

Charlotte-Mecklenburg

Historic Landmarks Commission



Steele Creek Presbyterian Church Manse

7728 Steele Creek Road
Charlotte, North Carolina 28217

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission
Local Landmark Designation Report

Prepared by Tommy Warlick

December 2023

ADDRESS OF PROPERTY

7728 Steele Creek Road (house displays an alternative 7500 street number)
Charlotte, North Carolina 28217

PIN #

14111206

DEED BOOK & PAGE

Book 31978, Page 685

ZONING

N1-A(ANDO)

AMOUNT OF LAND/ACREAGE TO BE DESIGNATED

16.890 acres

AD VALOREM TAX APPRAISAL

The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of up to 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes depending upon the portion(s) of the property designated as the “historic landmark.” As of December 2023, the total appraised value of the property is \$1,710,800.

RECOMMENDATION FOR DESIGNATION

The Commission recommends the exterior of the manse building, the exterior and interior of the four-room wooden frame structure located behind the manse building, the exterior of the garage, and all of the property associated with the tax parcel for historic designation. The Commission also recommends further investigation to locate and assess the eligibility of other outbuildings and features on the property (including without limitation the Shoaf Lake structure, the concrete block well house at the rear property line, the CMU block water feature at the front property line, and a potential cemetery) for landmark designation.

NAME/ADDRESS OF CURRENT PROPERTY OWNER

City of Charlotte
600 E. Fourth Street
Charlotte, NC 28202

DESIGNATION REPORT CONTENTS

This report includes maps and representative photographs of the property, a brief historical sketch and architectural description of the property, and documentation as to why and how the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S. § 160D-945.

I. Abstract

Statement of Significance

The manse of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, a congregation in southwest Mecklenburg County dating back to 1745, housed the church's senior pastors for seventy-five years. As the nation's largest rural Presbyterian church for much of the twentieth century, the Steele Creek pastorate was a significant posting, offering both a prominent local leadership role within the Steele Creek community and an invaluable learning experience for those men that they used and shared as they later migrated to other communities throughout the country. For decades, the Steele Creek manse (ca. 1914) served as a central hub for the daily lives of the congregation and the local Steele Creek community, hosting a variety of church and community functions and events. Built on property owned by the congregation for nearly 140 years, the manse is the sole remaining pre-World War I residence in the Steele Creek community that reflects both Four Square (or Rectilinear) and Colonial Revival architectural influences. In various historical and architectural surveys of the Steele Creek community, the manse has been described as "one of the more important surviving architectural resources in the rural Steele Creek community and the finest example of the Colonial Revival style" and "critical" to the understanding of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church and its surrounding community. In 2008, the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office determined that the manse was eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in part due to the house's architectural significance and retention of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Only moderate exterior alterations have been made to the manse since then, prompting NCSHPO to reaffirm that determination of eligibility in 2020. To date, there has been no discernible deterioration in any aspect of the house's integrity. The manse property also contains several additional features – including without limitation a one-story frame garage, a four-room wooden frame house, a CMU block water feature, a concrete block well house, a lakeside wooden shelter, and a potential cemetery – that, upon further investigation, may further contribute to the property's historic significance.

Integrity Statement

- **Location:** The extant Steele Creek Presbyterian Church manse remains at its original site of construction and thereby retains a high degree of integrity of location.
- **Design:** The manse's form, proportions, and overall design remain unchanged, thereby giving the house a high degree of integrity as to its original Four Square and Colonial Revival influenced design.
- **Setting:** Since its construction, the manse has stood prominently less than 100 feet from the winding historic stage route (now Steele Creek Road) that once linked Salisbury, North Carolina, and Camden, South Carolina. Situated at the approximate midway point of the property's nearly 650 foot east border, with no other visible structure on that west side of Steele Creek Road for more than three-tenths of a mile in either direction, the manse is a prominent and widely recognized feature of the landscape. Its proximity to the 134+ year-old Steele Creek church campus underscores the significant role that the manse and its series of occupants played in the lives of generations of members of the church and the overall Steele Creek community.
- **Materials:** At some point in the 1960s or 1970s, the likely deteriorating wooden floor of the front porch was replaced with a masonry surface. Between 2008 and 2020, some or all

of the original windows were replaced, and the original weatherboard siding was covered with vinyl siding. Otherwise, the manse retains good integrity as to its materials.

- **Workmanship:** Built over a century ago, the Steele Creek manse retains numerous elements of the Four Square form and Colonial Revival features of its original construction, including without limitation its two-story rectangular massing, the pyramidal hip roof, the hipped dormers, the pedimented one-story full-length front porch supported by classical columns, and the low-pitch slate roof flaring out over wide unornamented boxed eaves. The durability of those elements demonstrates the skills of the builder.
- **Feeling:** In addition to its location and setting, situated as a singular presence on the west side of a historic thoroughfare and in close proximity to the centuries-old church it served since 1914, the Steele Creek manse maintains its historic feeling as a prominent and recognizable century-old Steele Creek community landmark. Its storied architectural influences aptly reflect the simplicity and humble nature of an early twentieth century rural church community.
- **Association:** Since 1914, the manse has been a prominent element of the centuries-old Steele Creek Presbyterian Church properties that line Steele Creek Road. The manse also served as the home of five prominent clergymen who served as senior pastors of the Steele Creek church for most of the twentieth century – Reverends John W. Orr, John Mack Walker, Watt M. Cooper, John R. McAlpine III, and Lewis W. Bledsoe (the longest serving Steele Creek pastor at nearly 30 years) – and their families, including two young men who spent part of their childhoods in the manse and later followed their fathers into the ministry (Reverends W. F. Orr, and John Mack Walker, Jr.).

II. Maps and Chain of Title

Mecklenburg County Tax Maps



Mecklenburg County Birdseye View Aerial Imagery



- 1 – Steele Creek Presbyterian Church manse
- 2 – Manse garage (one-story frame structure)
- 3 – Four-room wooden frame house (approximate location)
- 4 – CMU block water feature
- 5 – Shoaf Lake structure

Previously identified property features still to be located*

- Concrete block well house at rear property line
- Potential cemetery

* Both features were identified in a 2020 survey of the property. Environment & Archaeology, LLC, “Historic Resources Report, Charlotte Douglas International Airport, Historical Resources Summary Project, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, ER# 20-0438,” September 2020, 52, accessed December 2, 2023, https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/historic-preservation-office/PDFs/ER_20-0438.pdf.

Chain of Title

Transaction Date	Grantor	Grantee	Book	Page(s)
July 19, 2017	Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, Inc.	City of Charlotte (17.028± acres)	31978	685-88 ¹
July 24, 1880	Dr. I. W. Herron & wife A. M. Herron	J. S. Collins, J. B. Swann, and W. H. Clark as trustees for the Steele Creek Presbyterian Church congregation (approx. 20 acres for \$300)	25	220
February 5, 1874	B. F. & wife Susan Matilda Brown	I. W. Herron (approx. 50.25 acres for \$700)	10	485

¹ The deed granted to the City of Charlotte erroneously identifies the acquired property as that property conveyed to the Trustees of the Steele Creek Presbyterian Church congregation by “Dr. J.W. Herron and his wife.” The original deed granted to the Trustees actually identifies the grantors as “Dr. I.W. Herron and his wife A.M. Herron.” Mecklenburg County Deed Book 25, Page 220 (1880).

