

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Neal Somers Alexander House

Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, MK2064, Listed 5/7/2008

Nomination by Mattson, Alexander and Associates, Inc.

Photographs by Mattson, Alexander and Associates, Inc., March 2007



Front and side view



Side view

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of property

historic name Alexander, Neal Somers, House

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 5014 North Sharon Amity Road not for publication N/A

city or town Charlotte vicinity N/A

state North Carolina code NC county Mecklenburg code 119 zip code 28215

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official Date

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

| I, hereby certify that this property is: | Signature of the Keeper | Date of Action |
|---|-------------------------|----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet. | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet. | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other (explain): _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- X private
public-local
public-State
public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- X building(s)
district
site
structure
object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Historic and Architectural Resources of Rural Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC

Sub: single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: WORK IN PROGRESS

Sub:

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Queen Anne
Colonial Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick
roof slate
walls wood: weatherboard; shingle; German siding
other wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheet, Section 7, Page 1.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or a grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1903

Significant Dates

1903

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheet, Section 8, Page 1.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Section 9, page 1

See Continuation Sheet,

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, Charlotte

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 4.0

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing
1 17 523000 3898040
2 Zone Easting Northing
3
4
 See continuation sheet.**Verbal Boundary Description**

The National Register boundary is defined by the current tax parcel depicted on the accompanying Mecklenburg County tax map.

Boundary Justification

The current tax parcel encompasses a portion of the property historically associated with the Neal Somers Alexander House and provides an appropriate setting.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Richard Mattson and Frances Alexander, Historiansorganization Mattson, Alexander and Assoc. Inc. date 5 September 2007street & number 2228 Winter Street telephone (704) 376-0985city or town Charlotte state NC zip code 28205

12. Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets**Maps**A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commissionstreet & number 2100 Randolph Road telephone (704) 376-9115city or town Charlotte state NC zip code 28207

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Neal Somers Alexander House
Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

7. Narrative Description

Originally the seat of a 1,000-acre cotton farm, the 1903 Neal Somers Alexander House is located roughly five miles east of downtown Charlotte in Mecklenburg County. Now situated amidst suburban residential and commercial development, the residence stands on a four-acre corner lot bounded by four-lane Shamrock Drive (south) and four-lane North Sharon Amity Drive (west).¹ The house occupies a clearing shaded by a grove of mature oak trees bounded to the east and north by woodland and undergrowth that have reclaimed former farmland. The only remaining agricultural building associated with the farm is an abandoned and heavily deteriorated barn. Dating to the mid-twentieth century, the frame, gable roofed barn sits in the woods north of the house. In addition, the property includes a small, mid-twentieth century pump house, covered in asphalt shingles that sits east of the residence. Because these ancillary buildings do not date to the construction of the house in 1903, which defines the period of significance, the barn and pump house are non-contributing resources.

Neal Somers Alexander House: Exterior

The Neal Somers Alexander House is a spacious, two and one-half story, frame, Queen Anne house with classical decorative elements. The Queen Anne style is clearly expressed in the variety of surface materials and consciously asymmetrical form with projecting wings and cutaway bays unified by a wraparound porch. While weatherboards cover most of the exterior, German siding is found on the sections of the first story shielded by the front and side porches, and wood shake shingles adorn the gables. Some of the weatherboards have water damage and are being replaced with boards that match the original. The house has a high hip roof with slightly flaring eaves, cross gables, and a corner tower with a distinctive cutaway dormer and a conical roof. The slate shingles of the house roof are laid in a decorative pattern created by alternating bands of rectangular and scalloped shingles. The box cornice has a simple flat frieze. Metal cresting embellishes the ridge of the hip roof, and metal finials as well as weathervanes and lightning rods cap the gables and tower. The house has five interior, brick chimneys with corbelled caps. The chimney on the gable end of the east elevation has an exposed brick face. The foundation is brick.

Capped by a hip roof, the large, one-story, wraparound porch extends around the front of the house to form a porte-cochere on the west side. The porch configuration, pedimented entry bay, and balustrade formed by slender, square balusters and pedestal newels are all original. However, the original wooden Doric porch columns have been replaced in recent years with the present wooden columns. The modern supports are tapered columns with simple, wood-block caps. The replacement columns supporting the porte cochere rest on smaller, modern, brick

¹ To simplify the physical narrative, directions will be described by their closest cardinal point. For example, the house, which actually faces southwest, will be described as facing south.

