

Landmark Designation Report for the



R. Kent and Gertrude N. Blair House 529 N. Poplar Street Charlotte, North Carolina

Prepared by:
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September 2025

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**HISTORICAL
CONSULTING**

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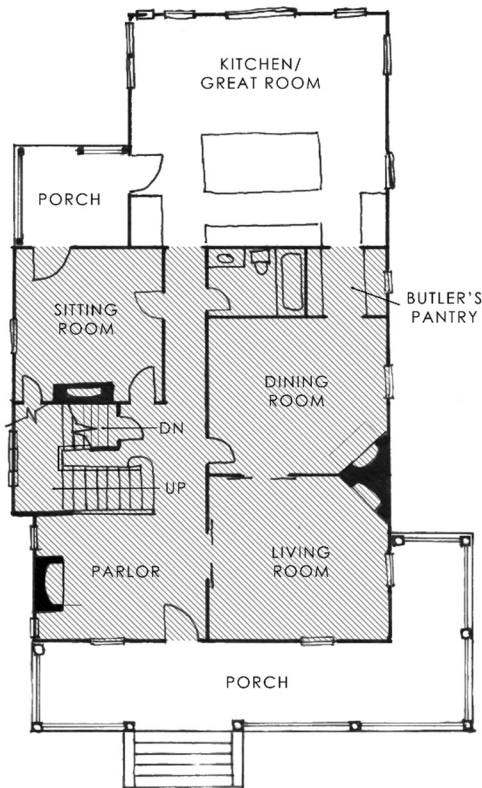
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General Information

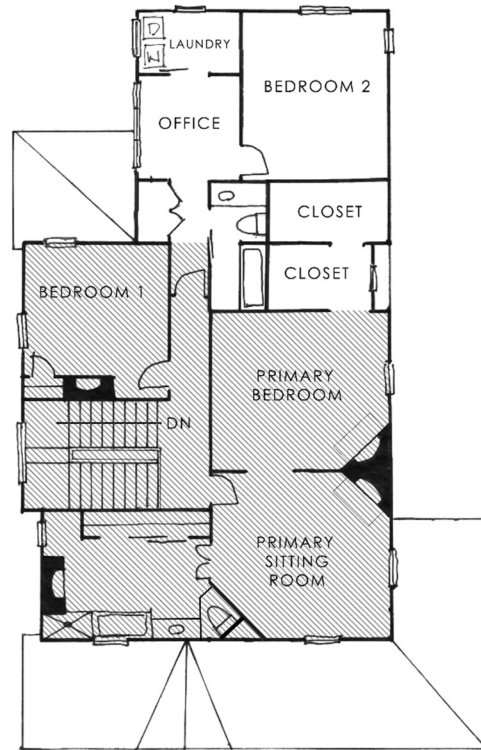
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|---|--|
| Historic Names of Property: | R. Kent and Gertrude N. Blair House |
| Address of Property: | 529 North Poplar Street Charlotte, North Carolina 28202 |
| PIN: | 07803616 |
| Deed Book & Page: | Mecklenburg County Deed Book 11425, Page 661 |
| Amount of Land/Acreage to be Designated: | 0.148 acres |
| Ad Valorem Tax Value: | The 2025 tax value is \$963,400. |
| Recommendation for Designation: | The designation shall include the exterior, interior as defined in interior parameters, and entirety of the parcel 07803616. |
| Name/Address of Current Property Owner: | Christopher M. Holtz and Cameron Blake Holtz 529 North Poplar Street Charlotte, North Carolina 28202 |

Interior Designation Parameters

In support of their request for landmark designation of the interior of the Blair House, the property owners have provided written consent for interior review of the house pursuant to N.C. Gen. Stat. § 160D-947(b). The intact original portion of the house, indicated with hatching, defines the entirety of interior designation.



First Floor
NTS



Second Floor
NTS

Chain of Title

| Grantor | Grantee | Date | Deed Book/Page | Notes |
|---|--|-----------|----------------|-------|
| Gary M. Phillips | Christopher M. Holtz and wife, Cameron Blake Holtz | 7/14/2000 | 11425/661 | |
| Cathi Lee Phillips | Gary M. Phillips | 6/20/1996 | 8641/593 | |
| John M. Bowden and wife, Molly A. Bowden | Gary M. Phillips and wife, Cathi Lee Phillips | 7/13/1987 | 5547/870 | |
| Margaret L. Blair (single); Kent Blair Davidson and husband, Walter P. Davidson; and Mary N. Blair Allison and husband James Barnwell Allison | John M. Bowden and wife, Molly A. Bowden | 3/14/1979 | 4167/782 | |
| Gertrude N. Blair and R. K. Blair | Margaret L. Blair, Mary N. Blair and Kent Blair | 1/27/1943 | 1088/275 | |
| James A. Bell and wife Jessie S. Bell and H. N. Pharr | R. K. Blair | 1/25/1907 | 220/426 | |
| <i>Source: Register of Deeds Office, Mecklenburg County</i> | | | | |

Abstract

Statement of Significance

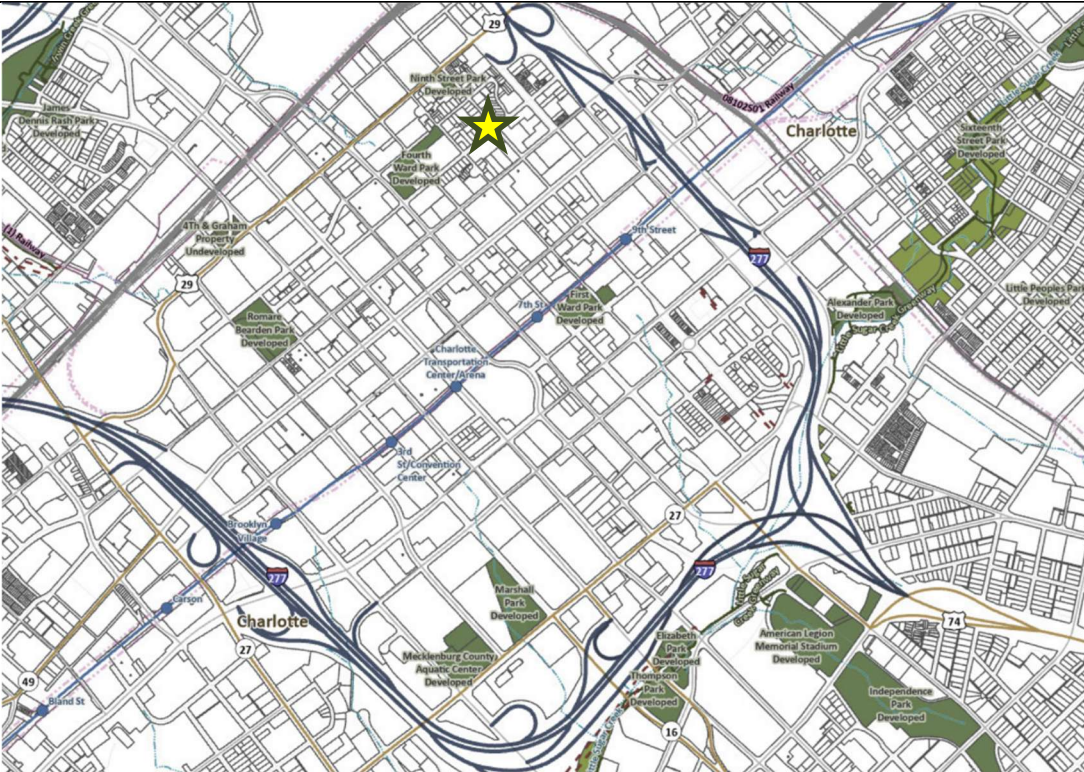
The R. Kent and Gertrude N. Blair House is significant as the best-preserved extant example of the Foursquare style of residential architecture in the Fourth Ward neighborhood of Charlotte. The Blair House is significant for its association with R. Kent Blair, a pharmacist who actively participated in the business, civic, and political communities of Charlotte. The Blair House is significant for its association with the historic preservation of Fourth Ward in the 1970s and 1980s.

Integrity Statement

| | | |
|--------------------|-------------|--|
| Location | HIGH | The Blair House was built in 1906 at its extant location at 529 North Poplar Street in the Fourth Ward neighborhood of Charlotte. |
| Design | HIGH | The Blair House retains a high degree of integrity of design as a modified Foursquare house. Original design elements including the wrap-around front porch, gabled dormers, and hipped roof are intact. |
| Setting | HIGH | The Blair House retains a high degree of setting in Fourth Ward. The neighborhood has historically been primarily residential with commercial use at its eastern and southern edges. The Blair House is two blocks from North Tryon Street, the major north-south street in uptown Charlotte. |
| Materials | HIGH | The Blair House retains a high degree of integrity of materials at both exterior and interior. The exterior has original wood siding, brick chimneys, wood sash windows, and wrought iron security doors. The interior is largely intact with original wood elements including strip floors, mouldings, five-panel doors with hardware, six-panel pocket doors with hardware, mantles, and staircase with railing, balustrade, and newel posts. Cast iron fireplace grates, cast iron summer fronts, and ceramic tile surrounds are known to be original. Plaster walls and ceilings have been retained in most areas. |
| Workmanship | HIGH | The Blair House retains a high degree of integrity of workmanship. The brick chimney at the north elevation reflects the craftsmanship of masons in early twentieth century Charlotte. Wood millwork, especially the mantles, were likely produced by local manufacturers. |
| Feeling | HIGH | The Blair House retains a high degree of integrity of feeling as an early twentieth-century house in an urban residential neighborhood. The interior retains this feeling, which is |

| | | |
|--------------------|-------------|---|
| | | enhanced by the use of task lighting rather than overhead fixtures in many rooms. |
| Association | HIGH | The Blair House retains a high degree of integrity of association with the Blair family in the early twentieth century and the revitalization of the Fourth Ward neighborhood in the 1970s. |

Maps



Source: Polaris (2023)



Source: Polaris (2023)



Historic Narrative

The R. Kent and Gertrude N. Blair House is historically significant for its association with pharmacist, businessman, and civic leader Rochelle Kent Blair. Located in the Fourth Ward neighborhood, one of the original four wards of Charlotte, the 1906 Blair House is also important in its contribution to the preservation and revitalization of the neighborhood in the 1970s and 1980s.

R. Kent Blair and Gertrude Norfleet Blair

The Blair House is significant for its association with the Blair family—R. Kent Blair (1869-1943) and Gertrude Norfleet Blair (1874-1967) and their daughters Margaret Louise Blair (1900-1985), Mary Norfleet Blair Allison (1901-1990), and Kent Blair Davidson (1914-1996). R. Kent Blair was heavily involved in professional, business, civic, and political interests, the latter which had the largest impact on Charlotte. Most notably, he served as chair of the board of water commissioners which built a new pump station on the Catawba River in response to severe drought and water shortages in 1911.

Rochelle Kent Blair was born on June 23, 1869, the fourth child of Dr. Isaac Hilton Blair and Louisa Matilda Miller Blair. His father was a native of Lancaster County, South Carolina, who attended South Carolina Medical College in Charleston. Dr. Blair had practiced in Mecklenburg County for a short period before returning to South Carolina, then moving to Monroe, Union County by 1871. Kent was the fourth of six children, four sons followed by two daughters. He was educated at Union Institute in Cabarrus County and Thompson's Military School, a college preparatory school in Siler City, Chatham County. In 1889-1890 Kent attended Emory and Henry College as a member of the Select Class.¹

Kent worked for older brother Stephen Oscar Blair, who had graduated from Maryland College of Pharmacy in 1888 and went into business with their father in Monroe for a period before entering school in Baltimore. He graduated with a Graduate of Pharmacy degree in 1891 and moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, where he was employed by Teasdale & Black. After six months, he returned to North Carolina and partnered with D. A. Houston to open a drug business in Mt. Airy. In May 1894 they dissolved their partnership, and Kent moved to Albemarle where he opened "R. K. Blair, Druggist."² After a year, he made his final move to Charlotte, with a local newspaper reporting,

Druggist R. Kent Blair, will remove his drug business from this place to Charlotte and form a partnership with his brother, Dr. Hugh (sic) Blair. The change will take place immediately. Dr. R. K. Blair is an accomplished druggist and we regret the change he has made.³

¹ "R. Kent Blair," *Carolina Journal of Pharmacy* 8, no. 9 (May 1927), 209; *The Fifty-Third Annual Catalogue of Emory and Henry College with Courses of Instruction, 1889-'90* (Cincinnati: Elm Street Printing Co., 1889), 9.

² "R. Kent Blair."

³ "Albemarle News," *Concord Times*, May 6, 1895.

He purchased the store of Murphy & Atkinson, which operated at 22 West Trade Street, and took possession of it on June 7, 1895. According to city directories, Kent resided in an apartment above his business.⁴



Figure 1 Blair Bros. Co., the drugstore of R. K. Blair was located at 22 (later 24) West Trade Street. In this 1904 photograph of West Trade Street looking west from the Square, the drugstore was in the false-gabled two-story building at right. "Trade Street (West)," Hornet's Nest Collection, CMStory Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library, <https://vault.cmlibrary.org/record/749?ln=en&v=uv#?xywh=30%2C70%2C718%2C396>, accessed May 12, 2025.

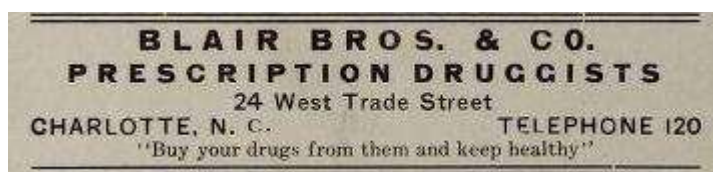


Figure 2 Advertisement in the 1912 edition of Snips and Cuts, the Charlotte High School yearbook.