The deed granted to the City of Charlotte expressly excludes two parcels originally included within the land sale by Dr. and Mrs. Herron to the Trustees: (1) a 0.53± acre parcel in the Markswood subdivision (referencing Mecklenburg County Map Book 9, Page 157 (1960)) conveyed by the Trustees to Mrs. M.M. Marks (referencing Mecklenburg County Deed Book 426, Page 1) on January 1, 1913; and (2) a 1.54± acre parcel now in the Markswood subdivision (also referencing Mecklenburg County Map Book 9, Page 157) conveyed by the Trustees “to Dr. J. W. Herron” on December 27, 1897 (per the deed between the Church and the City of Charlotte, “Said conveyance deed was provided by the church staff and was unable to be located in public records.”). Both excluded parcels are situated to the north side of the manse property. Mecklenburg County Deed Book 31978, Page 688 (2017).

III. Historical Sketch

Officially organized in 1760, the founding of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church preceded the formation of Mecklenburg County from Anson County by two years. But the Steele Creek community in southwest Mecklenburg County was home to an active Presbyterian congregation as early as 1745. Before the church's 1760 formal organization, local congregants were served by circuit riders – itinerant preachers each charged with serving several settlements. In 1764, a commission appointed by the Presbyterian Synod of New York and Philadelphia reorganized and adjusted the boundaries of the churches in North Carolina. Calls were sent out for more “settled” pastors for the congregations of Steele Creek, Providence, Hopewell, Centre (now in Iredell County), and Rocky River and Poplar Tent (both now in Cabarrus County). Sugaw Creek, to the northeast of Charlotte, already had a pastor. These seven churches – sometimes known as the pre-Revolutionary “Pleiades” or the “Seven Sisters” – were the first churches established in Mecklenburg county by its early Scotch-Irish settlers.²

Reverend Robert Henry, Steele Creek's first “settled” pastor, was actually shared with Providence Presbyterian Church during his 1766-1767 tenure. Indeed, during much of its first century of existence, the Steele Creek congregation often experienced extended periods of either shared pastors or no pastors. That lack of consistent pastoral support may have contributed to the fact that the Steele Creek Presbyterian Church did not provide living quarters for its pastors prior to 1880.³

The Founding of the Steele Creek Manse

On July 24, 1880, the Steele Creek Presbyterian congregation purchased approximately twenty acres from two of its members – Dr. Isaac Wainwright Herron (1832-1907) and his wife Alethia Minerva Cooper Herron (1834-1909) – for \$300 for the construction of a manse for its pastors. The property, which remained in the church's possession until 2017, is situated approximately one-quarter mile south of the church's 1889 sanctuary, lying on the west side of the winding historic stage route (now Steele Creek Road) that once linked Salisbury, North Carolina, and Camden, South Carolina.⁴

Both natives of Mecklenburg County, Isaac and Alethia Herron were long-time members of the Steele Creek congregation. Following his graduation with honors from the Medical College of Charleston, South Carolina, at the age of 24, Isaac returned to Charlotte and quickly established a sizable medical practice, specializing in infectious diseases. According to the *Charlotte News*, Isaac “rarely ever lost a patient” in his fifty-two years of medical practice. In 1856, he and Alethia

² “Church Celebrates 175th Anniversary,” *Charlotte Observer*, June 23, 1935, section 3, page 9; William Huffman and Richard Mattson, “The Steele Creek Presbyterian Church and Cemetery,” designation report for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 7, August 28, 1990, accessed November 27, 2023, <http://landmarkscommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Steele-Creek-Presby-Church-Cemetery-SR.pdf>.

³ Ibid.; John Douglas, *The History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, 1745-1978*, 3rd ed. (1872; Charlotte: Craftsman Printing & Publishing House, 1978), 75-76, 147.

⁴ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 25, Page 220; Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 75-76, 147, 151; National Register of Historic Places registration form for Steele Creek Presbyterian Church and Cemetery, January 3, 1991, 3, accessed December 1, 2023, <https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/nr/MK1377.pdf>.

were married. They built a home in the Steele Creek community less than a mile from Isaac's childhood home. The couple had seven children, four of whom survived to adulthood.⁵

In addition to a thriving medical practice, Isaac was an active member of the Democratic Party at the state and local levels for more than three decades.⁶ He and Alethia also maintained a large farming operation of several hundred acres, with particular emphasis on raising wheat, cotton, and horses. African American tenant farmers and their families lived on and cultivated the Herron's property.⁷ As farmers, both Isaac and Alethia became active participants in the North Carolina State Grange (also known as the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry), the national political organization that sought favorable state-level public policies for farmers. They were founding members of the local Steele Creek Grange chapter, for which Isaac served as the inaugural "Overseer" and subsequently as the "Worthy Master."⁸ Following the 1888 destruction of the Steele Creek Presbyterian Church building, the congregation appointed Isaac to a select committee tasked with soliciting and reviewing proposed building costs and plans for the church's reconstruction.⁹

Both Isaac and Alethia Herron were highly regarded members of the Steele Creek community. At the time of his death in 1907, shortly after the couple's fifty-first wedding anniversary, Isaac was "one of the oldest and best beloved physicians of the county." The *Charlotte News* reported: "In the death of Dr. Herron the county loses one of its most valued citizens. He . . . always manifested an interest in things for the upbuilding of the community, contributing largely to church organizations and schools." An estimated 1,100 to 1,200 people attended his funeral services.

⁵ "Death of Dr. I. W. Herron," *Charlotte News*, August 23, 1907, 5; "Funeral of Dr. I. W. Herron To-Morrow," *Charlotte News*, August 24, 1907, 5; "Funeral Services for Dr. Herron at 2 P.M.," *Charlotte Observer*, October 17, 1921, 8; "Life Story of Dr. Isaac Wainwright Herron," Ancestry.com, accessed December 1, 2023, <https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/116029262/person/220150913474/story>; "Life Story of Alethia Minerva Cooper," Ancestry.com, accessed December 1, 2023, <https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/116029262/person/220150913483/facts>.

⁶ "Delegates to the Congressional and Judicial Conventions," *Charlotte Observer*, May 7, 1874, 1; "Mecklenburg County Convention," *Charlotte Democrat*, July 12, 1875, 3; "Mecklenburg Delegates to the State Convention," *Charlotte Observer*, June 14, 1876, 4; "Mecklenburg Democratic County Convention," *Charlotte Democrat*, July 17, 1876, 3; "Convention of Mecklenburg Democrats," *Southern Home*, May 24, 1878, 3; "Mecklenburg Democratic County Convention and Mass Meeting," *Charlotte Democrat*, May 21, 1880, 3; "The Ticket Named," *Charlotte Observer*, August 22, 1882, 3; "Mecklenburg Democratic County Convention," *Charlotte Democrat*, June 6, 1884, 2; "Democratic County Convention," *Charlotte Democrat*, May 13, 1892, 3; "Mecklenburg's Democracy," *Charlotte Observer*, July 22, 1894, 1; "The Democratic Primaries," *Charlotte Democrat*, June 11, 1896, 3; "The Winning Candidates," *Charlotte Observer*, March 29, 1900, 6.