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bases atop the original brick pedestals. The modifications to the front porch constitute the principal changes to the exterior of the house.

In addition to the main wraparound veranda, a one-story, hip roofed porch shields a side entrance on the west elevation, and a one-story, hip roofed porch along the rear elevation is partially enclosed with lattice screens. Both of these smaller porches have original box piers and balustrades.

The house retains its original, one-over-one light, wood sash, double hung windows with simple flat surrounds. Although these windows have been boarded over, they all remain intact. A variety of decorative, arched, square, and rectangular, fixed sash windows and vents embellish the gables. A Palladian-inspired window is located on the west cross gable. The broader front gable is punctuated by two small, round-arched windows that flank a pair of narrow, rectangular windows. The paired windows are capped by a bracketed, triangular hood covered in slate shingles. The tower dormer also contains a pair of narrow, single light windows.

The front entrance consists of double leaf doors, each with a large light in the upper half and two horizontal panels with molded surrounds below. The entrance is embellished by fluted pilasters, bull's-eye corner blocks, and a large transom.

Neal Somers Alexander House: Interior

The entrance opens into a well-preserved interior that, unless otherwise stated, contains original pine floors, plaster walls and ceilings, picture moldings, and horizontal paneled doors (see attached floor plan). Throughout the interior, the doors and windows have classically inspired surrounds consisting of tall, flat plinths and wide, simply molded or paneled doorjambes capped by flat friezes and molded cornices. The baseboards found throughout the house repeat the tall plinth and molded cornice design of the door surrounds.

The small entrance foyer contains beaded board, pine wainscoting capped by a molded chair rail that is also found in the other public rooms of the house. The foyer leads into the stair hall that features an alcove with a three-sided bay, each side punctuated by a single window, and a frame created by a wide frieze and fluted pilasters. Opposite the alcove along the rear wall of the stair hall, a broad, closed-string stairway rises in two landings to the second floor. The staircase newels found in the stair hall are the most decorative and consist of large, square, paneled piers set at a 45 degree angles and broken by moldings into three parts (base, shaft, and capital). The newels have molded and denticulated caps above which are turned finials. The other newels are simplified versions of the ones at the bottom of the staircase, and the balustrade has slender, turned balusters.

The nine mantels in the house (one in the stair hall, the parlor, the study, the dining room, and one in each of the five bedrooms on the second floor) are intact and display such classical

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elements as dentils, colonettes, mirrored overmantels, and applied floral motifs on the friezes. The most ornate mantel is found in the parlor (west front room) and features an overmantel with an oval-shaped mirror framed by tall, Ionic colonettes that support a molded cornice. A bracketed shelf above the fire opening and applied, floral decoration complete the embellishments.

Pocket doors lead into the parlor from the stair hall while French doors capped by a transom separate the stair hall from a central corridor. The center hall opens into a short, transverse hallway at the back of the house. An ornate, wooden Queen Anne screen marks the junction of the center and rear halls. The rear hall contains a service staircase and doorways into the bathroom and the kitchen. The wainscoted bathroom is original although the fixtures appear to date from the mid-twentieth century and are in disrepair. Similarly, the wainscoted kitchen has utilitarian, mid-twentieth century cabinetry and sink.

The second floor contains five bedrooms and a rear bathroom, all opening from the center hall that is distinguished by beaded board wainscoting and chair rail cap. Single light, operable transoms cap bedroom doorways, and closets retain original, horizontal paneled doors that match other interior doors. The closed-string rear staircase provides access to the unfinished upper story.

Barn

The mid-twentieth century, frame, gable roofed barn is now in ruinous condition. Sited north of the house in an overgrown area, the barn is not a contributing resource because this dairy farm outbuilding does not date to the period of significance.

Pump House

Dating to the mid-twentieth century, the deteriorated pump house has a standing seam, metal, gable roof and asphalt shingle siding. The door is now boarded over. Sited immediately east of the house, the pump house is not a contributing resource because this auxiliary building does not date to the period of significance.