It is unclear when Kent and Gertrude Norfleet met, but newspaper items show the likelihood of their meeting in either Charlotte or Albemarle. Virginia Gertrude Norfleet was born November 15, 1874, in Nansemond County, Virginia, the daughter of Nathaniel George Norfleet and Mary Elizabeth Darden Norfleet. She graduated from Nansemond Seminary and taught music at Franklin Female Institute.⁵ After Gertrude's sister Margaret married James P. Cook, editor of the *Daily Concord Standard*, in 1892, she was a frequent visitor. She also visited Albemarle in early 1895, when Kent was still operating his pharmacy in that town. In August 1896 she was hired to "take charge of a music

⁴ "Local Items," *Charlotte Democrat*, June 7, 1895.

⁵ "Mrs. Gertrude Norfleet Blair," obituary, *Charlotte Observer*, July 8, 1967.

school” in Matthews.⁶ It is evident that by October 1897 Kent and Gertrude were acquainted and likely courting, as a Virginia newspaper noted,

Mr. Kent Blair, a prominent merchant in Charlotte, N. C., has been in Suffolk for several days. Suffolk has been long been noted for its attractive young ladies, and his presence here is evidence of the justice of the reputation.⁷

They married on October 26, 1898, at the Main Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Suffolk, Nansemond County, Virginia. After visiting Kent’s mother in Monroe, they returned to Charlotte where they boarded at 512 N. Graham Street.⁸

The Blairs were longtime residents of the Fourth Ward neighborhood. Kent and Gertrude moved from North Graham to “the Harty cottage on North Church between Fifth and Sixth streets” in August 1899, where they had “their first experience at housekeeping.”⁹ Here their daughters Margaret and Mary were born. By 1903 they had moved to 213 W. 7th Street, which they rented from W. T. McCoy.¹⁰

By June 1906, the Blairs began construction of a new house at the corner of N. Poplar and W. Ninth Streets.¹¹ The location had been a ca. 1860 one-story six-room cottage owned by J. W. and Mary B. Abernathy. J. W. died in 1904 aged eighty, and Mary sold the property and moved to Alabama to live with family.¹² The house was rented until being moved to another site in early 1906. On August 24, reported the *Observer*, “Mr. and Mrs. R. K. Blair and family yesterday moved from their former home on West Seventh street into their new residence at the corner of Ninth and Poplar streets.”¹³ However, the Blairs only purchased the property in February 1907 from James A. Bell and H. N. Pharr.¹⁴

Living in Fourth Ward

Charlotte was divided into four wards in the 1850s, with Fourth Ward located in the northern quadrant. When the Blair House was constructed in 1906, Charlotte was beginning a seemingly unending boom. The population nearly doubled between 1900 and 1910, recording over 34,000 residents in the latter census. The city was a center of textile manufacturing, banking, and railroads. Grand home lined the major thoroughfares of Trade and Tryon Streets. However, according to Thomas Hanchett, “Beyond those grand avenues Fourth Ward seems to have had more than its share

⁶ “A Batch of Local News,” *Daily Concord Standard*, August 24, 1896.

⁷ “Suffolk,” *Richmond Dispatch*, October 27, 1897.

⁸ “Suffolk,” *Virginian Pilot*, October 27, 1898. Gertrude’s wedding dress was donated to the Mint Museum by daughters Mary and Kent in 1986.

⁹ “Into Winter Quarters,” *Charlotte Observer*, August 20, 1899.

¹⁰ “Personal Pointers,” *Charlotte News*, January 21, 1903.

¹¹ “Social and Personal,” *Charlotte Observer*, June 13, 1906.

¹² “Home She Had Nonet Once Prosperous,” *Charlotte News*, March 28, 1911.

¹³ “Social and Personal,” *Charlotte Observer*, August 15, 1906. The address, given as North Church Street, appears to have been printed incorrectly.

¹⁴ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 220, Page 426. Historically, the house construction date has been given as 1907, perhaps due to the later land purchase by the Blairs.

of prosperous middle-class families, however, probably because the land is the highest and best drained of the four wards.”¹⁵

Suburban growth expanded the city, and many middle-class professionals like Kent Blair chose to build homes in Dilworth, Piedmont Park, and Elizabeth Heights, accessible to the business district by electric streetcar, rather than Fourth Ward. However, he had lived in the neighborhood since moving to Charlotte in 1895, and it may be likely that he preferred the convenience of living near his business. Fourth Ward was a varied neighborhood, including commercial use on its eastern and southern edges, residential development in its center, and industry on its northern and western edges. The neighborhood was home to Charlotte’s first hospitals: St. Peter’s Hospital in the 1870s at W. Sixth and N. Poplar Streets; Presbyterian Hospital in 1903 at W. Trade and N. Mint Streets; and the Charlotte Sanatorium in 1907 at N. Church and W. Seventh Streets. The North Carolina Medical College was also located in Fourth Ward, built in 1907 at N. Church and W. Sixth Streets. The offices of medical professionals, including the Blair pharmacy, clustered near these facilities.¹⁶



Figure 3 This photo of Kent Blair was published with his profile in the *Carolina Journal of Pharmacy* in May 1927.

¹⁵ Thomas W. Hanchett, “THE CENTER CITY: The Business District and the Original Four Wards,” History South, <https://www.historysouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/THE-CENTER-CITY.pdf>, accessed August 13, 2025.

¹⁶ Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 192-193.



Figure 4 The Blair Building (right) was demolished for the construction of the Spectrum Center.

The Blairs were largely typical of the middle-class white citizens of Charlotte, and Kent was heavily involved in professional, business, civic, and political interests. Professionally, he continued partnership in his pharmacy in Albemarle until 1902. Blair Bros. operated in a building W. Trade Street until 1917. Kent had constructed a two-story building at 405 East Avenue (later E. Trade Street) which included space for his business and apartments above. In 1927 he opened Plaza Drug Co. on Central Avenue in Piedmont Park.¹⁷

Kent was an active member of the North Carolina Pharmaceutical Association. He was profiled in the May 1927 issue of the *Carolina Journal of Pharmacy*, with the editorial note that, "Except that we could not secure his consent, we would long have since dedicated a *Journal* issue to Kent Blair, of Charlotte."¹⁸ In 1920 Kent organized the state convention in Charlotte, and in 1922 he organized a joint meeting with the South Carolina Association in Greenville, South Carolina. He also served as president of the Charlotte Retail Druggists' Association.

When first arriving in Charlotte, Kent was among the charter members of a new International Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.) lodge in November 1895. He was a York Rite Mason, active in the Royal Arch Masons and Shriners, and a member of the White Oak Camp, No. 2, Woodmen of the World. Kent was a volunteer fireman, leading the Pioneer Reel Team at the state firemen's convention and tournament in Wilmington in 1900.¹⁹ Kent joined in progressive-era boosterism as a director of the Carolinas Exposition Company. Charlotte hosted the Made-in-the-Carolinas Exposition in 1923, and a new building at 128 E. Park Avenue was constructed to house the event.

¹⁷ "Partnership Dissolved," *Stanly News and Press*, January 9, 1902; "Permit for \$10,000 New Buildings on West (sic) Trade Street," *Charlotte News*, January 27, 1914; "Blair Bros' Firm Is Moving Today," *Charlotte News*, February 22, 1917; "State Charters," *Charlotte Observer*, April 10, 1927.

¹⁸ "Blair," *Pharmacy*.

¹⁹ "A New Lodge of Odd Fellows," *Charlotte Observer*, November 14, 1895; "Masons Elect Officers," *Charlotte News*, March 28, 1900; "The Shrine," *Charlotte News*, December 29, 1900; "New Officers," *Charlotte News*, January 13, 1905; "To Welcome the Firemen," *Wilmington Messenger*, July 8, 1900.

Officers and Directors of the Carolinas Exposition Company.

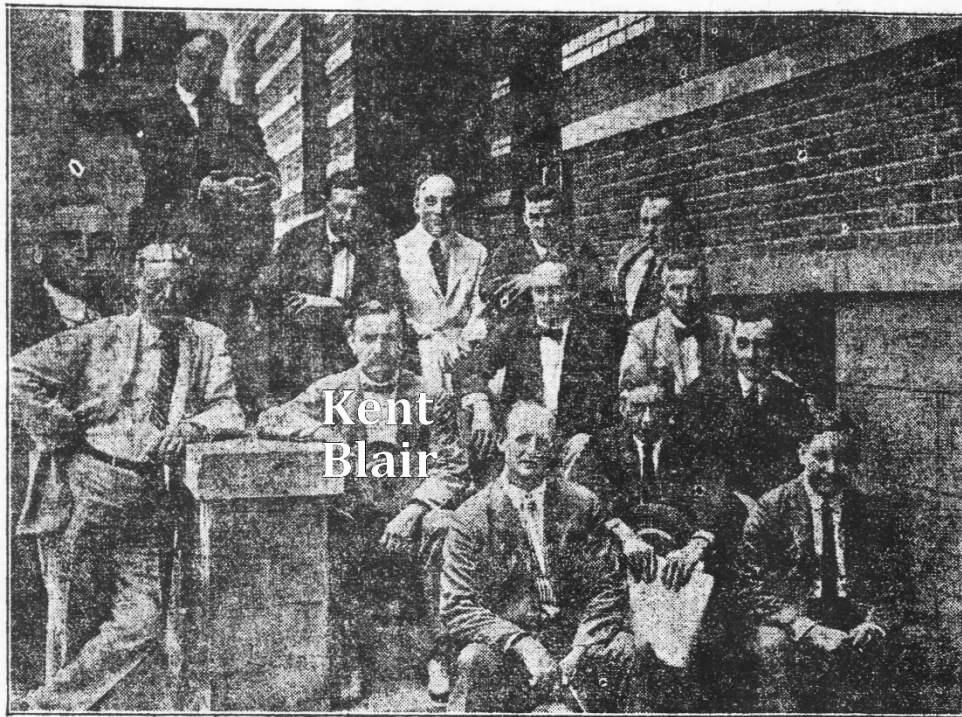


Figure 5 Kent is pictured with the other officers and directors of the Carolinas Exposition Company in 1921. *Charlotte News*, September 8, 1921.

In political matters, Kent served in a variety of offices and committees. In 1907 he was elected as a school commissioner for Fourth Ward.²⁰ In June 1911 Kent was appointed to the city board of water commissioners; the following year he was elected chair.²¹ He joined the commission at a critical time, as by July 1911, Charlotte was in its worst drought in fifty years. The city reservoir on Irwin Creek had dried up, and drinking water was being brought in from Gastonia, Asheville, and Columbia while gray water was pumped from the Catawba River into tank cars. According to W. E. Vest, superintendent of the water works,

Streams of people carrying containers of all kinds constantly visited the three artesian wells in the city at that time. Many citizens will recall the commotion in Charlotte households at certain hours as the inmates hastened to fill up the receptacles of all kinds, bath tubs and etc., at the words, "Hurry up, its almost time to cut the water off."²²

²⁰ "Small Vote in Election," *Charlotte News*, May 8, 1907; "R. Kent Blair," *Carolina Journal of Pharmacy* 8, no. 9 (May 1927), 209.

²¹ "Elizabeth Avenue Included for Bitulithic Pavement; New Water Commissioners Elected," *Charlotte Evening Chronicle*, June 6, 1911; "R. Kent Blair," *Carolina Journal of Pharmacy* 8, no. 9 (May 1927), 209; "Mr. R. K. Blair Is Chairman of the Water Board," *Charlotte Evening Chronicle*, June 6, 1912; "Planning to Welcome the Catawba River," *Charlotte News*, March 21, 1913.

²² Mrs. J. A. Yarborough, "Interesting Carolina People: Mr. W. E. Vest," *Charlotte Observer*, April 12, 1936.

A bond initiative was put forth by city aldermen to fund a pumping station on the Catawba River and reservoir near Chadwick Mill. It was put into operation in April 1912 and dedicated on April 24, 1913. Kent spoke at the event, providing a report of the commission finances and work prefaced by this remark:

As chairman of the board of water commissioners, it gives me great pleasure to present to the city of Charlotte the only complete water system it has ever possessed. The dream of our citizens for many years has been accomplished, and we now have for the first time in the city's history an abundant and unfailing supply of pure and wholesome water. The board of water commissioners feels a pardonable pride in this result, which has been carried to completion during their term of office.²³

Kent pursued other offices with less success. Twice in 1913 and 1932, he lobbied for the job of postmaster in Charlotte. He considered running for commissioner of public safety in late 1926 but ultimately declined. Kent ran for chair of the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners in 1936 but placed third. His last candidacy was for city council in April 1943. Though qualified for the runoff as an independent candidate, he withdrew due to ill health.²⁴ Kent was also involved in state-level political activity. In 1915 he was appointed traveling deputy collector and narcotics inspector, in which he traveled to pharmacies throughout western North Carolina to instruct them on new regulations instituted by the Harrison Narcotics Tax Act.²⁵ He was appointed in 1923 to the board of trustees of the North Carolina State Sanitorium.²⁶

Kent had business interests beyond his pharmacies. He joined the board of directors of W. L. Hand Medicine Company, which was known for its aggressive advertising campaigns for its Liv-o-lax product, in 1926 and served president in 1927.²⁷ Kent invested in a number of business ventures, including the Vienna Café (1901-1902); a brokerage company with M. C. Sims (1902); the former Burke Manufacturing Company textile mill near Lincolnton (1911); North State Oil, Gas & Mineral Company (1920).²⁸ He served on the board for the Charlotte Building & Loan Association.²⁹

In contrast with her husband, Gertrude maintained a lower profile. She was a member of the Liberty Hall chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and active in Tryon Street Methodist Church (later merged to form First United Methodist Church in 1927). Gertrude traveled frequently

²³ "Catawba River Flows into City of Charlotte—Old Dream Realized," *Charlotte News*, April 24, 1913.