⁷ "Heavy Rain and Wind," *Charlotte Democrat*, June 16, 1868, 3; "Houston's Prolific Cotton Seed," *Southern Home*, April 7, 1873, 3; "Mecklenburg Colt Show," *Mecklenburg Times*, October 2, 1891, 4; "Notice of Tax Sales," *Charlotte Democrat*, April 5, 1889, 3; "Adventists in Mecklenburg," *Charlotte News*, April 25, 1889, 1. The 1860 census – the final population survey conducted before the abolition of slavery – reported no enslaved people owned by the Herrons. U.S. Census Bureau, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*, Slave Schedules, Western Division, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, August 23, 1860 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1860).

⁸ "Patrons of Husbandry," *Southern Home*, June 16, 1873, 2; Letter to the Editor, *Southern Home*, June 18, 1877, 3; Karin Lorene Zipf, "Grange," NCPedia, accessed December 1, 2023, <https://www.ncpedia.org/grange#:~:text=Image%20from%20the%20North%20Carolina,mold%20and%20shape%20state%20policies>.

⁹ "Steele Creek Committee in the City," *Charlotte Observer*, February 1, 1888, 4; Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 78.

When she passed away two years later, Alethia was described as “one of the most worthy, most estimable and most beloved women in the community, whose life had been a benediction.”¹⁰

Construction of the Steele Creek Manse

According to the first published history of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, written by Reverend John Douglas (who served as the church’s pastor from 1866 to 1879), the congregation purchased the Herron property “and erected thereupon a suitable manse with the necessary out-buildings” in 1880. The manse was constructed at a cost of \$1,600.¹¹

When Reverend J. T. Plunkett, Steele Creek’s tenth pastor, arrived in 1881 to assume the Steele Creek Presbyterian pastorate, he and his family were the first occupants of the new manse. Although Plunkett’s tenure at Steele Creek was short-lived – he departed in August 1882 to answer the call from another congregation in Covington, Kentucky – his parting tribute to the Steele Creek congregation provided some insight as to the elements of the stately new manse:

When we took possession of it (manse), we found thoughtful hands had anticipated our coming by cleansing and scouring the premises and left for us to occupy a clean new home. This was not all, for we found every closet, storeroom and pantry filled to overflowing with every substantial and delicacy needed in the housekeeping department. It was such an abundance as to supply us for several months. The barn too, was handsomely remembered with corn, hay and fodder stored away most liberally. An elegantly stitched saddle and bridle with the compliments of the young men was found. . . . Mrs. Douglas, widow of my lamented predecessor, also remembered us liberally by making us recipients of her husband’s handsome study table and by furnishing us a complete orchard of apple, peach, cherry and plum trees, together with a fine quality of grapevines. . . . Why cannot other churches follow this example and do what they can for comfort and happiness to their ministers. Perhaps they can offer no manse, but maybe they can gladden him with some unexpected visitation and surprise, if not the quality but the will he will enjoy.

In 1883, Plunkett’s successor, Reverend A. P. Nicholson, moved into the manse.¹²

The barn no longer remains. It is unclear where the barn may have been situated, as well as what and where other “necessary out-buildings” may have been constructed. Further investigation is

¹⁰ “Death of Dr. I. W. Herron,” *Charlotte Observer*, August 24, 1907, 7; “Funeral of Dr. I. W. Herron To-Morrow”; “Large Funeral Party,” *Charlotte News*, August 26, 1907, 4; “Passing of Mrs. I. W. Herron,” *Charlotte News*, December 4, 1909, 5.

¹¹ Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 76; William E. McIlwain, *Historical Sketch of the Presbytery of Mecklenburg From its Organization, October 16th, 1869, to October 1st, 1884* (Charlotte: Hirst Printing Company, 1884), 35.

¹² Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 75-76, 76-77.

warranted as to the full extent of the manse's associated structures, as well as what may remain of the orchards.

Further investigation was also necessary to determine whether the extant Steele Creek manse is in fact that "suitable manse" of 1880 occupied by Reverends Plunkett and Nicholson. Douglas' Steele Creek history was first published in 1872, eight years *prior* to the manse's reported 1880 construction date. Accordingly, the information concerning the manse first appeared in a subsequent edition of Douglas' history, which the church's Historical Committee updated in 1901 and 1978. According to the most recent edition (the 1978 third edition), the manse "has been remodeled and renovated several times," including the addition of a new room in 1891 (at a cost of \$117 funded by the women of the congregation), redecorations of the house in both 1957 and 1972, and repairs at the manse's garage in 1941. This otherwise meticulously detailed history makes no mention of any construction of another manse after the initial 1880 construction date. The 1888 fire that destroyed the church's sanctuary also claimed its sessional records pertaining to that time period. Mecklenburg County's property records also reflect an 1880 construction date for the current manse.¹³

However, other persuasive evidence suggested that the extant manse may have been constructed in the early twentieth century. A biographical sketch of Reverend John W. Orr, who served as Steele Creek's pastor between 1912 and 1920, states that "a new manse was built during his pastorate" at the church.¹⁴ In a similar vein, the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office recorded a 1910 construction date for the Steele Creek manse (identified as MK1378) in its 2020 reaffirmation of the 2008 determination that the building was eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. That 1910 construction date has been confirmed by three separate historic/architectural assessments of the property – in 1990 by Kinley-Horn & Associates for the North Carolina Department of Transportation, in 2008 by Mattson, Alexander and Associates for the North Carolina Turnpike Authority, and in 2020 by Environment & Archaeology LLC for the Federal Aviation Administration – and a 1997 survey of Mecklenburg County's historic rural resources prepared for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.¹⁵

¹³ Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 147, 80, 121, 128, 113, 78; Mecklenburg County Property Record Card Property Search for tax parcel number 14111206, Polaris 3G, accessed December 2, 2023, <https://property.spatalest.com/nc/mecklenburg/#/property/152572>. The manse was also redecorated in 1939 and was part of a three-year \$90,000 church renovation project completed in 1952 that included the Steele Creek sanctuary and community house. "Steele Creek Plans Meeting," *Charlotte Observer*, March 20, 1939, 2; "Church Construction Increased," *Charlotte News*, January 30, 1953, 26C.

¹⁴ Austin P. Foster and John Trotwood Moore, eds., *Tennessee: The Volunteer State 1769-1923*, 5 vols. (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1923), 4:179.

