



North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
State Historic Preservation Office

Ramona M. Bartos, Administrator

Governor Roy Cooper
Secretary Susi H. Hamilton

Office of Archives and History
Deputy Secretary Kevin Cherry

November 19, 2019

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kate Husband
Office of Human Environment
NCDOT Division of Highways

FROM: Renee Gledhill-Earley 
Environmental Review Coordinator

SUBJECT: NC 73 in Huntersville to Westmoreland Road in Cornelius, 19-05-0014, Mecklenburg County,
ER 17-0515

Thank you for your October 22, 2019, memorandum transmitting the above-referenced report. We have reviewed the report and offer the following comments.

We concur that the Alexander Farm (MK1448) is not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, while the adjacent and related Alexander Farm Tenant House (MK2293) is eligible for listing under Criteria A for the reasons cited in the report.

Please note that Table 1 on page 3 of the report incorrectly shows the Alexander Tenant House as eligible under Criterion C. Page 33 clearly states that the house is not eligible under this Criteria for several reasons.

The above comments are made pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's Regulations for Compliance with Section 106 codified at 36 CFR Part 800.

Thank you for your cooperation and consideration. If you have questions concerning the above comment, contact Renee Gledhill-Earley, environmental review coordinator, at 919-814-6579 or environmental.review@ncdcr.gov. In all future communication concerning this project, please cite the above referenced tracking number.

cc: Mary Pope Furr, NCDOT, mfurr@ncdot.gov

Received: 10/24/2019
State Historic Preservation Office



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

ROY COOPER
GOVERNOR

JAMES H. TROGDON, III
SECRETARY

ER 17-0515

October 22, 2019

Due -- 11/15/19

MEMORANDUM

TO: Renee Gledhill-Earley
Environmental Review Coordinator
North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office

H- 2R letters
11/12/19

FROM: Kate Husband
Architectural Historian
NCDOT Division of Highways

SUBJECT: U-5108: Northcross Drive Extension from NC 73 to Westmoreland Road,
PA No. 19-05-0014, Mecklenburg County

Enclosed please find the Historic Structures Survey Report, survey site database, and additional materials for the above referenced project for your review and comment per 36CRF.800. Please contact me by phone (919-707-6075) or email (klhusband@ncdot.gov) if you have any additional questions or comments.

Mailing Address:
NC DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
PDEA-HUMAN ENVIRONMENT SECTION
MAIL SERVICE CENTER 1598
RALEIGH NC 27699-1598

Telephone: (919) 707-6000
Fax: (919) 212-5785
Customer Service: 1-877-368-4968

Location:
1020 BIRCH RIDGE RD
RALIEGH NC 27610

Website: www.ncdot.gov

HISTORIC STRUCTURES SURVEY REPORT

**CONSTRUCT ROAD ON NEW LOCATION, NORTHCROSS DRIVE EXTENSION FROM NC 73 IN
HUNTERSVILLE TO WESTMORELAND ROAD IN CORNELIUS
MECKLENBURG COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA**

**TIP No. U-5108
WBS No. 42370.1.1
Limited Services Contract No. 7000019082**

Prepared by:

**Frances Alexander, Project Manager
Mattson, Alexander and Associates, Inc.
2228 Winter Street
Charlotte, North Carolina 28205**

Prepared for:

**North Carolina Department of Transportation
Environmental Analysis Unit
Raleigh, North Carolina**

October 14, 2019

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October 14, 2019

MATTSON, ALEXANDER AND ASSOCIATES, INC.

Frances P. Alexander

October 14, 2019

Frances P. Alexander, M.A.

Date

Richard L. Mattson, Ph.D.

Date

North Carolina Department of Transportation

Date

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) is constructing an extension of Northcross Drive on new location from NC 73 in Huntersville to Westmoreland Road in Cornelius, Mecklenburg County. This project is subject to review under the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement for Minor Transportation Projects (NCDOT/NCHPO/FHWA/USFS 2015). NCDOT architectural historians delineated an area of potential effects (APE) for the project which is defined as the geographic area or areas within which a project may cause changes to the character or use of historic properties, if any such properties exist. The APE for this road construction project lies generally between Westmoreland Road to the north, West Catawba Avenue to the west, Sam Furr Road to the south, and I-77 to the east. At the north end, the APE follows Westmoreland Road between its intersection with West Catawba Avenue and Eagleridge Way Lane in the Alexander Chase subdivision. Along Westmoreland, the APE extends off the center line of the roadway in both directions for approximately 150 feet. From Westmoreland Road, the APE extends south through recreational fields and open woodland before reaching the termination of Northcross Drive at I-77. Along Northcross Drive, the APE extends approximately 200 feet in both directions off the center line of this north-south roadway before terminating at Sam Furr Road.

