

# Slavery at the Hovis-Spratt House

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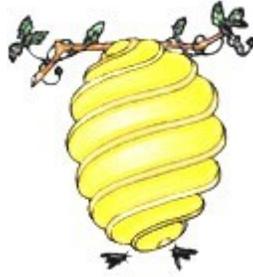
Designation Report Addendum  
Susan V. Mayer, SVM Historical Consulting  
September 2024

While Franklin Hovis built the Hovis-Spratt House before and after his service in the Civil War, he and his family resided in a log cabin on the property. In the 1860 U. S. Census, the Hovis family was not listed as enslavers and recorded \$1,000 of real estate and \$1,000 in personal estate.<sup>1</sup> Many of the Hovis neighbors, which included Thomas N. Spratt, were also subsistence farmers who enslaved at most one person. Thomas, the father of Charles A. Spratt who later purchased and expanded the Hovis-Spratt House, enslaved a fifteen-year-old girl.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1860 U. S. Census, Western Division, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, 32.

<sup>2</sup> 1860 U. S. Census Slave Schedule, Western Division, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, 12,



SURVEY AND RESEARCH REPORT  
on the Hovis-Spratt  
House



*This report was written on June 4, 1986.*

- 1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Hovis-Spratt House is located on Wilmount Road in the Steele Creek Community of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.
- 2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property:** The owner of the property is:

Crow-Childress-Klein #9 c/o  
Trammell Crow Company  
1400 Charlotte Plaza  
Charlotte, N.C. 28244

Telephone: 704/376-5910

**3. Representative photographs of the property:** This report contains representative photographs of the property.

**4. A map depicting the location of the property:** This report contains a map which depicts the location of the property.



**5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property:** The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 5110, Page 351. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 143-111-25.

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

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Dr. William H. Huffman and Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

**8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-399.4:**

**a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance:** The Commission judges that the property known as the Hovis-Spratt House does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Hovis-Spratt House, built over a span of years in the mid-1800's by Franklin Hovis (1827-1903), is one of the few remaining farmsteads which survives in this section of the Steele Creek Community of Mecklenburg County, near Douglas International Airport; 2) the Hovis-Spratt House and the extant outbuildings associated therewith are representative of a rural lifestyle which once predominated in this section of Mecklenburg County; and 3) the Hovis-Spratt House will be destroyed in the very near future unless a preservation strategy is developed.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association:** The Commission contends that the architectural description included in this report demonstrates that the exterior of the property known as the Hovis-Spratt House meet this criterion.

**9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal:** The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes "historic property." The current appraised value of the improvements is \$23,430. The current appraised value of the 36.94 acres of land is \$646,450. The total appraised value of the property is \$669,880. The property is zoned I1.

**Date of Preparation of this Report:** June 4, 1986.

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

Telephone: 704/376-9115

## *Historical Overview*

*Dr. William H. Huffman*

*May, 1986*

The Hovis-Spratt House, located about two miles from the Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, is one of the last original buildings in the Steele Creek community dating from the Civil War era, and carries with it a country simplicity combined with a strong sense of rural heritage.

Begun prior to the Civil War by Franklin Hovis (1827- 1903), it was not completed until after his return from service in the Confederate Army. <sup>1</sup> Records of the period are scant; but we know that Hovis, who was a native of Lincoln County, married Mary Ann McKnight (c.1821-1887) of Mecklenburg County on August 12, 1852, with Reverend A. L. Watts of the Steele Creek Presbyterian Church officiating, and built a log cabin behind the site of the present house, on what was then the Steele Creek Road. <sup>2</sup> There all five of their children were born: Zenas A. (c.1853); Robert McKnight (1855); Amanda (1857); Margaret (1862); Martha(c.1864).<sup>3</sup>

With such a growing family and pre-war prosperity permitting, Franklin Hovis laid out and started work on building a new house that would be more suitable. Family folklore has it that he was able to find tall virgin pines with no branches along the length he needed for the beams and clapboard, and that the brick for the chimney was made by hand on the site. It is also said that Hovis resumed work on the house only after a period of recovery from the war. <sup>4</sup>

After completion of the house and the struggles of Reconstruction, The Hovis family shared in the fortunes of the changing area. The children all married and moved from the farm, but at the division of the estate after Franklin Hovis' death in 1903, ownership of the home tract with 94 acres passed to son-in-law William L. Shelby. <sup>5</sup> Eight years later, in 1910, ownership was transferred from the Hovis to the Spratt family, where it remained for seventy-five years, when C. A. Spratt bought the place for \$4606.25.

Charles A. Spratt (1855-1917) was a well-known Mecklenburg County surveyor and engineer who did a great deal of the survey work of the city and county in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was under his ownership that the room addition was added to the back of the house. <sup>7</sup> After C. A. Spratt's death, title passed down through several heirs to Frank S. Spratt, Jr. in 1949.<sup>8</sup> From 1930 to 1949, the

house was leased to various tenants, but during the latter years Frank Spratt, Jr. moved back until 1986.<sup>9</sup> In 1985 he sold the property to a business partnership which plans to develop the site for on office park.<sup>10</sup>

Once an integral part of the thriving rural community of Steele Creek, which was anchored by the Presbyterian Church, the Hovis-Spratt house, with its simple but powerful lines, is now encountering the pressure of assured destruction as is the case of much of Mecklenburg's rural heritage, unless means are found to move it to another site. Retaining the means to know and understand our past is surely worth the effort.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Frank S. Spratt, Jr. 23 February 1986.