¹⁵ North Carolina Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Ramona Bartos to U.S. Federal Aviation Administration Memphis Airports District Officer Manager Tommy L. Dupree with attachments, October 26, 2020, accessed December 2, 2023, https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/historic-preservation-office/PDFs/ER_20-0438.pdf; Uncredited letter to Federal Highway Administration Division Administrator Nicholas L. Graf with attachments, April 5, 1990, accessed December 2, 2023, https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/historic-preservation-office/PDFs/ER_90-8066.pdf; North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office Administrator Peter B. Sandbeck to North Carolina Turnpike Authority PE Jeff Dayton with attachments, April 14, 2008, accessed December 2, 2023, https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/historic-preservation-office/PDFs/ER_02-9723_PhaseII.pdf; ER 02-9723; GS/MK Co Rpt #380.1; U-3321; ER 20-0438; MK Co Rpt #1130; Sherry J. Joines and Dan L. Morrill, "Historic Rural Resources in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina," Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1997, 28, accessed December 2, 2023, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/historic-rural-resources-in-mecklenburg-county-north-carolina/378701>.

Further, as noted in the Architectural Assessment section below, the Steele Creek manse combines the simplistic, cubic American Four Square or Rectilinear form with Colonial Revival detailing. Neither of those architectural trends arrived in Charlotte's *urban* neighborhoods until the mid-1890s, according to Charlotte historian Tom Hanchett, some fifteen years *after* the Steele Creek manse was reportedly constructed in *rural* Mecklenburg County.¹⁶

Moreover, in its identification of a 1910 construction date for the manse, Mattson, Alexander and Associates noted, "Commissioned by the congregation of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church for their pastor, the handsome, Colonial Revival manse neatly reflected the community's adoption of the latest architectural trend." By the 1910s, the Steele Creek community featured three two-story Four Square homes with Colonial Revival detailing: the Isaac Freeman House (built in 1914), the Dr. Richard Z. Query House (built in 1919), and the Steele Creek manse. Local contractor Paul Brown has been credited with building all three of those structures. Today, the Steele Creek manse survives.¹⁷



The now-demolished Dr. Richard Z. Query House (1919). Note the hipped dormer and second story window grouping on the front elevation and the contrasting symmetrical and irregular fenestration on the side elevations, reminiscent of the Steele Creek manse constructed earlier by the same builder. Source: Mattson, Alexander and Associates, Inc., "Architectural Resources Survey Report, Wallace Neel Road Relocation, Charlotte, Mecklenburg County," July 7, 2004, 15, accessed December 5, 2023, https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/historic-preservation-office/PDFs/CH_04-0636.pdf.

Based on that conflicting information, Walter Neely – a longtime member of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church and current member of its successor Steele Creek Presbyterian Church at Pleasant Hill – recently reviewed the church's session records for the 1910s. He discovered that on September 14, 1913, the session scheduled a vote on whether to approve construction of a new

¹⁶ Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (1998; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 159-61; see also Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Homes*, 2nd ed. (1984; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020), 409, 413; Catherine W. Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture* (1990; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 497-500.

¹⁷ Mattson, Alexander and Associates, Inc., "Phase II Architectural Resources Survey Report, Gaston East-West Connector, Gaston and Mecklenburg Counties," February 14, 2008, 156, accessed December 2, 2023, https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/historic-preservation-office/PDFs/ER_02-9723_PhaseII.pdf; Kinley-Horn & Associates, "Historic Structures, Survey and Evaluation Report, Charlotte Outer Loop (West Section), R-2248A," January 30, 1990, 18, accessed December 2, 2023, https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/historic-preservation-office/PDFs/ER_90-8066.pdf.

manse on the Herron property. The records do not indicate the result of that vote. However, because the congregation began fundraising activities and disbursements specifically for the manse in the fourth quarter of 1930, Neely believes construction of a new manse was approved at the September 14, 1913, Steele Creek session meeting. By the end of the first quarter of 1914, the congregation had raised \$3,889.25 for the manse. Also by the end of the first quarter of 1914, the congregation paid out the last of \$4,649.32 in total disbursements for the manse, leading Neely to conclude that the new manse was completed by the end of March 1914. To date, no records have been located as to whether the original manse was demolished or renovated, where (if demolished) the old manse stood in relation to the extant manse, and whether Paul Brown in fact built the new manse.¹⁸

Further investigation would be necessary to determine whether the extant manse is a substantially remodeled version of an earlier 1880 residence or a second subsequently constructed building. It is clear, however, that the extant form of the Steele Creek manse – the sole remaining pre-World War I residence in the Steele Creek community that incorporates both Four Square and Colonial Revival architectural influences – dates back to early 1914.

Accordingly, while Reverend J. T. Plunkett was the first Steele Creek pastor to occupy a manse constructed by the congregation of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, Reverend John W. Orr was the first Steele Creek pastor to occupy the extant 1914 manse and the only Steele Creek pastor to occupy both the 1880 and the 1914 manses.

The Steele Creek Manse

From 1880 to 1989, the congregation of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church provided housing for its senior pastors and their families in a manse located on the former Herron property. The Steele Creek post occurred early in the ministerial careers of nearly all of those pastors. As Steele Creek Presbyterian Church was the nation's largest rural Presbyterian church for much of the twentieth century, the Steele Creek pastorate provided a unique and invaluable learning experience to be applied throughout the remainder of those pastors' careers as they migrated to other communities throughout the country.¹⁹ Those pastors went on to serve the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the greater communities in a wide range of significant roles: from trustees of institutions of higher education and newspaper editorships to military chaplains and bank presidents, from novelists to elected officials.

Likewise, given their various backgrounds and pre-Steele Creek endeavors, those thirteen pastors offered the congregation a broader perspective of the world beyond their community. As senior pastors of the prominent local church, those men became influential community leaders, guiding and comforting the Steele Creek congregation and community through some of the most tumultuous periods in American history: Reconstruction, two world wars, the Great Depression, the decline of the cotton industry and agricultural economy, the Cold War, and beyond. In many

¹⁸ Telephone interview of Walter Neely by Tommy Warlick, December 6, 2023.

¹⁹ "Church Celebrates 175th Anniversary"; "Steele Creek Church Featured in New Book," *Charlotte Observer*, July 15, 1952, 6; "Sunday vote could mean end of historic Steele Creek church," *Charlotte Observer*, May 22, 2017, A4; Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 123-24.

ways, for more than a century, the Steele Creek manse served as both an incubator and a lifeline for the rural Steele Creek community.