²⁴ "Charlotte Postmaster," *Charlotte Observer*, April 9, 1913; "Dr. Kent Blair Asking for Postmaster's Job," *Charlotte News*, December 2, 1932; "Blair in Race for City Post," *Charlotte Observer*, November 12, 1926; "Three Victors for Place on County Board," *Charlotte News*, June 7, 1936; "Factions Square Off in Final for Ballots," *Charlotte Observer*, April 28, 1943.

²⁵ "R. Kent Blair Is Appointed," *Charlotte News*, March 29, 1915. Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914, Pub. L. 63-223, 38, Stat. 785 (1915). Opium, cocaine, and morphine were the narcotics largely targeted for regulation.

²⁶ *Charlotte Observer*, March 23, 1923.

²⁷ "Hand Company Names New Board of Directors," *Charlotte Observer*, April 9, 1926.

²⁸ "Sergeant Baker Resigns," *Charlotte Observer*, May 4, 1901; "Mr. Baker Sells Out," *Charlotte News*, February 5, 1902; "In a Paragraph," *Charlotte News*, January 17, 1902; "Leases Small Mill at Crouse," *Charlotte Observer*, May 6, 1911; "Blair Believes State Has Oil," *Charlotte News*, January 28, 1920.

²⁹ "Building and Loan Officers," *Charlotte News*, August 24, 1904.

to stay with her sister Margaret Norfleet Cook in Concord and visit family in Virginia and Monroe. Most mentions of Gertrude in newspapers were small events, such as bridal showers for family members and friends.

Mildred Morse McEwen grew up two houses from the Blairs at 603 N. Poplar Street (not extant). She wrote a memoir about growing up in Fourth Ward after retiring from Queens University of Charlotte, where she taught chemistry. She, along with the older Blair sisters and other neighbors, walked to Bethune School at N. Graham and W. Ninth Streets. She recalled in sixth grade, “Tina Wallace (Mrs. C.P. Street), Mary (Mrs. Barnwell Allison) and Margaret Blair, Katherine Blakeley, Edith Sheppard (Mrs. T.W. Shaw), and I would walk home at lunch and gather on the corner of Poplar and Ninth streets and share bites.” Mary, she said, would hold her finger so the others could only get small bites, and the friends teased her for it.³⁰

The three Blair sisters were well-educated, all attending college with two pursuing post-graduate studies. While eldest sister Margaret never married, both Mary (40) and Kent (33) married later than typical and had no children.

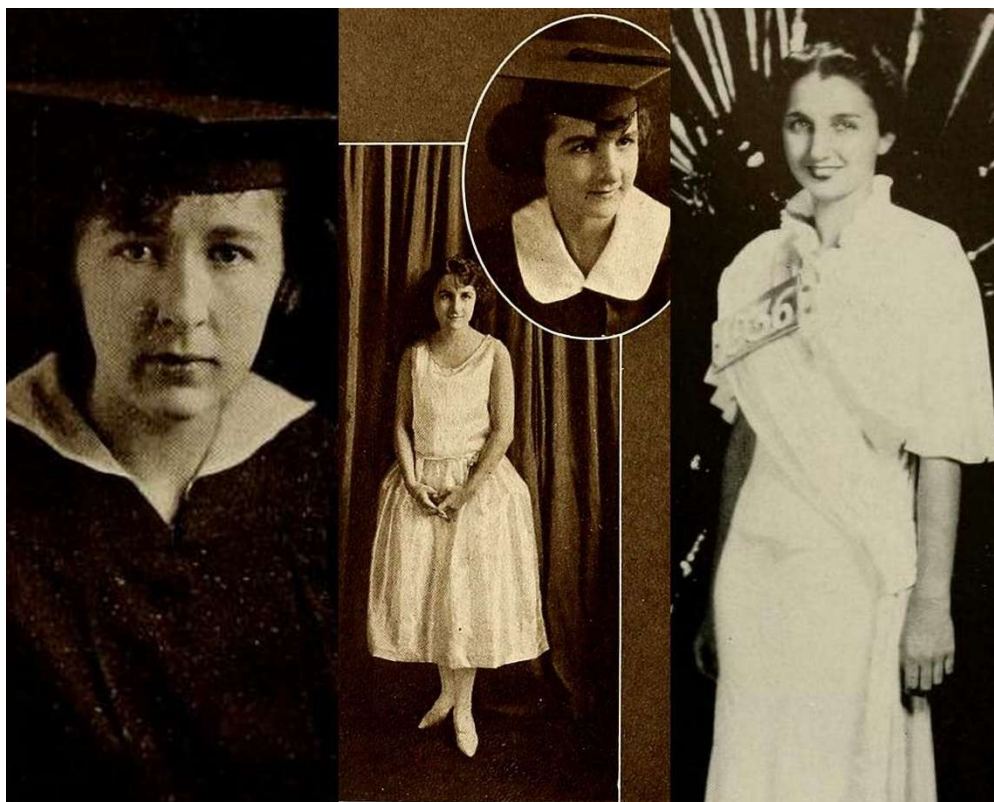


Figure 6 Margaret Louise Blair, 1922 University of North Carolina Women's College yearbook; Mary Norfleet Blair, 1923 University of North Carolina Women's College yearbook; Kent Blair, 1936 North Carolina College for Women yearbook.

Margaret Louise Blair graduated from Central High School in 1917 and attended the University of North Carolina Women's College (today UNC Greensboro), receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in

³⁰ Mildred Morse McEwen, *Growing Up in Fourth Ward* (Charlotte; Heritage Printers, 1987), 88.

home economics in 1922. She completed post-graduate studies at the University of Virginia and Columbia University. Margaret was a career home economics educator. She taught home economics at Alexander Graham Junior High School (1922-1923), First Ward Grammar School (1923-1925), Piedmont Junior High School (1925-1927), Carthage High School in Moore County (1927-1928), Wingate Junior College/Wingate University (1931-1932), Whiteville High School in Columbus County (1934-1935), China Grove High School in Rowan County (1937-1944), and Belmont High School in Gaston County (1946-1959). She also taught in Cabarrus County. Additionally, in 1935 she accepted a position as home economics supervisor for Mecklenburg and Union counties for the Resettlement Administration. Margaret retired from teaching in 1962. She never married and lived with her mother in the family home.

Mary Norfleet Blair, one year younger than Margaret, also graduated from Central High School. She attended Queens College (today Queens University of Charlotte) and graduated from Women's College in 1923. Mary taught first or second grade at Villa Heights School (1924-1926), D. H. Hill School (1934-1937), and Myers Park School (1937-1951) as well as in Concord and Asheboro. She married pharmacist James Barnwell Allison of Lancaster, South Carolina, in 1951. They resided in his family home, the Robert Barnwell Allison House, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990.

Youngest daughter Kent Blair was significantly younger than her sisters, born in 1914. Mildred recounted that her mother, embarrassed to be pregnant at an older age, "felt better when she learned that Gussie Cannon and Mrs. Blair were pregnant too and they were as old as she."³¹ Kent was a graduate of Central High School and matriculated at North Carolina College for Women. She pursued post-graduate work at the College of William and Mary in 1936-1937. Kent served as supervisor in the public welfare departments in Mecklenburg County (1939-1940), Guilford County (1940) and Buncombe County (1941). She continued to Tulane University, earning a master's degree in social work in 1945, then worked at the Yale New Haven Medical Center in New Haven, Connecticut until 1948. That year, she married accountant Walter Pitt Davidson, Sr., and moved to Miami where she worked at the V. A. Mental Health Clinic.

Decline and Revitalization

In April 1943, Kent announced his candidacy for city council representing Fourth Ward:

Having been a resident of the city of Charlotte since June 1, 1895, always a resident of Fourth ward, having served on the city school board and as chairman of the water board of the city, and finding my great old ward without a representative on the city council, I have decided to ask the voters of the city of Charlotte to elect me to one of the seats on the city council.³²

He ran as an independent rather than aligning with the two slates of candidates calling themselves the Peoples Party and the Citizens. In the April 26 election, Blair received 1,537 votes, qualifying for

³¹ McEwen, 20-21.

³² "3 More Join Council Race," *Charlotte Observer*, April 14, 1943.

the runoff the following week.³³ However, he withdrew his candidacy on April 27, indicating that he did not feel he could adequately serve in office: "If I were elected I could be of absolutely no service or benefit to the fine city I have lived in for a half hundred years."³⁴

R. Kent Blair died of a coronary thrombosis at Charlotte Memorial Hospital on August 10, 1943. Funeral services were conducted in the Blair House with burial in Elmwood Cemetery.³⁵ As the *Observer* eulogized, "he came to be generally and favorably known and highly esteemed for his sincerity and solid integrity." His public service had declined along with his health, though he was noted, "at one time or another, a prominent member of some of the city's public authorities."³⁶

By the 1970s, Fourth Ward was largely considered a seedy area inconveniently close to the business district of Charlotte. Gertrude died in 1967, and Margaret remained in the house. Perhaps the roughness of the neighborhood combined with the upkeep of a large, old house led Margaret and her sisters to sell the property in 1978. None of the Blair sisters had children, and any ephemera or information about the Blair House was mostly lost.

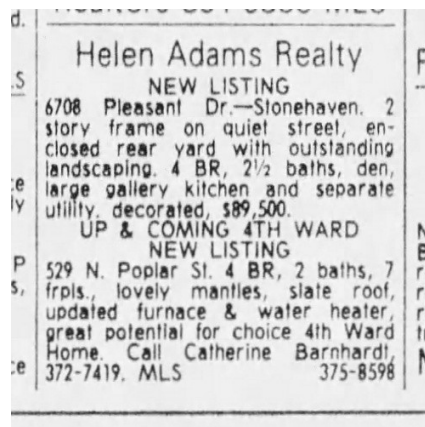


Figure 7 Listing for the Blair House. *Charlotte Observer*, September 3, 1978.

The Blair House sold to Jack Bowden, a native of Durham who worked as a manufacturing representative. According to realtor Catherine Barnhardt, "it was snapped up almost the day it was listed" by Bowden.³⁷ He met David Seymour, manager of Ivey's department store payroll department, and together the men restored the aged Blair House. Seymour had been active in the Friends of Fourth Ward neighborhood organization since moving to the city in 1976. His apartment at 515 N. Church Street had been featured in the holiday home tour in 1978. Additionally, Seymour brought

³³ "H. H. Baxter Elected Charlotte Mayor," *Charlotte Observer*, April 27, 1943.

³⁴ "Factions Square Off in Final for Ballots," *Charlotte Observer*, April 28, 1943.

³⁵ "Blair Rites This Morning," *Charlotte News*, August 10, 1943.

³⁶ "Kent Blair," *Charlotte Observer*, August 11, 1943.

³⁷ "Moving in on North Poplar Street," *Charlotte News*, October 6, 1978. Bowden was married to Molly A. Bowden. They divorced about seven months after the purchase of the Blair House, which is likely the reason her name appears on the deed.

experience in organizing historic tours, having chaired the bicentennial home tour committee for the Lincoln County Historical Society in 1975.³⁸

Bowden and Seymour's interest in Fourth Ward was part of a movement to preserve and restore the historic residential core of Charlotte. The grand residences which had lined Trade and Tryon Streets in the first half of the twentieth century were gone. A few had been moved, like the ca. 1874 McManaway House, which was relocated from 406 W. Trade Street to 1700 Queens Road in Myers Park in 1916.³⁹ Residential areas in Second and Third Wards were gone. Fourth Ward was languishing as older owners could no longer maintain the large houses, with many divided into cheap multi-family rentals. The Charlotte Redevelopment Commissions surveyed the area in 1963-1966, capturing conditions in a series of photographs. High-rise Edwin Towers public housing development was built in 1967 across North Poplar Street in 1967.⁴⁰

³⁸ Rolfe Neill, "Dreaming Successfully: 4th Ward Meets Serendipity," *Charlotte Observer*, November 11, 1979; Edie Low, "He'll Open His Home for 4th Ward Tour," *Charlotte News*, December 1, 1978; Ellen Scarborough, "Lincoln County Plans a Tour of Homes from Its Past," *Charlotte Observer*, August 8, 1975.

³⁹ McManaway House, Landmark Designation Report (June 1, 1977), Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, <https://mecknc.widen.net/s/csxjfnvfwf/mcmanaway-house-sr>, accessed September 11, 2025.

⁴⁰ Edwin Towers, Inlivan, <https://www.inlivan.com/property/edwin-towers/>, accessed September 11, 2025.



Figure 8 North Poplar Street properties photographed by the Charlotte Redevelopment Commission included (clockwise from top left) houses at 515, 517, 605, and two homes on the 600 block. Charlotte Redevelopment Commission records, J. Murray Atkins Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, <https://goldmine.charlotte.edu/record/19087?ln=en&p=%28+%28creator%3A%5BCharlotte+Redevelopment+Commission%5D%29%29&v=uv#?xywh=-885%2C386%2C5302%2C2922>, accessed May 16, 2025.