<sup>2</sup> North Carolina Marriage Bond No. 81766; interview with Belk Hovis, 30 May 1986; *The History of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church*, 3rd Ed. (Charlotte: Craftsman, 1978), p. 19; Elizabeth Rucker, *The Genealogy of Petter Heyl and His Descendants* (Shelby, N.C.: A. J. Thompson, 1938), p. 302 [Contains errors in dates - WWH]. The property may have come through her family, although this is not confirmed in the records; Franklin Hovis is not recorded as having] bought any property prior to 1874.

<sup>3</sup> *History of Steele Creek Church*. p. 288; Rucker, cited above.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Hovis Belk, cited above.

<sup>5</sup> Mecklenburg County Deed Book 195, p. 155, 11 Feb. 1908; Z. A. Hovis eventually started a funeral home business which continues to the present.

<sup>6</sup> Mecklenburg County Deed Book 264, p. 156, 28 April 1910.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Frank Spratt, Jr.; information on file with the Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission.

<sup>8</sup> Mecklenburg County Record of Estates, Administration Book 36, p. 91.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Frank Spratt, Jr.

<sup>10</sup> Mecklenburg County Deed Book 5110, p. 351, 21 October 1985.

## *Architectural Description*

*Dr. William H. Huffman*

*Dr. Dan L. Morrill*

*June 4, 1986*

The Hovis-Spratt House on Wilmount Road in the Steele Creek community of Mecklenburg County is more or less typical of farmhouses erected by prosperous farmers in Mecklenburg County just after the Civil War. Construction began before the Civil War, but the house was completed over a period of several years after that conflict had ended. The strict symmetry of the house was compromised by the addition of two ells and an L-shaped porch at the rear of the house shortly before World War I.

The Hovis-Spratt House is part of a farmstead which contains six outbuildings, five of which probably date from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century and the other of more recent origin. Included in the outbuildings is a small barn with a decorative cupola, a rarity in Mecklenburg County. Rustic, wood-post fences with barbed wire separate the pastures and fields; and the farmstead appears to have experienced minimal ground disturbance, thereby suggesting the presence of historic artifacts.

The overall massing of the original house is balanced or symmetrical, but the decorative detail is far less refined than that found in the more substantial Mecklenburg County farmhouses of the ante-bellum era. Particularly indicative of the early post-bellum period of construction in Mecklenburg County are the oversized sidelights and transom, and the double doors at the front entrance, and the mantel in the living room.

The two-story, gable-roof house faces southwest, and the original portion is three bays wide by two bays deep. The sheathing is unadorned clapboard, except under the front porch, which is flushboard. A one-story, columned porch with half-hip roof extends nearly all the way across the front of the house. Six square-shaped, wooden columns rise to simple, boxed eaves. The flooring material for the porch is concrete of relatively recent origin. The original portion of the Hovis-Spratt House is flanked by identical single-shouldered, brick end chimneys, laid in American or Common bond and topped by simple corbeled caps. The corner boards of the house are unadorned

and rise to boxed eaves. The roof is covered with black, composition shingle. Three lightning rods with delightful decorative detail are spaced evenly across the ridge of the gable roof. The house is painted white and rests upon a continuous brick foundation.

The fenestration of the original portion of the Hovis-Spratt House is symmetrically placed. On the first floor front, two windows with 9/9 lights flank the entrance; and on the second, three windows with 9/6 lights are evenly spaced across the facade. All have wooden shutters. The end chimneys are flanked by 9/9 windows on the first floor and 9/6 on the second. In keeping with the overall simplicity of the house, the window surrounds are devoid of substantial decorative detail.

A distinguishing element of the Hovis-Spratt House is the central front entranceway. Solid double doors are flanked by sidelights (5 lights each) and a transom (6 lights). The overall quality of the elements, while suggestive of Federal style houses, is heavy and expansive. The use of two doors and the employment of large lights in the sidelights and the transom tend to stretch the entranceway out, so to speak, giving it an overall massive quality. The entranceway also contains the anomaly of having decorative spindles on the screen doors which belong to the Victorian era.

The interior of the Hovis-Spratt House, especially on the first floor, has been substantially altered from the original. While the entry vestibule is largely intact (with flush board walls), the main stairway, which originally rose from the vestibule, has been replaced by a stairway which rises in a single run from the back of the house. None of the flooring on the first floor is original; a large entryway has been cut into the back wall of the house, creating a large den. The walls are covered with new paneling. A modern bathroom has been added.

Happily, the room on the left front does contain an original mantel. Again, as with the central entranceway, the overall feeling of the mantel is massive and heavy. Unadorned, wide pilasters rise to a broad apron beneath a deep, single shelf.

More of the second floor of the Hovis-Spratt House remains in its original form. The wide-planked floors, the doors, and the window surrounds are original. Neither of the mantels on the second floor survives, however; but the brick hearth in the left front room does remain. The second floor contains a modern bathroom, and a back bedroom has been completely modernized.