Those pastors of the Steele Creek Presbyterian Church manse and their terms of service are as follows:

Reverend J. T. Plunkett (1881-1882), the first Steele Creek pastor to occupy the church's first manse, graduated from South Carolina's Columbia Theological Seminary. After one year of service at Steele Creek, he answered the call of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in Covington, Kentucky. Plunkett subsequently served the congregations in Detroit, Michigan, Augusta, Georgia, and Birmingham, Alabama. He also moderated the Georgia Assembly in 1905. Plunkett served as the chaplain of the Georgia military establishment as well as national chaplain and Georgia's chaplain for the Travelers' Protective Association of America.²⁰

Reverend A. P. Nicholson (1883-1886), another graduate of the Columbia Theological Seminary, was a member of the South Carolina Presbytery before transferring to Steele Creek.²¹

W. O. Cochran (1887-1889), a native of Mecklenburg County and graduate of Erskine College, came from Crittenden, Kentucky, to accept the senior pastor position at Steele Creek. He led the Steele Creek congregation through its recovery following the 1888 fire that destroyed the sanctuary, and personally replaced the pulpit lost in the fire. Cochran left after the completion of the new sanctuary to become pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Bristol, Tennessee. Cochran later returned to the Blue Grass State to serve congregations in Millersburg, Brooksville, and Augusta.²²

Turner Ashby Wharton (1889-1894), a native of Guilford County, North Carolina, graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, and King College in Bristol, Tennessee. In his childhood, he was a classmate of North Carolina author William Sidney Porter, better known as O. Henry. Wharton's Steele Creek tenure was marked by the addition of a new room at the manse, as well as the dedication of the new sanctuary and the introduction of the first organ used at Steele Creek Presbyterian. Following his time at Steele Creek, Wharton served as pastor for churches in Abington, Virginia, Memphis and Columbia, Tennessee, and Sherman, Texas. In addition to his ministerial duties in Sherman, Wharton served as

²⁰ Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 75-76; Louis C. La Motte, *Colored Light: The Story of the Influence of Columbia Theological Seminary* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1937), 158; "May Call Plunkett," *St. Louis Republic*, March 2, 1901, 10.

²¹ Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 77-78; *General Catalogue of the Officers and Students of the Theological Seminary at Columbia, South Carolina, 1870-1871* (Columbia SC: Presbyterian Publishing House, 1871), 19.

²² Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 78-79; Robert Stuart Sanders, *Presbyterianism in Paris and Bourbon County, Kentucky, 1786-1961* (Louisville, KY: The Dunne Press, 1961), 236; North Kentucky Views, "Religious Institutions of Bracken County," 4, accessed December 2, 2023, https://www.nkyviews.com/bracken/pdf/bra_religious_institutions.pdf; Methodist Episcopal Church, "1920 Minutes of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church: The Ninety-Fourth Annual Session" (Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern Press, 1920), 28.

chairman of the city health department, chairman of the Speakers' Bureau for North Texas during World War I, and moderator for the Synod of Texas.²³

Archibald Alexander Little (1895-1901) came to Steele Creek from the Synod of Virginia. A graduate of Hampden-Sydney and Southwestern Presbyterian University, he held pastorates in Virginia, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi in addition to his Steele Creek tenure. For ten years, starting in 1916, he edited the *Presbyterian of the South* periodical. Little authored numerous articles for various religious journals and published a book of sermons entitled *The Highway to Happiness* (1935). He also served on the board of directors of several educational institutions, including Agnes Scott College, Southwestern College, Columbia Theological Seminary, and Belhaven College.²⁴

Price Henderson Gwynn (1901-1906), a graduate of the University of Virginia, worked as a teacher in Charlottesville before entering Union Theological Seminary. He led several congregations throughout North Carolina and Virginia, leaving Steele Creek for Spray Presbyterian Church in Rockingham County. After twenty-five years in the ministry, Gwynn retired and founded Boulevard Bank (later known as Leaksville Bank and Trust Company) in Leaksville, North Carolina, filling the roles of president, trust officer, and director. He served as superintendent of the Leaksville public schools from 1912 to 1915 and again as "emergency head" during World War I, between 1917 and 1920. Moore also served two terms (1929, 1931) in the North Carolina Legislature.²⁵

George F. Robertson (1907-1908), a graduate of Davidson College and Princeton Theological Seminary, served eighteen months as Steele Creek's pastor before resigning to "enter the evangelistic work," which he launched from his new home on Charlotte's East Fourth Street. He was elected General Evangelist of the Synod of South Carolina in 1909 and used that position to begin traveling around the country assisting struggling congregations. Robertson also authored three novels: *Only Nancy: A Tale of the Kentucky Mountains* (1917), *King John: A Tale of the South* (1927), and *A Small Boy's Recollection of the Civil War* (1932).²⁶

²³ Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 79-81; Brian Hart, "Wharton, Turner Ashby (1862-1935)," in Texas State Historical Association, *Handbook of Texas*, accessed December 5, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/wharton-turner-ashby>; "Noted Minister of Presbyterian Church Succumbs," *Bryan (Texas) Daily Eagle*, October 26, 1935, 1.

²⁴ Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 80-82; "Little, Archibald Alexander" in *Lives of Mississippi Authors, 1817-1967*, ed. James B. Lloyd (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1981), 265; "Dr. A. A. Little Dies; Presbyterian Leader," *Commercial Appeal* (Memphis, TN), June 1, 1939, 5; "Dr. A. A. Little To Be Buried Here Friday," *Richmond (VA) Times-Dispatch*, June 1, 1939, 13.

²⁵ Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 101-05; *General Catalogue of the Trustees, Officers, Professors and Alumni of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1807-1924*, eds. Walter W. Moore, William R. Miller, and John A. Lacy (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1924), 149; "Illness Is Fatal to Price H. Gwynn," *Raleigh News and Observer*, December 9, 1938, 16.

²⁶ Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 105-07; "Church at Large," *The Herald and Presbyter* 79, no. 51, December 16, 1908, 21; "Society," *Charlotte News*, January 1, 1909, 5; "The Synod of South Carolina," *Presbyterian of the South*, November 10, 1909, 16; "Personal," *Presbyterian of the South*, September 12, 1917, 12; "Presbyterian Minister Dies in Hospital," *Charlotte News*, April 8, 1938, 14.

Wilburn A. Cleveland (1909-1912) came to Steele Creek from Costernville, Georgia. His tenure included a celebration of the church's 150th anniversary. He left Steele Creek to become the pastor of a Franklin, Texas, congregation, followed by service in Tennessee and Jacksonville, Florida. According to a report in the *Jacksonville Journal*, Cleveland was considered "one of the pioneers of Jacksonville." A graduate of Southwestern Presbyterian University, he served as moderator of the Synods of Florida and Tennessee.²⁷

John W. Orr (1912-1920), a graduate of Southwestern Presbyterian University, was the first Steele Creek pastor to occupy the second manse provided by the church and the only Steele Creek pastor to occupy both manses. He arrived in Steele Creek after serving for several years in Corinth, Mississippi. After eight years at Steele Creek, Orr moved to Memphis, Tennessee, where he served the McLemore Avenue Presbyterian Church for sixteen years and became moderator of the Synod of Tennessee.²⁸

John Mack Walker (1920-1948) arrived in 1920 from Marlinton, West Virginia, to begin what was up until that time the longest pastorate in Steele Creek history, twenty-eight years. He and his family are believed to have been the longest residents of the Steele Creek manse. A native of Burlington, North Carolina, Walker completed his undergraduate studies at Davidson College before entering Union Theological Seminary, where he later served as a trustee. His Steele Creek tenure included a celebration of the church's 175th anniversary. While at Steele Creek, he served as moderator for both the Mecklenburg Presbytery and the Synod of North Carolina. Steele Creek was his final post; he retired due to declining health.²⁹

Watt M. Cooper (1949-1957), a native of Graham, North Carolina, studied at UNC-Chapel Hill, Davidson College, Union Theological Seminary, and Yale Divinity School. During World War II, he served as a chaplain in the U.S. Navy. While at Steele Creek, Cooper was president of the Mecklenburg Presbyterian Association and moderator of the Mecklenburg Presbytery. He chaired various committees within the North Carolina Synod and served as trustee for both Davidson College and Union Theological Seminary. Upon leaving Steele Creek, Cooper returned to North Wilkesboro Presbyterian Church, where he had been prior to 1949 and ultimately served for thirty-four years before his retirement.³⁰

John R. McAlpine III (1957-1971) came to Steele Creek from Lexington, North Carolina. The South Carolina native was a graduate of Erskine College and Union Theological

²⁷ Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 107-08; "Leader in Jacksonville," *Southwestern Alumni Magazine* 4, no. 4 (October-November 1932), 16.