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8. Statement of Significance

Constructed in 1903, its period of significance, the Neal Somers Alexander House is an especially imposing and sophisticated, Queen Anne farmhouse in Mecklenburg County. With most of the county now largely suburban, the N.S. Alexander House is one of the few examples of early twentieth century, Queen Anne architecture to survive in rural Mecklenburg County. Its remarkable state of preservation only enhances its significance. The house meets the requirements for listing in the National Register under Criterion C for architecture and is of local significance (see *Historic and Architectural Resources of Rural Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form*, 1990).

As defined in the Multiple Property Documentation Form (M.P.D.F.), the Neal Somers Alexander House is associated with Property Type I.D., Houses, Early Twentieth Century Small-Town Dwellings and Farmhouses (Section F, page 12). Only ten two-story, Queen Anne houses were identified in the 1990 M.P.D.F. (Section F, page 13) for rural Mecklenburg County, and most of these were found in the small rail towns and hamlets of the county rather than as the centerpieces of farmsteads. Due to rapid development in the county, very few examples survive. The N.S. Alexander House stands out not only as a fine, well-preserved expression of the Queen Anne style, but also as the seat of a prosperous farm of the period.

As described in the M.P.D.F., by the turn of the twentieth century, domestic designs in the small, rail-related towns and on the farms of Mecklenburg County began to reflect the newfound wealth associated with the booming textile industry in Charlotte and a rural prosperity based on cotton cultivation. Mecklenburg County landowners began to favor up-to-date farmhouse designs that asserted their new status. Often mirroring city dwellings in their sophistication, these farmhouses introduced urbanity to the countryside. Although many built regional interpretations of the picturesque Queen Anne style, others combined Queen Anne elements with classical restraint. Builders often mixed Queen Anne-inspired irregular shapes and plans with an array of classical motifs. For example, complex roof silhouettes, jutting bays, and deep, wraparound porches were combined with classical porch posts, pedimented gables, Palladian windows, and columned mantelpieces. In its grand, asymmetrical form, signature corner tower, and formal, classical elements, the Neal Somers Alexander House is a particularly illustrative example of this architectural pattern. Originally the seat of a large cotton farm, the residence asserted Alexander's educated taste and position as a prominent landowner and businessman (Mattson and Huffman 1990: F-13).

Specifically, the N.S. Alexander House meets the registration requirements for this property type (Section F, Pages 20-21). The house is remarkably intact, retaining its original forms and plans as well as its interior and exterior elements of style that reflect the period of construction. On the exterior, the house retains its patterned, slate roof with metal finials and cresting, weatherboard, German, and shingle siding materials, one-over-one windows, and broad, wraparound porch.

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The interior is equally well preserved with nine fireplace mantels ornamented with a variety of classical motifs, pine floors, plaster walls, horizontal paneled doors, and an elaborate staircase, all of which are original to the house. In addition, other original interior finishes remain to reflect the combination of picturesque and classical elements common to houses of this period.

Historical Background

Neal Somers Alexander (1855-1926) was a wealthy farmer in the Crab Orchard community east of Charlotte in Mecklenburg County and the great-grandson of Hezekiah Alexander, prominent Mecklenburg County planter, civic leader, and Revolutionary War patriot. Neal Alexander married Ida Jane Caldwell (1855-1928) on May 11, 1885, and the couple had five children, three of whom lived to adulthood. The 1880 agricultural census records that the young Neal Alexander owned a sixty-six-acre farm valued at \$1,600 in the Crab Orchard section of Mecklenburg County near what is now Shamrock Drive east of downtown Charlotte. Soon after his marriage to Ida, Alexander built a one-story house on the tract and began acquiring additional acreage. By the early twentieth century, through inheritance and shrewd financial investments, Neal Alexander had established a large cotton farm of some 1,000 acres. Typical of such substantial holdings, the farm reputedly encompassed several tenant families and a host of outbuildings, including sizable barns for horses and mules, cotton houses, and corncribs (*Charlotte Observer* 8 November 1928; Morrill and Boyte 1979: 3-4; U.S. Census, Agricultural Schedule 1880; Mecklenburg County Deed Books 1885, 1886, 1894, 1899).