In 1975 the Junior League, among its members women who had taken part in the unsuccessful Citizens for Preservation effort to save the Bank of Charlotte building at 122 S. Tryon Street, purchased the 1884 Berryhill House on W. Ninth Street. The home, one of the few examples of the Eastlake movement of Victorian-era architecture, served as a catalyst for the purchase and renovation of other Fourth Ward properties. Barnhardt, the realtor who sold the Blair House to Bowden, chaired the Junior League committee that acquired the Berryhill House and served as the first president of the Berryhill Foundation. She also served as realtor in the purchase of other Fourth Ward homes by the foundation, which also moved homes onto empty lots.⁴¹

⁴¹ Cameron Holtz, *Fourth Ward Charlotte: A Neighborhood History* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2023), 13-26.

David Seymour helped in restoring the Berryhill House. According to a later article, he was unemployed “when he first began helping the Junior Leagues rescue Berryhill,” working “day and night for nothing.”⁴² While he and Bowden were restoring the Blair House, Seymour helped to organize the annual holiday home tour in Fourth Ward. In 1981 the house was ready to join the tour. Their renovations had included adding a large bathroom in the front left room upstairs.



Figure 9 Jack Bowden had this telephone jack installed on the front porch so he could sit outside and chat, according to Cameron Holtz.

The revitalization of Fourth Ward was a success, as recounted by Hanchett:

The redevelopment of Fourth Ward in the late 1970s and early 1980s set a new direction. The city's 1966 master plan, prepared by architect A. G. Odell, called for the old residential district to be cleared and replaced with high-rise residence towers and open space. Instead of backing this demolition, however, citizens influenced by the growing nationwide historic preservation movement salvaged a few of the remaining old houses. Around this nucleus a large amount of low-rise condominium construction has taken place. For the first time in decades, a Center City neighborhood is once again a highly desirable residential area.⁴³

⁴² Neill, *Charlotte Observer*.

⁴³ Thomas W. Hanchett, “THE CENTER CITY: The Business District and the Original Four Wards,” History South, <https://www.historysouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/THE-CENTER-CITY.pdf>, accessed August 13, 2025.



Figure 10 Advertisement for the Blair-Bowden House bed and breakfast, *Charlotte Observer*, June 27, 1982.

The following year, Seymour and Bowden opened one of Charlotte's first bed and breakfasts. Named the Blair-Bowden House, they offered a suite with sitting room and bath with whirlpool tub for \$50-60 per night. Travel writer Diana Gleasner spent a night at the house and described her experience in the *Observer* in October 1983. By this time, single rooms had been added to the offerings. She described her accommodation:

It was elegant. Antiques, two fireplaces, a miniature jungle of plants in the expansive bathroom, fat candles here and there, a wet bar with toaster oven and coffee maker, a massive four-poster queen-size bed, my own sitting room with cable TV and books of all kinds from slim volumes of poetry to a lavishly illustrated tome on the Smithsonian Museum. I could have easily stayed the week.⁴⁴

The Blair House was featured in the home tour of 1983. However, by 1985 it appeared that Bowden and Seymour were no longer partnered. In 1987 Bowden sold the Blair House and purchased the Van Landingham Estate in Plaza Midwood, finding another historic home to restore to an event space. He died of complications from AIDS in 1994.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Diana Gleasner, "No Need to Look Beyond Your Own Backyard," *Charlotte Observer*, October 2, 1983.

⁴⁵ Holtz, 151.

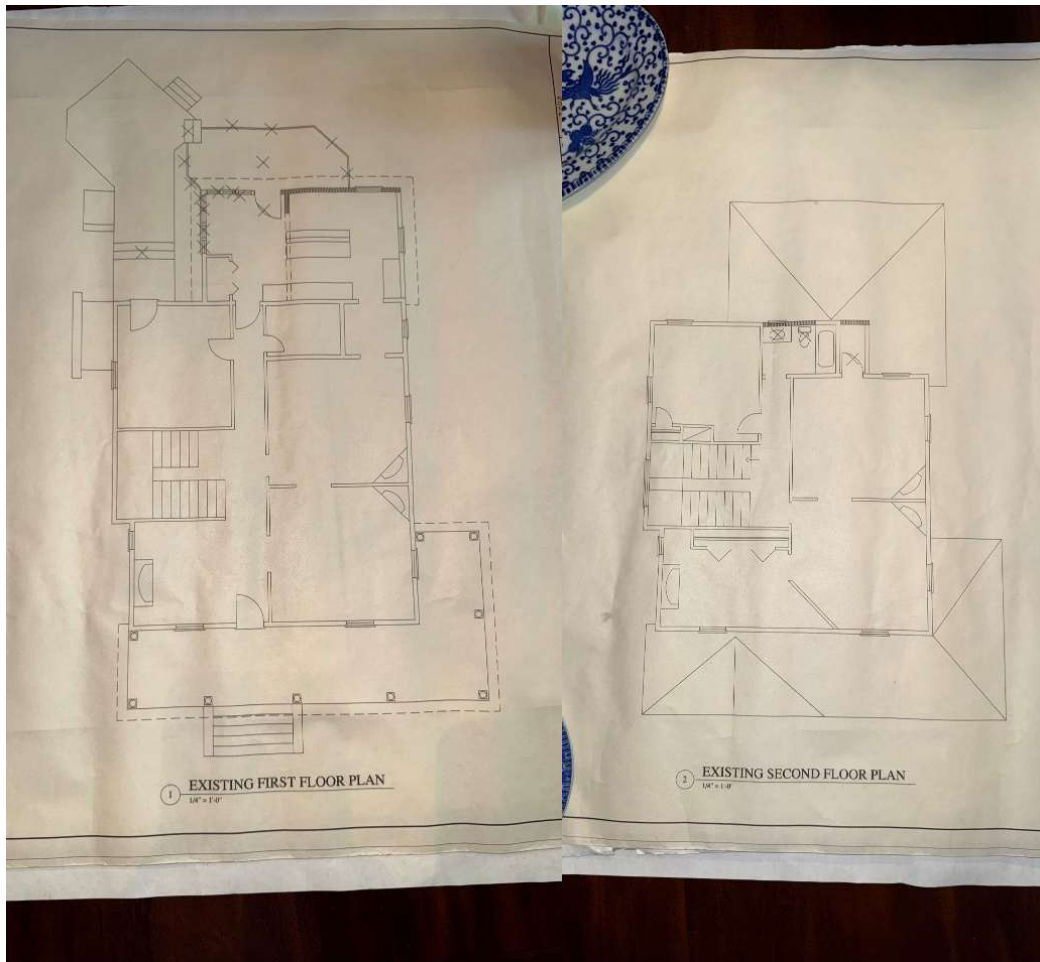
Architectural Description

Located in the Fourth Ward neighborhood, one of the original four wards of Charlotte, the 1906 Blair House is also the best example of a modified Foursquare residence remaining in the center city of Charlotte. Among its peers, it retains a high degree of integrity of materials and design at both exterior and interior.

Modifications were made to the house ca. 1922, 1978, and 2003. The first modifications, according to Jack Bowden, were made ca. 1922 by the Blairs to remove Victorian elements. Likely at this time, according to Dr. Mildred Morse McEwen, a furnace was installed. Sanborn maps from 1911 (below left) and 1929 (below right) show that extensive changes appear to have been made to the house with a shrinking of its footprint at rear and reduction of the north portion of the wraparound front porch. Unfortunately, no information is extant to explain these changes.



Bowden, who purchased the house from the Blair sisters, and partner David Seymour installed period-appropriate elements including the wood grille at the first floor hallway and wood mantle in the living room. It is likely that they also modified a bedroom in the front left to a bathroom, adding an angled wall between it and the primary sitting room. A two-story addition at rear designed by Charlotte architect Allen Brooks was made in 2003 by Christopher and Cameron Holtz, current owners of the Blair House. This addition expanded the footprint of the rear section of the house by one bay and extended the second story. An inset bay on the upper level at the south elevation demarks the addition from the original two-story mass of the house.



First and second floor plans of the Blair House ca. 2003 preceding rear addition. In the possession of homeowner.

The Blair House is the best extant example of a Foursquare house in Fourth Ward which remains at its original site of construction. It possesses the highest exterior and interior integrity of comparable buildings. While records are not available to specify where materials were sourced by the Blairs, it is likely that millwork was sourced from either J. H. Wearn & Co. or Carolina Manufacturing Company, the two major producers of these goods in Charlotte during this period.

Christian people, in a Presbyterian every department, some are and some are not.

J. H. WEDDINGTON, President

J. A. FORE, Treasurer and Manager

GEO. W. GRAHAM, Sec'y

Carolina Manufacturing Company

Manufacturers of

Sash, Doors and Blinds, Mouldings, Turned Work and all kinds of Planing Mill Work.

Bank Fixtures and Counters, Hard Wood Mantels, Stairways and Inside Trim, Rough and Dressed Lumber, Laths, Shingles, Plate Glass, Window Glass, Cathedral Glass, Venetian Glass, Putty, &c

COTTON FACTORY WORK A SPECIALTY

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Figure 11 Advertisement, *Charlotte News*, April 7, 1902.

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Hardwood Mantels

We manufacture and carry a large stock of Hardwood Mantels; also dealers in Tile and Grates. Can fill orders promptly. Write for catalogue.

J. H. WEARN & CO.,
Charlotte, N. C.

Figure 12 Advertisement, *Charlotte Observer*, December 31, 1907.

Neighbor Mildred Morse McEwen, who grew up two doors down from the Blairs, was a peer of the Blair sisters. She described the neighborhood and its houses in a 1987 memoir, remembering the early methods of heating the homes:

Nothing in the world gave the same sense of cozy well-being as the blue flame of a base burner on a cold night. The Blairs had one in the front hall, and the Sheppards had one in the sitting room. [...] I suppose the stove got its name from the fact that a whole scuttle full of small-size

'hard coal' was put into the top at one time and this would last all day or all night. The fire was at the bottom, and the blue flames showed through the isinglass windows.⁴⁶

[illegible]

Figure 13 The base burner stove in the Blair House was similar to these sold by Sears, Roebuck & Co. in their 1904 catalogue.

When coal prices shot up ca. 1917-1918, many people got rid of these stoves, replacing them with soft coal burning stoves, or dug basements and installed furnaces. As Mildred noted, "The Sheppards and Blairs got furnaces, but the McLaughlins and Morses kept stoves and fireplaces until the houses were torn down."⁴⁷ The Blairs installed a Iron Fireman Manufacturing Company automatic coal burner in the late 1930s or 1940s, and the operating instructions are still posted in the basement.

⁴⁶ McEwen, 101.

⁴⁷ McEwen, 102.



Figure 14 Operating instructions for the automatic coal burner in the Blair House basement.

Comparable Houses in Fourth Ward

Several houses comparable in age or style to the Blair House are extant in Fourth Ward, but these have either been moved from their original site of construction or have little interior integrity.



312 W. Ninth Street

This ca. 1903 Foursquare was moved from its original site of construction at today Fourth Ward Park around 1976.

333 W. Ninth Street

Though not the Foursquare style, this ca. 1910 house shares similar massing, wraparound porch, and gabled façade detail. The interior has been completely renovated with little original materials and design remaining.





326 W. Tenth Street

This ca. 1905 house has Greek Revival details but is similar to the Blair House in its façade massing. It was moved to the site from N. Church Street in the late 1970s and converted to commercial use in 1984.

Exterior Description



The Blair House is a two-story hipped wood frame building with a stuccoed brick foundation. The house is sheathed in narrow wood siding, mostly original, and has an original patterned slate roof above the wide cornice board. The one-over-one wood sash windows on the original portion of the house are original. All windows have storm windows installed on the exterior, and most retain original hardware for shutters.

