twentieth century.”¹⁰

Further, Charles Senn describes that the marble walls in the home was quarried from the same location that the stone from the Sistine Chapel was quarried, marble from the living room floor was quarried in Italy, and that the stained glass window in the home was manufactured by Emil Frei in St. Louis, whose studio produced some of the highest quality windows in the world.¹¹ Senn continues and describes the fact that the home “needs some significant TLC”, that it “is not in its heyday right now,” but that “whoever gets it, I hope they don’t knock it down. The house is structurally incredible.”¹² Images of the marble walls, the marble living room floor, and the stained glass are included below:



This is but a portion of the information regarding this home, describing that the home is in fact a historical treasure in its own right, representing quality in construction that is not able to be reproduced today at any cost. The preservation goal for the home must not merely be to keep the home from being demolished, but must also be to preserve the home as Asbury designed it and as Akers built it; both the home and its historically-significant setting must receive protection from material modification and disturbance.

The J.J. Akers House Garage:

The J.J. Akers House property has an additional structure that appears to be a garage, constructed of the same fieldstone the J.J. Akers House is constructed. While this structure currently appears to be a garage, there is evidence that this was actually the original home on the property, that predates J.J. Akers' purchase of the property and the construction of the J.J. Akers House.

A Charlotte Observer Article from 27 June 1937 records regarding the J. J. Akers House, "At present the dwelling is being reconstructed on a much larger scale than the original one, which was of the same stone material used in the new building."¹³ It is thus clear that there was a home on the property that significantly predated 1930. Another Charlotte Observer Article from 8 August 1937 records regarding the Akers, "they are living at 'Akers Acres now but not yet in the massive stone home that is near completion.'"¹⁴ It is thus clear that the original home on the property had not fallen into disrepair, nor was it not demolished, as the Akers were living in a home on the property at the time of the completion of the J.J. Akers House.

There is evidence that the current garage was actually the original home on the property describe by the Charlotte Observer articles and was later converted into a garage-type structure. The garage has a second story, a stone chimney associated with a fireplace or stove or boiler, is constructed of fieldstone over brick, has leaded windows, and – apart from the garage doors – generally appears to be more suitable as a residence as opposed to a garage. Images of the garage are included below:





Should the current garage in fact be – as it seems to be – the original home on the property described by the Charlotte Observer articles, it would currently be no newer than 1930, but likely could be well over 100 years in age. This structure could then be of incredible historical significance in Charlotte Mecklenburg, and more specifically in the historic Sardis community. Because of the age and condition of this structure, steps need to be taken to preserve and protect it from demolition or material disturbance or modification; perhaps the structure could be restored to its original design if documents describing that design are able to be located.

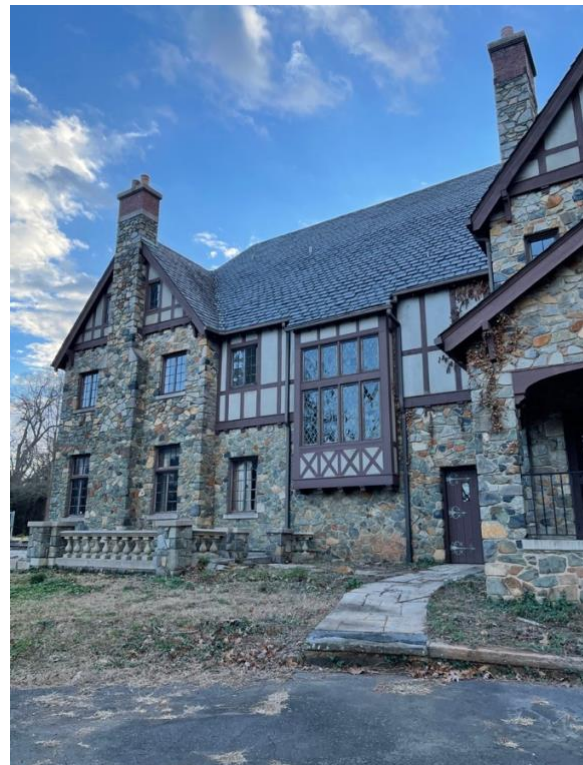
Summer House

The J.J. Akers House property has an additional structure known as the ‘Summer House’ constructed of the same fieldstone the J.J. Akers House is constructed; while the J.J. Akers House was completed in 1937, the ‘Summer House’ is mentioned prominently in a 1935 Charlotte Observer article: “. . . a feature is the small screened-in house in the yard with one side inclosed [sic] where there’s a fireplace and the other three sides open except for screening which together with some huge trees makes it a cool place in the summer.”¹⁵ Images of the ‘Summer House’ are included below:



It is unknown at this time if Louis Asbury, Sr. designed the ‘Summer House’, though clearly the ‘Summer House’ is constructed after the same Tudor Revival architecture that the J.J. Akers House is, also with the occasional homage to Art Deco; notice on the exterior of the chimney there is a starburst which clearly is done in accordance with Art Deco commitments. As such the ‘Summer House’ is also a quite unique blend of Tudor Revival and Art Deco, potentially an Asbury-designed structure, and needs to be studied further. Too, steps need to be taken to preserve and protect it from demolition or material disturbance or modification.

As was stated previously, it is far easier to destroy than to build. It is also far more difficult to preserve than to destroy. Yet some historically-significant artifacts from the past must be preserved, and the James Jones Akers House is undoubtably one of those historically-significant artifacts. It is vital that the governing authorities of Charlotte-Mecklenburg act to recognize it as such, bestowing on it landmark status, and protecting both it and its historically-significant setting from material modification or disturbance. Some reasons for this have been included in this document, though by no means are the reasons listed here complete. The home and its surroundings must be the object of an in-depth and complete study, so that those who will occupy the future are able to understand the past. Some additional photographs of the James Jones Akers House, and the property where it is found, are included below.



¹<https://findingaids.charlotte.edu/repositories/4/resources/114> from the resource
<https://wepreservemecklenburg.org/research-page-akers-acres>
²Ibid.

³https://d.lib.ncsu.edu/collections/catalog?_id=1640237696339&f%5Bclassification_facet%5D%5B%5D=Louis+H.+Asbury+Papers%2C+1906-1975&f%5Bwork_facet%5D%5B%5D=J.+J.+Akers+House+%28Charlotte%2C+N.C.%29

⁴“Sardis Information” document at <https://wepreservemecklenburg.org/research-page-akers-acres>

⁵<https://wepreservemecklenburg.org/research-page-akers-acres>

⁶<http://landmarkscommission.org/historic-properties-2/designated-historic-landmarks/>

⁷“Sardis Information” document at <https://wepreservemecklenburg.org/research-page-akers-acres>

⁸This article was published around the time that the Senn family began to try to sale the J.J. Akers House in 2013; the house or land has been for sale in one form or another since then. Screen captures of this article are available on an older listing of the J.J. Akers Home: http://www.donnasintay.com/index.php/homes_for_sale/details/6501-sardis-road-charlotte-north-carolina-28270.

⁹<https://wepreservemecklenburg.org/acres-acres-data>

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Charlotte Observer article from July 27, 2013, titled ‘Charlotte landmark on Sardis Road for sale’ by Reid Creager: http://www.donnasintay.com/index.php/homes_for_sale/details/6501-sardis-road-charlotte-north-carolina-28270.

¹²Ibid.

¹³A screen capture of this article is available here: <https://wepreservemecklenburg.org/akers-doc>

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.