²⁸ Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 108, 113; footnotes 14-18 *supra* and accompanying text; Foster and Moore, *Tennessee: The Volunteer State*, 4:179-80; "Two Bishops Preach, Two New Pastors Join Their Flocks," *News Scimitar* (Memphis, TN), April 26, 1920, 16; "Church Planning To Life College Debt," *Selma (AL) Times-Journal*, October 5, 1927, 1; "Former Pastor Of Steele Creek Church Dead," *Charlotte News*, October 26, 1937, 4.

²⁹ Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 113; "Well Known Presbyterian Pastor, Dr. Walker, Dies," *Charlotte News*, December 12, 1950, 1B, 9B.

³⁰ Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 118, 120; "Church Gets New Pastor," *News and Record* (Greensboro, NC), January 20, 1957, 46; Don Metcalf, "Minister Returns to Homeplace," *Daily Times-News* (Burlington, NC), December 22, 1969, 1B; "Wilkes Presbyterian Getting New Minister," *Winston-Salem Journal*, September 27, 1970, A4.

Seminary. While at Steele Creek, he served as moderator of the Mecklenburg Presbytery. His Steele Creek tenure also included the church's bicentennial celebration. After fourteen years of service, McAlpine left to assume the pastor position at First Presbyterian Church, Henderson, North Carolina, from which he retired in 1981.³¹

Lewis W. Bledsoe (1971-2002), a graduate of Rhodes College and Union Theological Seminary, was both Steele Creek's longest serving pastor and the final senior pastor to reside in the church's manse. After arriving from Greensboro, he led the Steele Creek congregation for nearly thirty years. During that time, he served the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in numerous capacities at the Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly levels.³²

³¹ Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 121, 125-26; "Steele Creek To Install Pastor," *Charlotte Observer*, September 28, 1957, 9A; "16 Are Selected By Presbytery," *Charlotte Observer*, January 27, 1965, 7B; Presbytery of Orange, *Minutes of the Presbytery of Orange 1981*, vol. 16 (North Carolina: Presbytery of Orange, 1981), 51-53, 78, 94.

³² Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 128; "Death Notices," *Charlotte Observer*, April 21, 2002, 6B.



Past residents of the 1880 manse of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, starting with J. T. Plunkett (not shown: A. P. Nicholson, W. O. Cochran).

Source: John Douglas, The History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, 1745-1978, 3rd ed. (1872; Charlotte: Craftsman Printing & Publishing House, 1978), 17.



Past residents of the 1914 manse of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, starting with John W. Orr.
Source: John Douglas, The History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, 1745-1978, 3rd ed. (1872; Charlotte: Craftsman Printing & Publishing House, 1978), 18.

The Steele Creek manse was not just a home for the pastor's family. It served as a central hub for the daily lives of the congregation and the local Steele Creek community. Through the decades, countless church members celebrated their weddings at the manse.³³ Over the years, the doors and grounds of the manse were open for a range of church and community gatherings, including picnics and meeting space for various local functions.³⁴ In just one example of the profound impact of the Steele Creek pastors on the local community, the church's 1935 celebration of its 175th anniversary included the honoring of fifteen "sons of the church" – former Steele Creek Presbyterian congregants – who had subsequently entered the clergy. The ministries of those

³³ "Society," *Charlotte News*, November 8, 1905, 2; "Miss Bertha Berryhill Is Wed to Ernest E. Clarke," *Charlotte News*, July 5, 1929, 15; "Miss Kate Mayhew Becomes Bride of Warren Porter," *Charlotte News*, July 30, 1931, 6; "Miss Mitchell Wedded to William McArver Jr.," *Charlotte Observer*, December 22, 1940, section 2, page 9; "Sparrow-Carroll Vows Said at Steele Creek," *Charlotte Observer*, November 5, 1947, B2; "Miss Martin Weds William A. Shaw," *Charlotte Observer*, November 29, 1955, 8A.

³⁴ "Social Happenings," *Charlotte Evening Chronicle*, August 17, 1909, 7; "Steele Creek Literary Society Meets," *Charlotte News*, April 10, 1913, 7.

former members extended from Davidson, North Carolina, to Araguary, Brazil. Of those fifteen clergymen, five were “sons of Steele Creek Manse” who, as children of Steele Creek pastors, had spent some portion of their childhood living in the manse during their fathers’ pastorates before entering the ministry themselves: Reverends C. T. Wharton, Lawrence Wharton, R H. Gwynn, Jr., W. F. Orr, and John Mack Walker, Jr.³⁵

By the time of that 1935 175th anniversary celebration, Steele Creek Presbyterian Church had long been the largest rural Presbyterian congregation in the national Presbyterian Church’s Southern General Assembly. By the 1950s and continuing into the 1970s, Steele Creek was the largest rural church in the national General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, with more than 1,000 members in the 1970s. Eventually, however, the centuries-old church found itself in the path of the ever-expanding Charlotte Douglass International Airport. According to the 1978 edition of Reverend Douglas’ Steele Creek Church history, the airport

has proved a serious encroachment upon the congregation as many people were forced from their homes in the northern part of the community. In a letter to the Charlotte City Council, the Reverend McAlpine pleaded for reconsideration of the plan to expand the Charlotte Airport towards the church property. He pointed out that plans projected a runway to within approximately 1,000 feet of the sanctuary itself, thereby creating an untenable situation. The purchasing of land, causing the area to be vacated, would be cutting at the very feed roots of the church. Only “polite replies” were received from officials, thus “a cancerous sore into the very breast of this Hallowed Place” was begun.

The author closed that airport-related portion of the church’s historical narrative with the prophetic statement, “At this point in history we are unable to project the final impact of what will no doubt prove the most damaging blow the church has experienced in all its history.”³⁶

Closure became inevitable as the continued development of the airport caused a precipitous drop in church membership, forcing the congregation to merge with another congregation. Following a May 2017 vote, the congregation of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church merged with the congregation of Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church to form the Steele Creek Presbyterian Church at Pleasant Hill in January 2019. The surviving congregation meets at 15000 York Road in Charlotte, approximately eight miles from the now-abandoned Steele Creek Presbyterian Church campus.³⁷

Reverend Lewis Bledsoe was the last Steele Creek senior pastor to live in the manse. After he and his family moved out in 1989, the congregation rented the property until 1992 when Reverend

³⁵ “Church Celebrates 175th Anniversary”; Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 110.