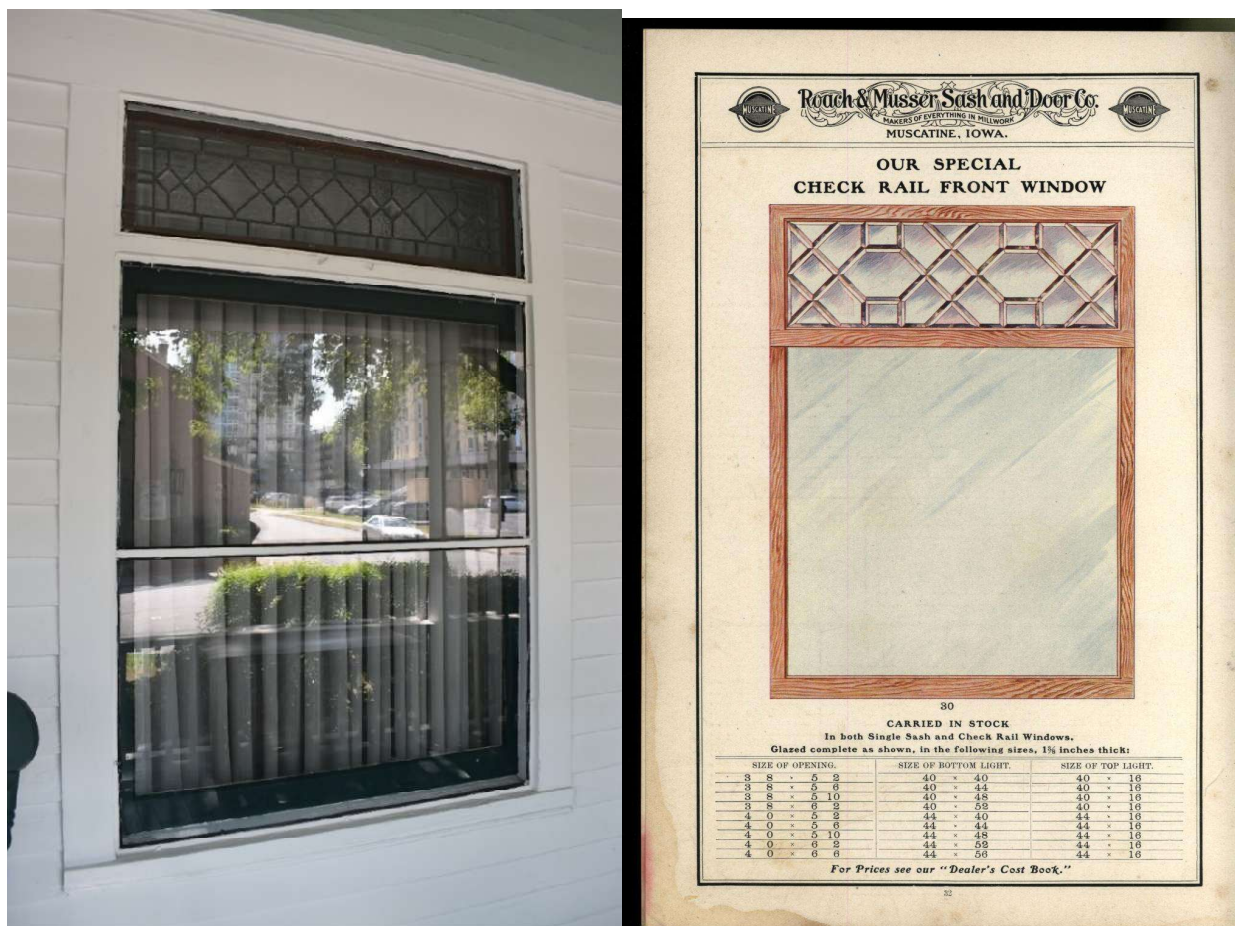
The front yard of the Blair House is grassy with mature shade trees. Low shrubs are planted along the porch and at the corner of N. Poplar and W. Ninth Streets. A wide brick walkway leads to the brick steps with brick parapets. A wood fence at the south side yard is obscured by shrubs.



The façade of the Blair House displays its modified Foursquare design. It is two bays wide with a full-width one-story porch wrapped around to the north elevation. The porch is four bays wide at the façade with a gabled bay framing the entrance. The gabled porch bay has vertical wood paneling. The porch is supported by wood doric columns—only one is original as others have been replaced with similar due to decay—with low railing and square balusters. The deck is wood tongue-and-groove.

Two gabled bays represent the primary modification of the typical symmetrical Foursquare design. An engaged gabled bay at the first bay of the façade has wood siding and a pair of single-lite windows. A gabled dormer at the second bay also has wood siding and a pair of single-lite windows.

The first bay of the façade contains a typical window and the front door. The second bay has a cottage window with beveled glass transom. The front door has a wrought iron security door, believed to be original to the house, and beveled glass transom matching the cottage window. The front door is two-panel wood with beveled glass (believed to not be original and installed after 1979). Wrought iron security doors original to the house are extant on the front door and the two exterior doors at the rear porch.



This 1905 catalogue shows a check rail window similar to that in the Blair House. The exterior storm window has a muntin while the actual window is one pane. The leaded glass transom matches those above the front door.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Roach & Musser, Sash and Door Co. 1905 Catalogue, 32,
<https://archive.org/details/CompleteCatalogue1905/page/n2/mode/1up>, accessed September 14, 2025.



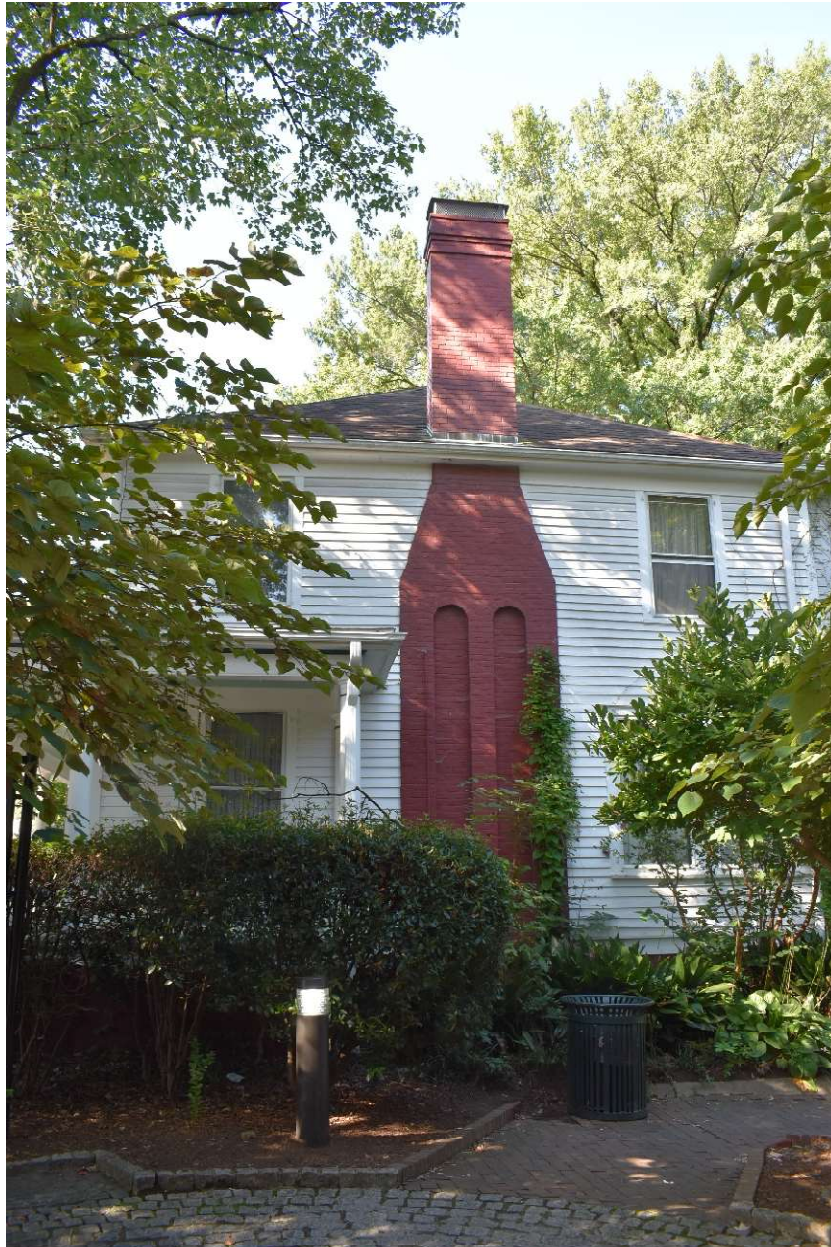
The leaded glass lite of the two-panel wood door has an etched pineapple motif. The heavy wrought iron security doors are believed to be original, and no similar products were found in catalogues. It is possible that they were locally produced.



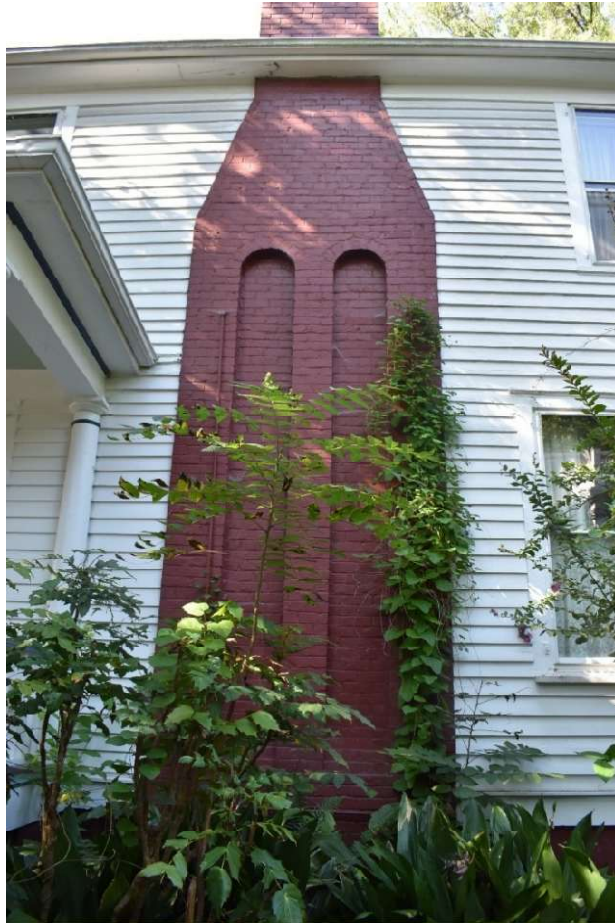
The fourth column on the porch is the only original wood column.



Beadboard wood ceiling at the front porch.



The north elevation of the Blair House is two bays wide with fenestration at each level flanking the brick chimney. The lower second bay has a pair of windows while the other bays have single windows. The brick chimney is flush with the wall plane. It has two arched insets extending to the single shoulder. The chimney continues through the roof plane and is topped with corbelled brick and screened metal cap.



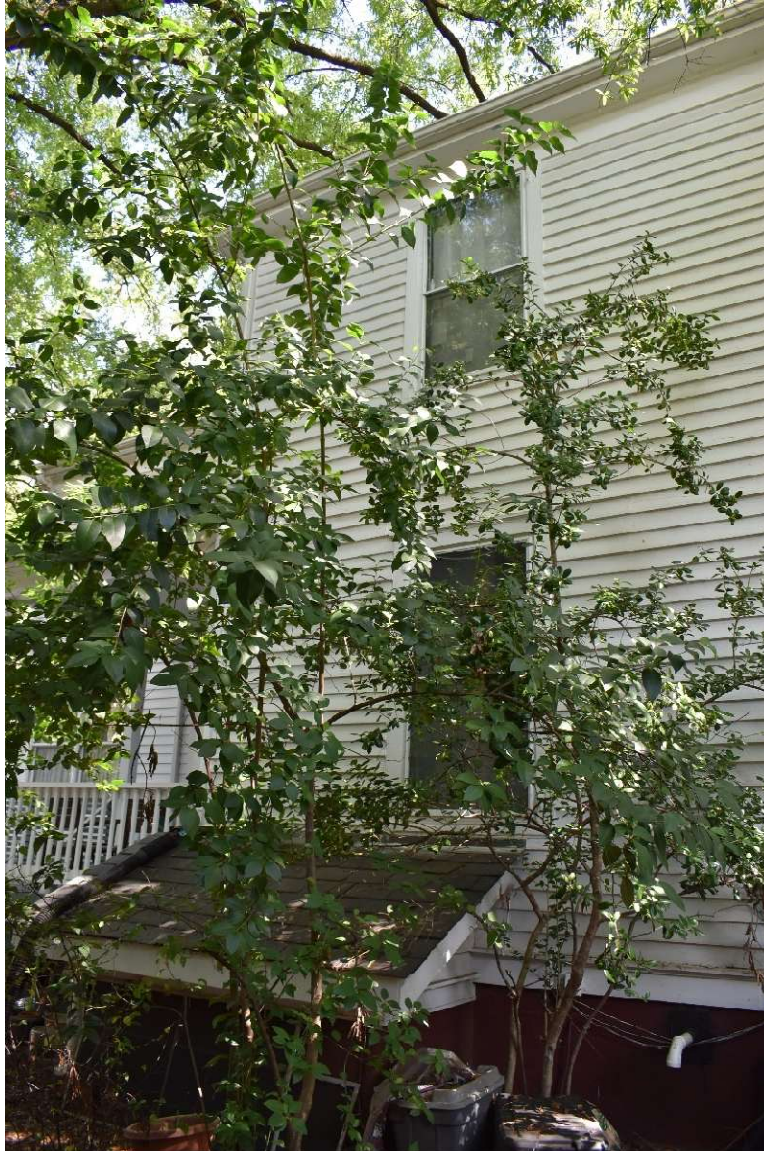


The south elevation is four bays wide, with two bays on the front section and two bays at the protruding rear section.



The front section of the south elevation has a pair of small typical windows at the lower level and a single typical window in the upper level second bay. A brick chimney rises through the roof.

The third bay has a tripartite window with leaded glass transom set between the lower and upper levels at the stairwell. Below is a small square leaded glass window at a closet under the stair landing. A brick chimney rises through the roof perpendicular to that in the front section.



The fourth bay has typical windows at each level. They sit above the exterior entrance to the basement, which has a slate shed roof, stuccoed brick walls, and plywood door.



The rear addition to the Blair House is three bays wide at the north elevation. The first bay distinguishes the original two-story mass from the addition. The lower level of the bay is original to the house and has a typical window and slate-shingled shed roof. The upper level is recessed with a typical window originally located on the west elevation.

The third bay has an original typical window at the lower level. The fourth bay has an original typical window originally located on the west elevation at the lower level. The upper level has a new 1/1 window.