Alexander commissioned this grand, Queen Anne house in 1903 to meet the needs of his growing family and to reflect his wealth. The dwelling was constructed in the side yard of the family's existing one-story farmhouse. The builder and architect (if any) are not known. The new dwelling's fashionable design attested to Alexander's status in the local community and his ties to the nearby city of Charlotte. Many of the interior features of the house are similar to those of the 1904 John Price Carr House (National Register 1980) in the city's First Ward. Carr and Alexander knew each other well as both were members of Second Presbyterian Church and traveled in the same social circles. The two houses appear to have been built by the same builder or the house plans may have been ordered from the same source (Morrill and Boyte 1979: 5).

Alexander opted for an up-to-date house design that embraced both the Queen Anne and the classical. By the early twentieth century in Charlotte and across the country, arbiters of educated taste were promoting greater architectural restraint. Thus, while the Queen Anne remained popular into the 1900s, the style frequently displayed more orderly, classical traits. As Victorian flamboyance gave way to formality, the well to do selected residences that often mixed Queen Anne with Colonial Revival and Neoclassical elements. By the 1910s and 1920s, simpler, Colonial Revival houses and bungalows defined Charlotte's emerging white-collar streetcar

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suburbs and became the favored styles on surrounding farms (Gatza 1987; Mattson and Huffman 1990; Bishir 1990: 417-423; Hanchett 1998: 65-66, 157-158).

Neal Somers Alexander died on 7 November 1926, and his wife Ida passed away on 19 August 1928. Subsequently, their son Nathaniel Alexander occupied the house with his wife, Louise, and his sister Ida Moore Alexander. A music teacher, Ida Moore taught in the public schools of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County for nearly fifty years. Nathaniel operated the farm into the 1930s when the boll weevil devastated cotton crops in the county and throughout the region. Nathaniel died in 1968, and Ida Moore Alexander resided in the house until shortly before her death in 1978. While the farmland was subdivided and sold for surrounding suburban development, the Alexander house remained in the family until 2006 when the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission purchased the property.

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9. Major Bibliographic References

Bishir, Catherine W. *North Carolina Architecture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.

Charlotte Observer. 8 November 1928.

Gatza, Mary Beth. Architectural Inventory of Rural Mecklenburg County. Survey files available at the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, 1987.

Hanchett, Thomas W. *Sorting Out the New South City*. Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Hood, Davyd Foard. *Carr, John Price House*. National Register Nomination. On file at the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, 1980.

Mattson, Richard L. and William H. Huffman. *Historic and Architectural Resources of Rural Mecklenburg County, North Carolina*. *National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form*. On file at the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, 1990.

Mecklenburg County. Mecklenburg County Courthouse, Register of Deeds.

Morrill, Dan L. and Jack Boyte. "Survey and Research Report for the N. S. Alexander House." On file at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, Charlotte, 1979.

United States Census Records. Tenth Census of the United States. Mecklenburg County. Agricultural Schedule, Mecklenburg County, 1860.

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Section Number Photos Page 1

Neal Somers Alexander House
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Photographs

The following information pertains to each of the photographs:

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <u>Name of Property:</u> | Neal Somers Alexander House |
| <u>Location:</u> | Charlotte, North Carolina |
| <u>County:</u> | Mecklenburg County |
| <u>Name of Photographer:</u> | Mattson, Alexander and Associates, Inc. |
| <u>Location of Photographs:</u> | Survey and Planning Branch North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources 109 E. Jones Street Raleigh, North Carolina 27601-2807 |
| <u>Date of Photographs:</u> | March 2007 |

1. House and Setting, Looking North
2. Front (South) Elevation, Looking North
3. Side (East) Elevation, Looking West
4. Side (West) Elevation, Looking East
5. Pump House, Looking Northwest
6. Farm Outbuilding, Looking North
7. Rear (North) Elevation, Looking South
8. Front (South) Elevation, Detail, Looking North
9. Main Hall, Staircase
10. Main Hall
11. Center Hall, Screen
12. Parlor, Mantel
13. Study, Mantel
14. Upstairs Bedroom, Mantel