³⁶ “Church Celebrates 175th Anniversary”; “Steele Creek Church Featured in New Book,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 15, 1952, 6; “Sunday vote could mean end of historic Steele Creek church,” *Charlotte Observer*, May 22, 2017, A4; Douglas, *History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 123-24.

³⁷ “Airport Negotiating to Purchase Steele Creek Presbyterian Church Property,” *Steele Creek News*, accessed December 5, 2023, https://www.steelecreekresidents.org/Newspages/news206_SteeleCreekPresbyterian.htm; “Dr. William Jeffrey Pinkston,” Steele Creek Presbyterian Church at Pleasant Hill, accessed December 5, 2023, <https://www.steelecreekchurch.org/staff/dr-william-jeffrey-pinkston/>.

Cory Ingold was called to be an Associate Pastor for the church. He and his wife moved into the manse and lived there until 1996 when he left to become the pastor at Rocky River Presbyterian Church in Concord, North Carolina. The Ingolds were the last pastoral residents of the home. The house was rented to several different families until, on May 21, 2017, the Steele Creek congregation voted to sell the manse and accompanying land to the City of Charlotte for nearly \$1.6 million.³⁸ It is believed that the house has remained unoccupied since that time.

IV. Architectural Assessment



Front elevation, looking northwest.

As a marked departure from the gaudy details and frilled embellishments of Victorian architecture, the Four Square form and Colonial Revival style were uniquely appropriate for the manse of a rural early twentieth-century Presbyterian church. The understated sensibilities of those two emerging architectural trends suited both the practical efficiency of the Progressive era and the simple lifestyle of a small agricultural community grounded in its local church. Introduced in 1894 by Charles Christian Hook (1870-1938), Charlotte's first fulltime professional architect, the Colonial Revival's symmetrical style topped by an unadorned hip or gable roof offered what Hook described as "simplicity of design and convenience of arrangement" without superfluous

³⁸ Email of former Steele Creek Presbyterian Church congregant Walter Neely to Tommy Warlick, November 29, 2023, in the files of the Mecklenburg County Historic Landmarks Department; "Sunday vote could mean end of historic Steele Creek church," *Charlotte Observer*, May 22, 2017, A4.

ornamentation. According to Tom Hanchett, the contemporaneous Four Square or Rectilinear form “shared the Colonial’s impatience with Victorian fussiness but took it one step further. Rectilinear designs abandoned virtually all historic ornament and instead featured clean lines and plain trim.”³⁹ What better housing for the parson of a rural agricultural community?

The Steele Creek manse aptly incorporated the primary exterior characteristics of the Four Square form, including its two-story rectangular massing, the pyramidal hip roof, the pedimented one-story full-length front porch supported by classical columns, and an off-center front door suggesting a side-stair interior plan. The house also reflects such Prairie style influences as the low-pitch slate roof flaring out over wide unornamented boxed eaves, hipped dormers (one each on the front and north elevations), and a two-story wing on the rear elevation with an adjoining one-story side room.



*Approaching the manse and garage from the north.
Steele Creek Road lies just off to the right of the slight decline shown on the left side of the image.*

Manse

A 2008 architectural survey report by prepared by Mattson, Alexander and Associates describes the Steele Creek manse as “one of the more important surviving architectural resources in the rural Steele Creek community and the finest example of the Colonial Revival style.” That report recommended the manse for the National Register of Historic Places based on its architectural significance, concluding that “the manse retains the seven qualities of integrity including integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.” The manse has been

³⁹ Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, 158-60.

described as “critical” to the understanding of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church and the surrounding rural community.⁴⁰

A subsequent 2020 survey by Environment & Archaeology, LLC noted only “moderate alteration” to the manse’s exterior since the prior survey, pointing to the installation of vinyl siding covering the house’s original weatherboard siding and the replacement of some or all of the original Craftsman-style windows. However, the report confirmed that the manse’s “form, proportions and overall design remain unchanged,” including the prominent front porch, pyramid-shaped slate roof, and hipped dormers. The report reaffirmed the recommendation for National Register eligibility.⁴¹ There has been no discernible deterioration in any aspect of the house’s integrity during the intervening three years.

Situated on a largely wooded 16.89 acre parcel, the east-facing manse is located on the west side of State Highway 160 (also known as Steele Creek Road). The prominence of the century-old house is underscored by its setting, standing alone a mere seventy-five feet off of that busy thoroughfare. The nearest visible structure on that side of Steele Creek Road (aside from the garage at the end of the house’s driveway) lies more than three-tenths of a mile to the south. A small five-step stair and walkway, both crafted in cement, approaches the house from the road.



Front elevation detail showing split-level brick porch and semicircular stair.

⁴⁰ Mattson, Alexander and Associates, Inc., “Phase II Architectural Resources Survey Report, Gaston East-West Connector, Gaston and Mecklenburg Counties,” February 14, 2008, 156, accessed December 2, 2023, https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/historic-preservation-office/PDFs/ER_02-9723_PhaseII.pdf; Joines and Morrill, “Historic Rural Resources in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina,” 28.

⁴¹ Environment & Archaeology, LLC, “Historic Resources Report, Charlotte Douglas International Airport, Historical Resources Summary Project, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, ER# 20-0438,” September 2020, 52, accessed December 2, 2023, https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/historic-preservation-office/PDFs/ER_20-0438.pdf.

The otherwise symmetrical form of the four-bay-wide front interior is rendered slightly askew by the off-center front door and a second floor central window. The decorative brickwork on the face of the front porch masks the split-level surface of the full-length front porch. The left-hand side of the porch sits is on ground level. A two-step semicircular brick stair otherwise concealed from street view rises to the right from ground level to the higher portion of the porch surface and the front door. The porch surface is likely a 1960s or early 1970s masonry replacement of the original wooden porch. The front door, featuring a single pane vertical rectangular glass panel, is topped by a smaller horizontally oriented single pane transom. The remaining three bays are dominated by large 12-over-12 rectangular windows with double-hung sashes. Six Tuscan columns support the pedimented low-pitch roof of the one-story porch.

The second floor features two sets of paired 6-over-6 rectangular windows with double-hung sashes separated by the slightly offset 4-over-4 rectangular double-sashed window. A corresponding single 4-over-4 rectangular double-sashed window appears on the second floor of the rear elevation, suggesting the presence of landings at those interior locations of the house. Unlike the other front elevation windows, the paired set of rectangular windows in the hipped dormer are oriented vertically, each appearing to be fixed windows with six panes.



South elevation.

The fenestration of the three-bay-wide south elevation provides a more uniform appearance, standing in sharp contrast to the irregular fenestration of the north elevation. However, the effect of the south elevation's regularly placed 8-over-8 rectangular double-hung windows is somewhat compromised by the corbeled interior chimney that protrudes through the hipped roof above and slightly to the right of the center second-story window.



South and rear elevations.