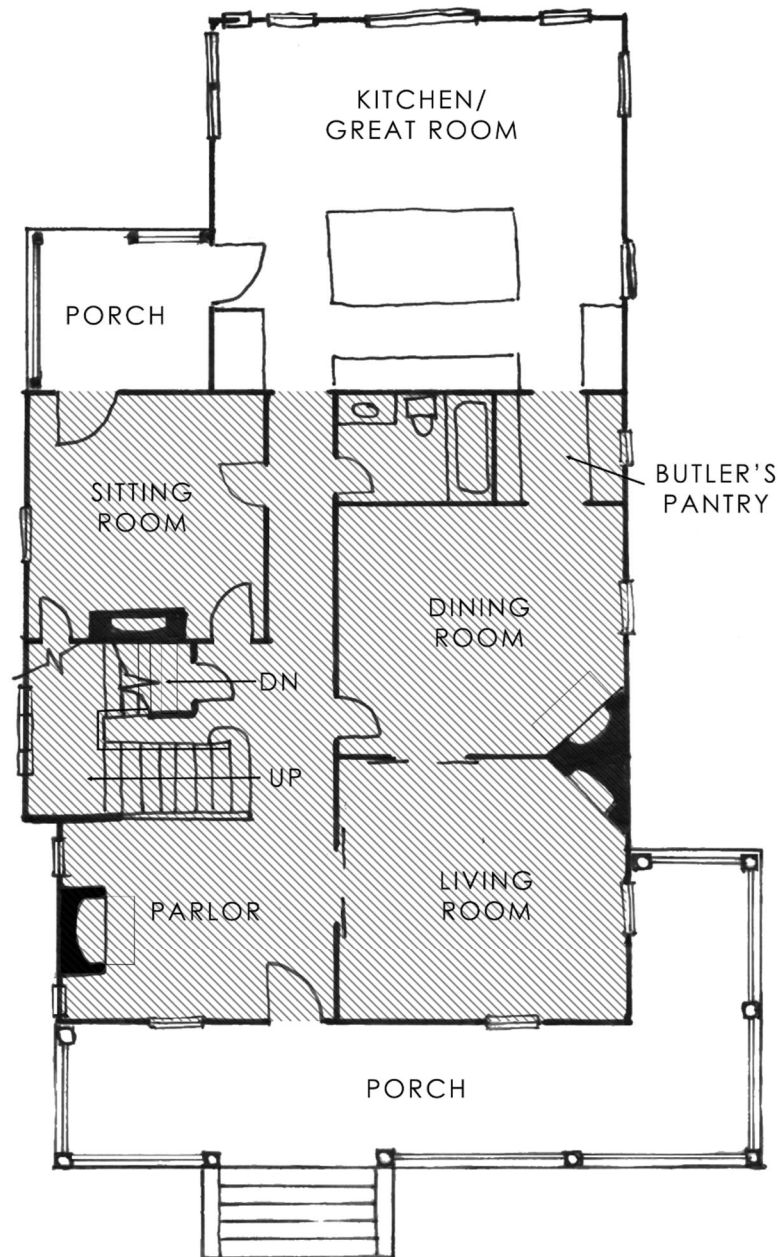
The west elevation of the addition has four bays on the lower level with new 1/1 windows. All are single except for the second bay, which has a pair. The window at the fourth bay is narrower than the others. At the upper level are two bays, roughly centered on the two bays below. The first bay has a pair of new windows, and the second bay has a single new window.

The first bay of the south elevation of the addition has a pair of wide new windows to reflect the sleeping porch that was previously located here. A square hipped porch covers the second bay, which has a door with transom and original wrought iron security door. The porch has square section wood posts and wood railing with square balusters. The upper level has a pair of new windows.

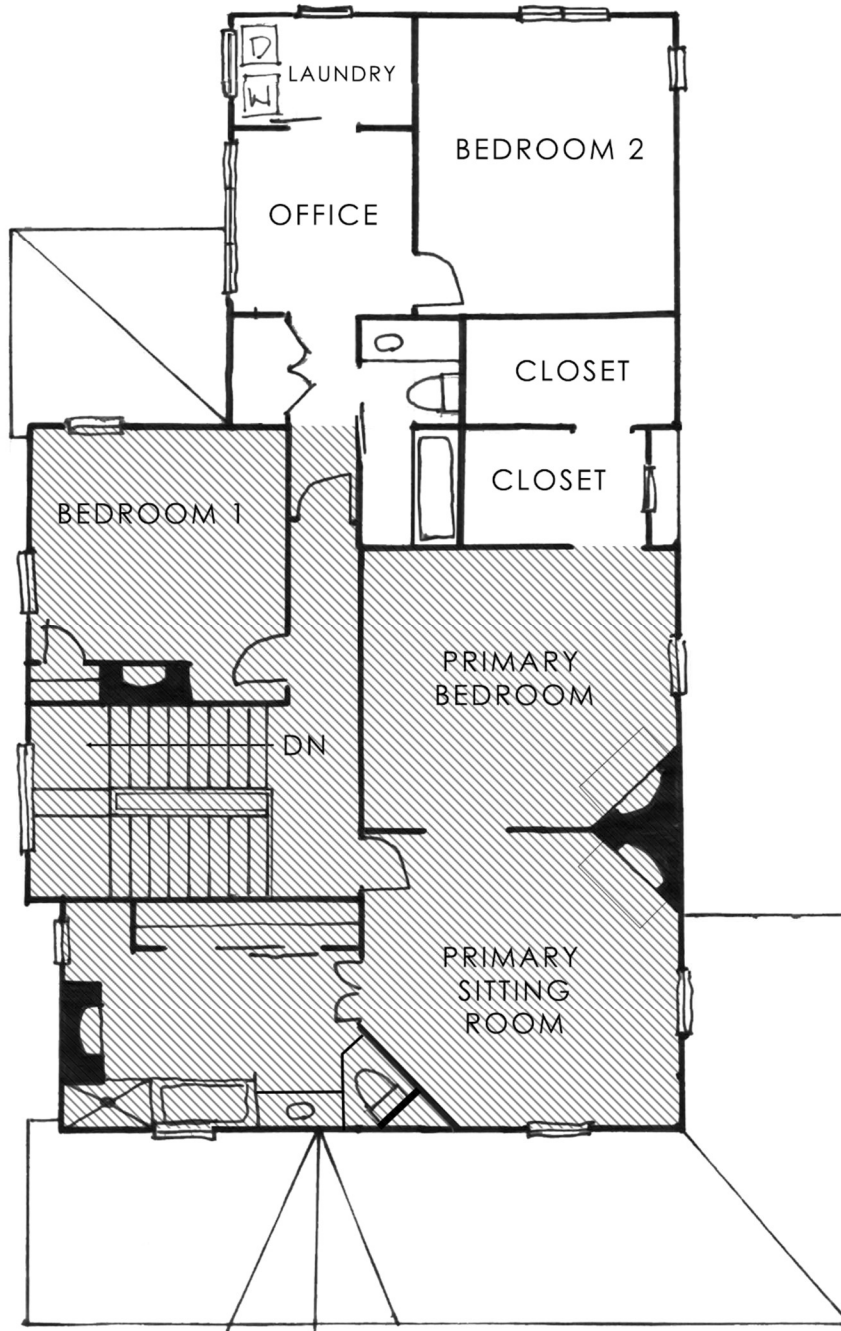
The west elevation of the original portion of the house is visible here. It is one bay wide with a door with transom and original wrought iron security door in the lower level. Above is a typical window.

A tiered wood deck leads to a brick patio in the back yard. Mature trees shade the yard, and low shrubs and ground cover edge the patio. A scalloped picket fence runs along the property line at W. Ninth Street. There is no fencing separating the property from its neighbor to the south.

Floor Plans



FIRST FLOOR | NTS



SECOND FLOOR | NTS

Interior Description

The hatching on the floor plans denote the areas to be included in the interior designation.

The interior of the Blair House retains many original materials and elements. Wood materials and elements include strip flooring, interior doors, window and door trim, crown moulding, wainscoting, and mantles. Walls and ceilings are plaster over wood lathe. Replaced elements and materials are identified within each room.

Typical trim at doors features a wide header, bellied casing, and plinth block. Windows also have wide headers and bellied casing.



Typical doors are wood five panel with original hardware.

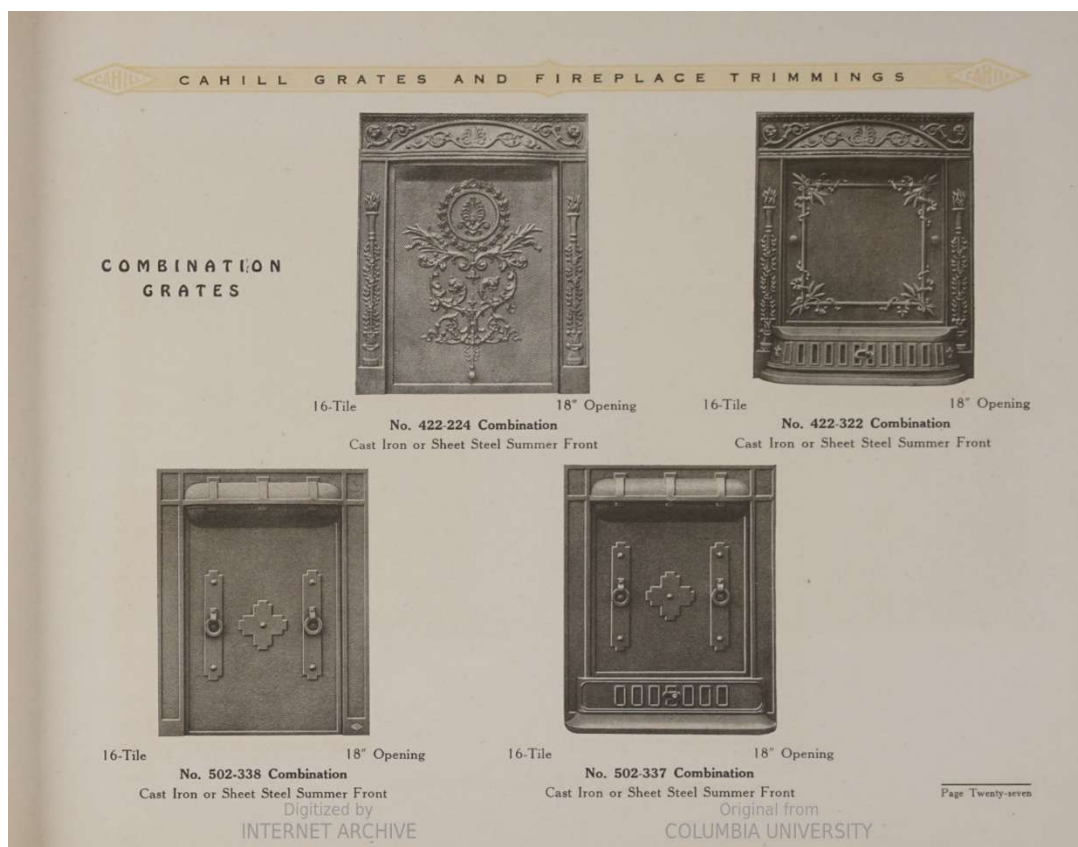


The front door opens to the parlor. Reportedly called the “courting parlor” by the Blair sisters, the room features a fireplace set forward between smaller typical windows.⁴⁹ The wood dentil crown moulding in this room and the hallway is replacement, and the ceiling is gypsum board.



The mantle in the parlor is unusual in its blocky Tudoresque design influence with pierced wood onlay, hexagonal faux pegs, and faceted brackets. The tile surround and hearth, cast iron grate, and summer front are original. The Holtzes observed similar tile in the Sheppard House (601 N. Poplar Street) and other nearby houses. In the floor to the right of the hearth is a metal vent, likely dating to when the Blairs installed a furnace ca. 1920.

⁴⁹ Corinne Madden Ross, *The Southern Guest House Book* (Charlotte: Fast & McMillan Publishers, Inc., 1984), 110.

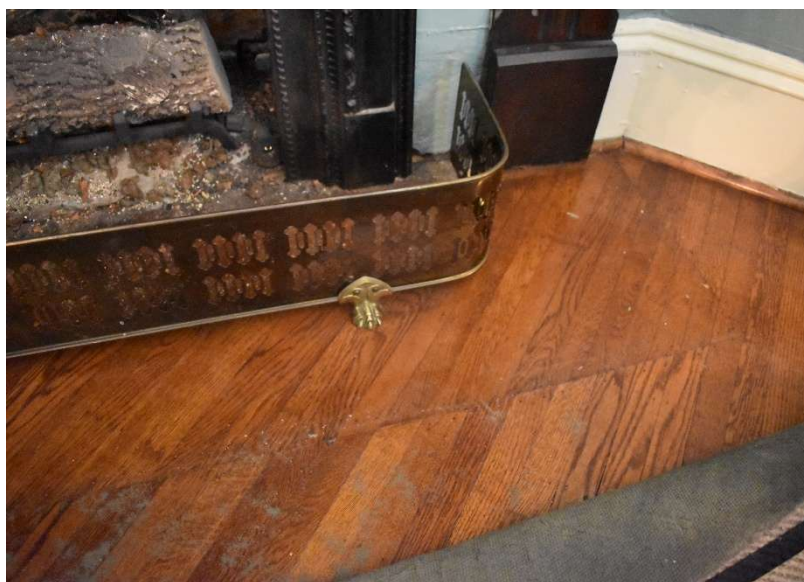


The grate resembles designs made by Chattanooga Roofing & Foundry Company as seen in this 1917 catalogue.⁵⁰ Hardware and building supply stores in Charlotte carried Cahill grates and fireplaces.

⁵⁰ Chattanooga Roofing & Foundry, *Cahill Grates: Fireplace Trimmings*, catalogue (1917), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/102808832>, accessed September 12, 2025.



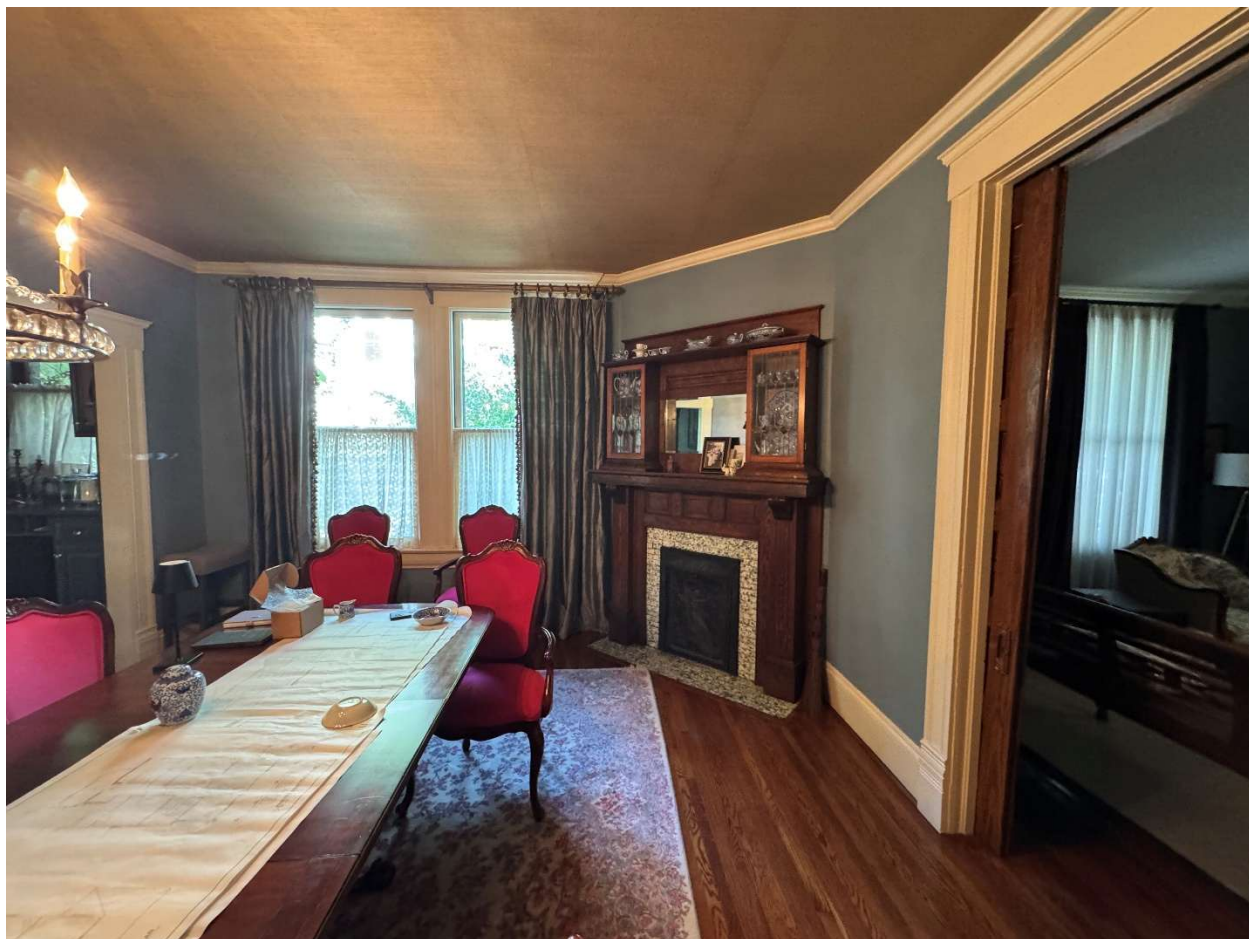
The focal point of the living room is the angled corner fireplace. The mantle is not original to the house; the metal and grate may not be as well. The fireplace has no tile surround or hearth, with the latter infilled with wood flooring. The moulding is painted.





Six-panel wood pocket doors with original hardware open from the parlor and dining room to the living room.

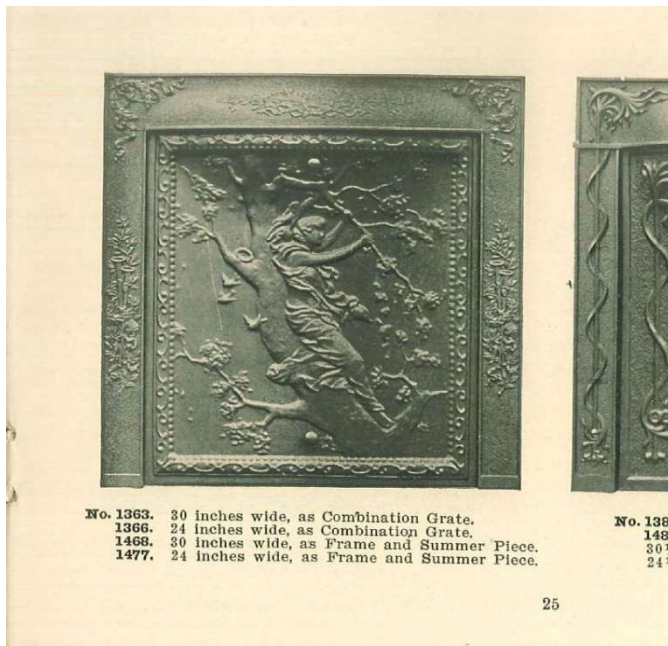




The dining room features a pair of typical window and original fireplace and mantle. Wood moulding is painted, and the ceiling is wallpapered.

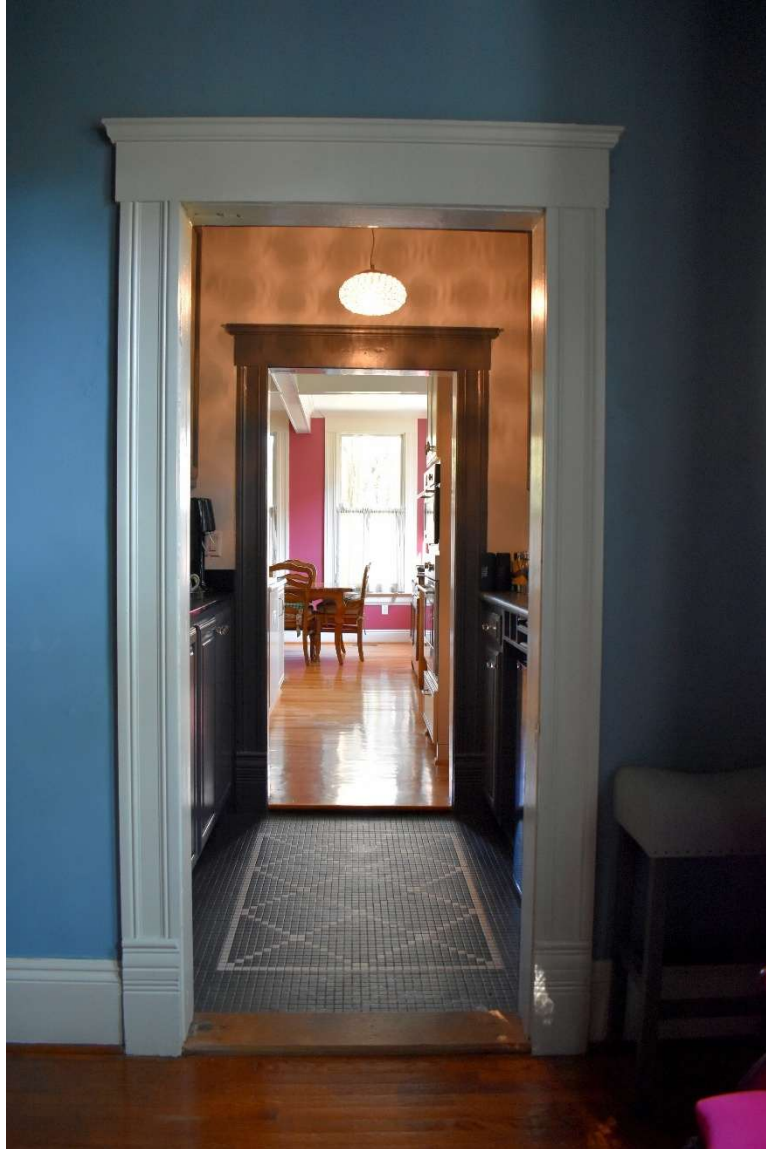


The mantle in the dining room has fluted pilasters and inset panels above the fireplace opening. Curved brackets support the mantle. Three shelf cabinets with leaded glass flank the rectangular mirror with inset panel above. The mantle is topped with a deep shelf. The surround and hearth are cream tile speckled with blues and pinks. The cast iron fireplace grate has a summer front with a woman in a tree, a motif common to the period.



The summer front design was found in many catalogues, including this 1907 Drake Marble and Tile Co., Minnesota, catalogue.⁵¹

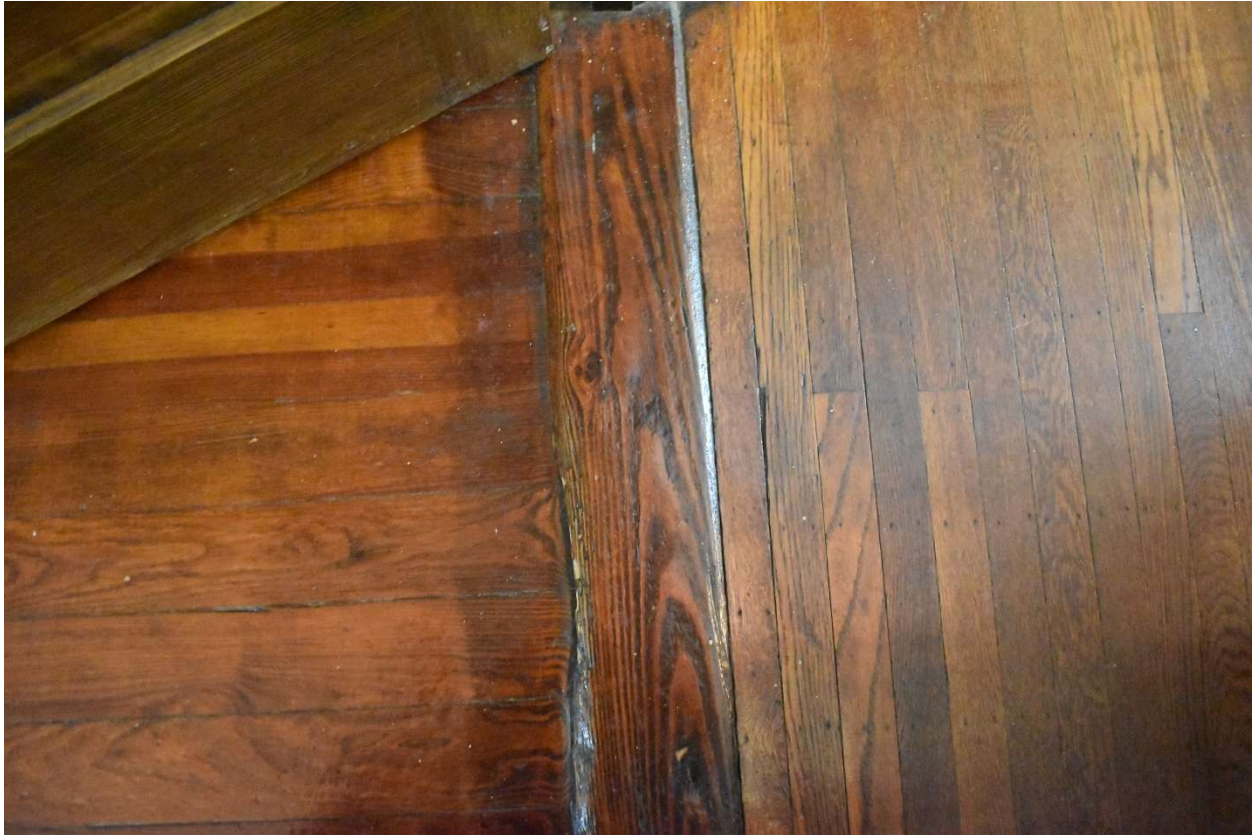
⁵¹ Drake Marble & Tile Co., Catalogue "D" 1907, Grates and Fireplace Fixtures in Iron and Brass, 25, <https://archive.org/details/GratesAndFireplaceFixturesInIronAndBrass/mode/1up>, accessed September 14, 2025.



The butler's pantry is located between the dining room and kitchen/great room. A swinging door was removed and is in storage.



The hallway runs from the parlor to the kitchen and great room at the rear of the house. Accessed from the hallway are the stairwell, basement, dining room, sitting room, and full bathroom. The wood grille at the front of the hall is not original to the house. A door from the hallway to the kitchen/great room has been removed and is in storage.