The form of the rear elevation and its two-story wing is best observed from the southwest corner of the house. The rear wing is one bay wide on its south and rear elevations, featuring double hung 8-over-8 rectangular windows. The rear wing begins approximately at the midway point of the rear elevation and proceeds northward but is not flush with the northernmost corner of the rear elevation. A one-story room or enclosed porch extends from the south elevation of the rear wing, providing rear entry to the house via a centered door on the room's south elevation. That single room features three groupings of double hung rectangular windows: a pair of 6-over-6 windows on either side of the rear door and a grouping of three 8-over-8 windows on the room's rear elevation. The south elevation of the rear wing's second story features one double hung 8-over-8 rectangular window. A second corbeled interior chimney not visible from the house's front elevation protrudes from the rear wing's hipped slate roof.



Rear elevation.

Like the manse's front elevation, the rear elevation appears slightly askew due to the placement and varying sizes of its windows. Four 8-over-8 double-hung rectangular windows – one on the second story of the wing's rear elevation, one second story window on the main house's rear elevation to the left of the rear wing, and one on each of the two stories of the main house's rear elevation to the right of the rear wing – appear to be of similar size and shape. A narrower and slightly shorter 4-over-4 rectangular window is situated between the two second story windows; its wooden frame appears to make contact with the south elevation of the rear wing.

The first story windows of the rear wing and its adjoining one-story room appear to be slightly shorter and wider than the second story windows, although they are also of a double hung 8-over-8 configuration. An attached cover supported by two wooden posts extends from below the rear wing's first story windows. One of the support posts is positioned on a partial CMU block wall. The cover shields a stairwell that leads to the basement of the manse. An entry door to a separate crawlspace is located at the top of that stairwell.



Detail of covered rear elevation stairwell leading to crawl space and basement.

Like the front elevation, the north elevation features a hipped dormer with a paired set of vertically oriented rectangular windows, each appearing to be fixed windows with six panes. Four 8-over-8 double-hung rectangular windows, two on each floor, are positioned toward the rear portion of the main house's north elevation. The upper right-hand window appears to be slightly smaller. To the left of those windows is a single 6-over-6 double-hung rectangular windows positioned midway between the two stories, consistent with the side-stair interior plan suggested by the house's off-center front door. The north elevation of the rear wing also features 8-over-8 double-hung rectangular windows, one on each floor, but they appear smaller and are positioned differently than the main house windows. Combined with the rear wing's chimney, the irregular fenestration of the north elevation appears significantly more asymmetrical than the house's three other elevations.



North elevation.

Garage

A small, paved driveway just north of the manse leads from Steele Creek Road to a one-story front-gabled frame structure lying approximately fifty feet northwest of the rear of the manse. The structure reportedly served as a garage and appears to be of comparable vintage to the manse. Like the manse, its original weatherboard siding has been covered with vinyl siding and the structure's windows (one each on the north, south, and rear elevations) appear to be relatively recent replacements. The design of the garage's roof mimics the manse's overhanging roof.

The entire bottom half of the front elevation is open, covered by what appears to be sliding sheet metal panels and topped by a small overhang. The remainder of the front elevation is covered with vinyl siding.



Garage front elevation.

The north and south elevations of the garage each feature a single centrally positioned square window.



Garage north elevation.



Garage south elevation.

The rear elevation likewise features a single square window, but it is centrally positioned within the rear gable, suggesting the possible presence of an interior loft. All of the garage's windows appear to be fixed six-pane windows.



Garage rear elevation.

Other Related Structures

The 2020 Environment & Archaeology, LLC survey of the manse property noted other property features not previously identified on the 2008 Mattson, Alexander and Associates report that initially determined the manse’s eligibility for the National Register:

- A concrete block well house purportedly located at the rear property line;
- A potential cemetery; and
- A one-story framed structure reportedly used alternatively as a tenant house and a schoolhouse for African Americans.⁴²

The 2020 report recommended further research of those property features to determine their potential association with Steele Creek Presbyterian Church and/or its manse. It is unclear whether such additional research has been conducted, but further investigation would be prudent, particularly with respect to the concrete block well house and the potential cemetery, as neither has been located to date.

The report did not reference a CMU block water feature located near the *front* property line, approximately 75 feet southeast of the manse’s front elevation and approximately 42 feet from Steele Creek Road. Given its location, the structure is likely a municipal feature, but it also warrants further investigation to determine whether it might be a contributing structure to the Steele Creek manse.

⁴² Environment & Archaeology, LLC, “Historic Resources Report, Charlotte Douglas International Airport, Historical Resources Summary Project, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, ER# 20-0438,” September 2020, 52, accessed December 2, 2023, https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/historic-preservation-office/PDFs/ER_20-0438.pdf.



CMU block water feature located at front property line.

The one-story framed structure identified in the 2020 report lies some 185 feet west of the manse within the property's woods. Reports as to the former use(s) of that wooden four-room back house vary: a relocated former schoolhouse for African American children; a former tenant farmhouse; housing for a caretaker employed by the Steele Creek congregation to maintain church property; and/or a "scout hut" for the church's Boy Scout troop.⁴³ Visual inspection of the faded red structure reveals a reasonably good degree of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. Much of the front porch flooring has deteriorated and a rear porch appears to have been removed. The building rests upon several stacks of CMU blocks with interior cylindrical holes indicative of early twentieth century manufacture, suggesting placement of the building at the site in the 1920s or 1930s. Further research of the back house and its history would also be prudent.



Back House front elevation.

⁴³ Ibid.; Telephone interview of Walter Neely by Tommy Warlick, November 29, 2023.



Back House rear elevation.



Back House east elevation.



Back House west elevation.



Back House, left front room.



Back House, right front room.



Back House, left rear room.



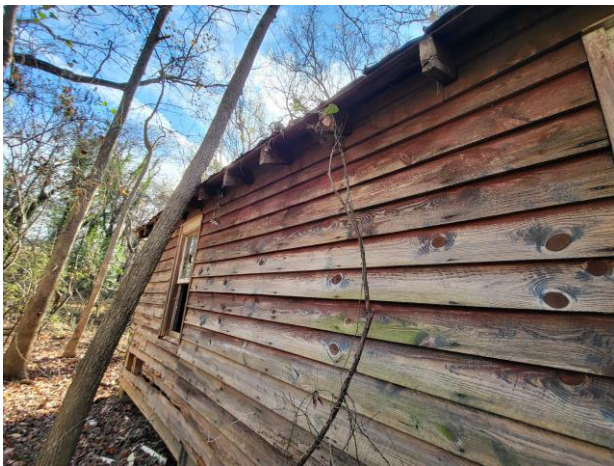
Back House, left rear room.



Back House detail – front door.



Back House detail – west elevation, rear window.



Back House detail – west elevation.



Back House detail – west elevation

Finally, aerial imagery of the manse parcel reveals another structure previously unreported in prior surveys of the property. A shed structure of undetermined age and purpose is located within the boundaries of the manse parcel. Situated approximately 550 feet southwest of the manse, the structure sits on the northeast shore of Shoaf Lake, a small body of water lying primarily within adjacent property (tax parcel nos. 14111212 and 14111218) immediately south of the manse parcel. That adjacent property is owned by the city of Charlotte. Further research of that structure and its history would also be prudent.



Shoaf Lake Structure

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