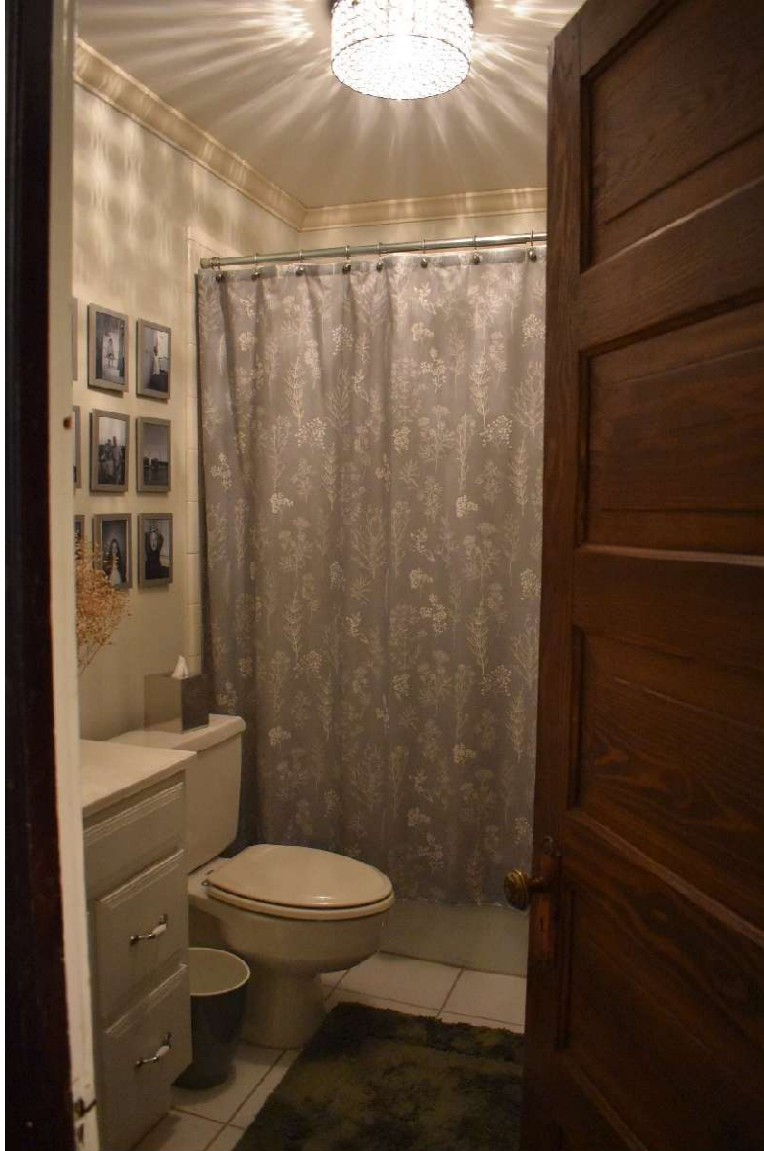
The sitting room has tongue-and-groove wood flooring running perpendicular to the strip flooring found throughout the house. There is also no extant hearth. Lore holds that this room served as Kent's office, so the different flooring may differentiate his work space from more formal and public spaces.



The fireplace in the sitting room has been infilled. The painted wood mantle is original. A smaller five-panel wood door opens to a closet with window under the stair landing. A pair of stained glass panels cover the window; these were installed by Bowden and Seymour. The door to the rear porch has a stained glass lite and transom. It is unknown if these are original.



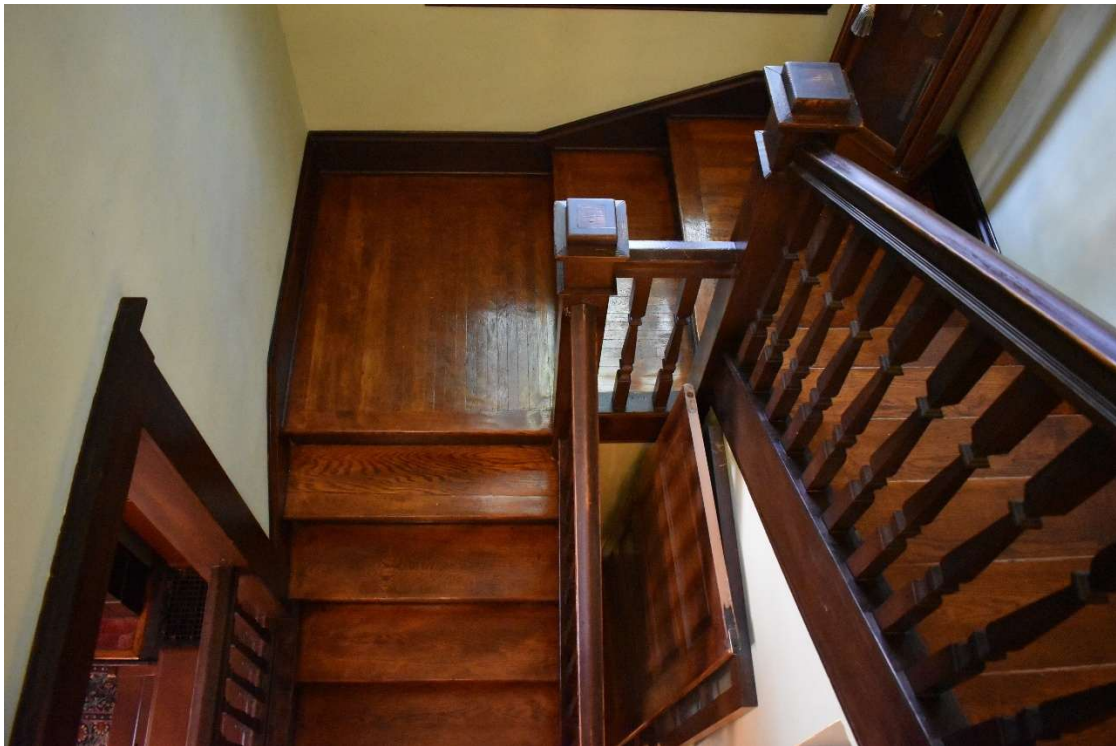
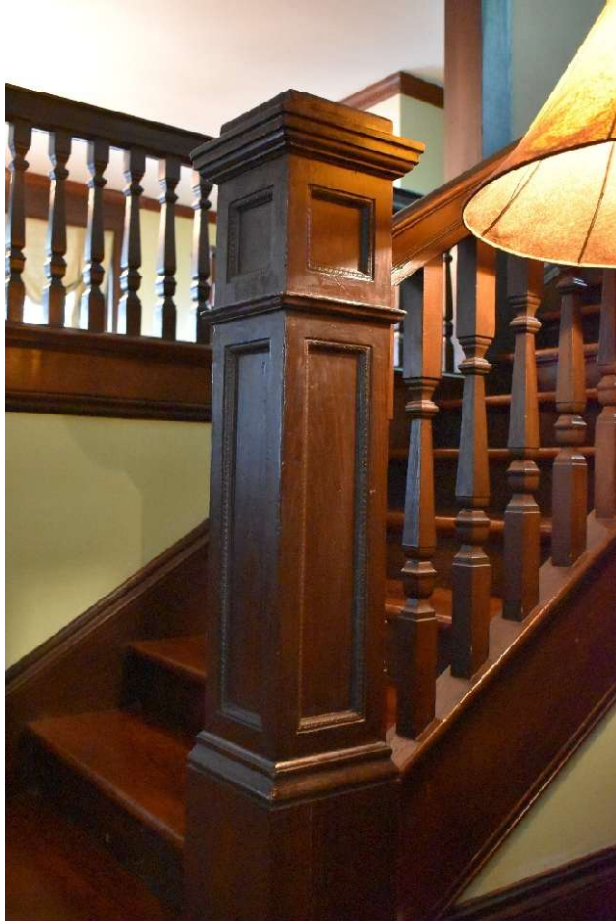
The junction box is located in the hallway adjacent to the door to the sitting room. The trims match those used throughout the house, leading to speculation that the fixture is original.



A full bathroom is located across the hallway from the sitting room. It was renovated ca. 1979.



The staircase is open to the parlor with a balustrade with squared carved balusters atop a wood half-wall with end post. The square newel post has detailed trim edging the inset panels. The balusters are squared with carved stems.



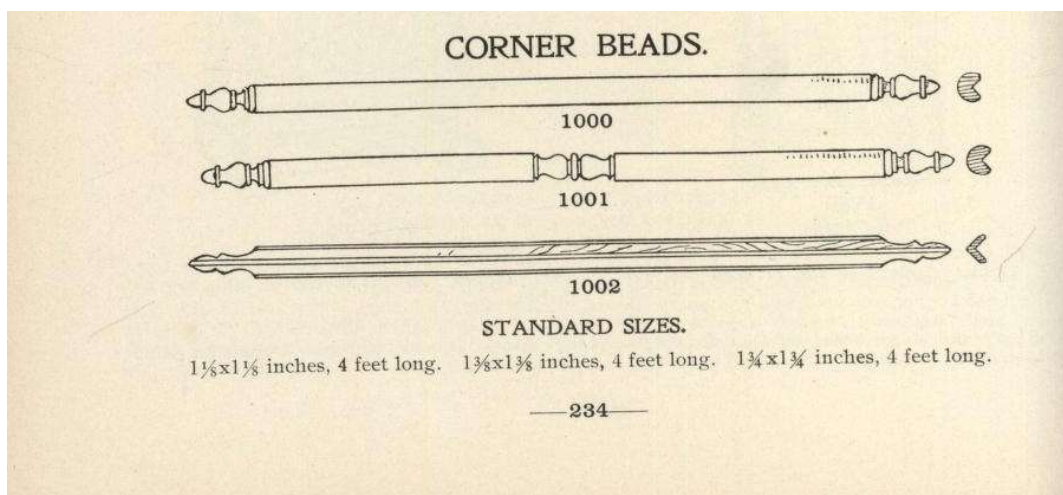


At the landing is a leaded glass tripartite window with transom.





Wood corner bead is located at the corner by the stairwell to the hallway (left) and by the door to the primary sitting room (right). This millwork was installed in high-traffic areas to protect the plaster corners. Examples are found in the 1904 Radford catalogue below.⁵²



⁵² Radford, Universal Design and Official Moulding Book (Chicago: Shattock & McKay, 1904), 234.

The primary suite, which includes a sitting room, bedroom, and bathroom, is accessed from the upstairs landing.



The sitting room is open to both the bedroom and bathroom. It has a fireplace with original painted wood mantle and slate hearth. However, the cast iron fireplace insert and grate have been replaced with a brass insert, likely ca. 1979.





A bedroom was converted into a bathroom ca. 1979. The fireplace opening was retained, though the mantle was removed and a brass insert installed. The wall between the sitting room and bathroom was altered to angle into the former room, with a plumbing plinth for the toilet built in the alcove. Above the garden bathtub, the ceiling was opened to allow light from the engaged façade dormer windows.



A wide cased opening leads from the sitting room to the primary bedroom. The bedroom also has a fireplace mantle and hearth believed to be original, though it also has a ca. 1979 brass insert. Beyond are two closets. The cased opening was formerly the location of a window, which was installed in the first closet in the recessed bay of the north elevation.





The upstairs bedroom is similar in size and layout to the sitting room below. There is an original fireplace mantle with infilled opening. Adjacent is a small closet with original door.



The basement is accessed through a door under the staircase. Steep wood steps, some with linoleum that was likely used in other rooms, lead down to the space.





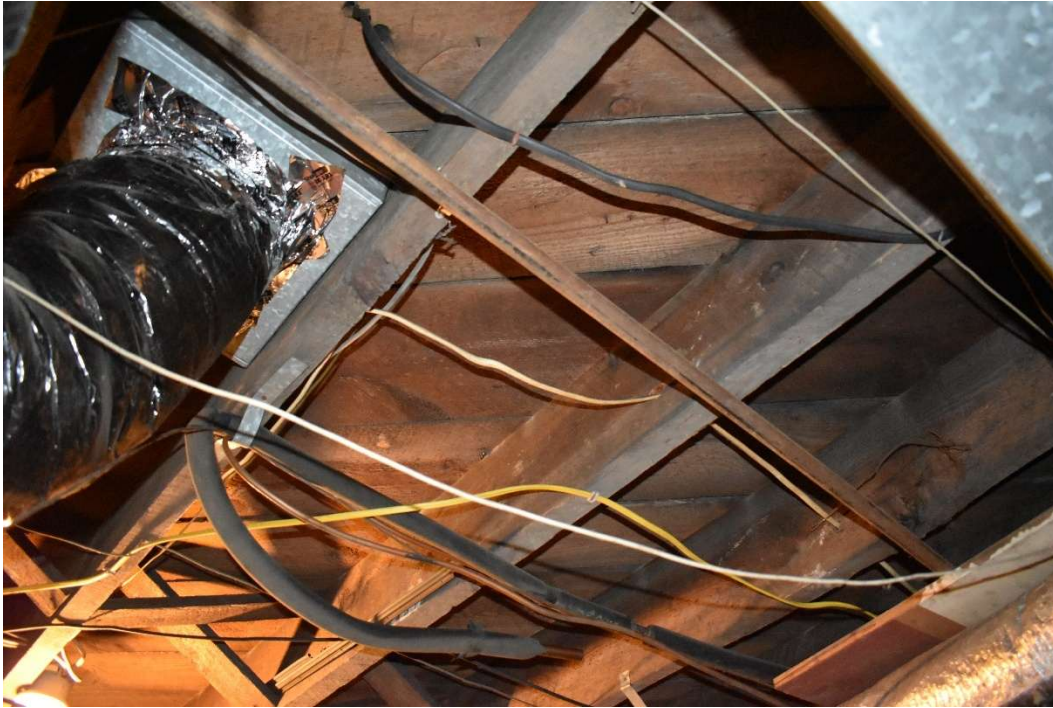
An original five panel wood door leads to the exterior.



The coal chute was located on the north elevation along W. Ninth Street. It has been removed and infilled with brick.



The brick foundation was insufficient to support the house, and metal posts were installed ca. 2003 as reinforcement.



Some remnants of knob-and-tube wiring are present but no longer in use.

Areas Not Included in Interior Designation

Kitchen/Great Room



The wood flooring in the kitchen lays atop existing flooring, so there is a slight step up from the hallway.

Office and Laundry



The hallway door was originally located at the bathroom.

Upstairs Bathroom



The wall separating the toilet from the shower is the location of the original exterior wall.

Bedroom 2



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