In addition to determining the APE, NCDOT architectural historians also conducted a field investigation of the APE to identify and assess all resources that appeared to be fifty years of age or older. The Alexander Farm, which also encompasses the Alexander Farm Tenant House, warranted intensive-level survey to determine National Register eligibility. The property was first surveyed in 1988 as the Alexander House (MK1448) but was later recorded as the Alexander Farm (MK2397). To eliminate the duplicative survey numbers, the North Carolina Historic Preservation Office (HPO) recently listed the property as a single resource, the Alexander Farm, under the original site number, MK1448. The tenant house (MK2293) was also investigated a second time, as an individual resource, during the 2002 county-wide survey of African American properties. The farm and tenant house are evaluated in this report both individually and collectively. NCDOT architectural historians determined that all other properties and districts in the APE were not worthy of further study and evaluation because they lacked historical significance and/or integrity. The project location is depicted in **Figure 1**, and the APE is shown in **Figures 2a-2b**.

This architectural resources investigation consisted of background research into the historical and architectural development of the study area and an in-depth field investigation of the farm, the farmhouse, and the tenant house as well as comparable farms in northern Mecklenburg County. The field survey was conducted in July 2019. As noted above, the Alexander Farm and the Alexander Farm Tenant House have both been surveyed previously, and the tenant house was added to the Study List in 2002. This intensive-level evaluation contained in this report recommends only the tenant house for National Register eligibility (**Table 1**).

Table 1

Property Name	PIN	Survey Site Number	Eligibility Recommendation	Criteria
Alexander Farm	00511105	MK1448	Not Eligible	N/A
Alexander Farm Tenant House	00511105	MK2293	Eligible	A/C

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page No.</u>
I. Introduction	5
II. Property Evaluations of Eligibility	10
Alexander Farm (included the Alexander Farm Tenant House)	10
III. Bibliography	37

I. INTRODUCTION

This eligibility report was prepared in conjunction with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) project entitled, *Construct Road on New Location, Northcross Drive Extension from NC 73 in Huntersville to Westmoreland Road in Cornelius, Mecklenburg County*. The TIP Number is U-5108, and the WBS Number is 42370.1.1. The project location is shown in **Figure 1**.

The area of potential effects (APE) for this transportation project lies generally between Westmoreland Road to the north, West Catawba Avenue to the west, Sam Furr Road to the south, and I-77 to the east. At the north end, the APE follows Westmoreland Road between its intersection with West Catawba Avenue and Eagleridge Way Lane in the Alexander Chase subdivision. Along Westmoreland, the APE extends off the center line of the roadway in both directions for approximately 150 feet. From Westmoreland Road, the APE extends south through recreational fields and open woodland before reaching the termination of Northcross Drive at I-77. Along Northcross Drive, the APE extends approximately 200 feet in both directions off the center line of this north-south roadway before terminating at Sam Furr Road. The Alexander Farm (MK1448), which also includes the Alexander Farm Tenant House (MK2293), warranted intensive-level survey to determine National Register eligibility. The farm and tenant house are shown on the APE maps (**Figures 2a-2b**).

This investigation was conducted to evaluate the Alexander Farm and the tenant house for National Register eligibility. The current evaluation of eligibility report is part of the environmental studies undertaken by NCDOT and is on file at NCDOT, Raleigh, North Carolina. This documentation complies with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (36 CFR 800), the National Register criteria set forth in 36 CFR 61, and NCDOT's current *Historic Architecture Group Procedures and Work Products*. The report also complies with the *Report Standards for Historic Structure Survey Reports/Determinations of Eligibility/Section 106/110 Compliance Reports in North Carolina* established by the North Carolina Historic Preservation Office (HPO). Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to take into account the effect of federally funded, licensed, or permitted projects on properties listed in, or eligible for listing in, the National Register of Historic Places and to afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the North Carolina Historic Preservation Office a reasonable opportunity to comment.

In order to evaluate the farm and tenant house for National Register eligibility, the principal investigators conducted a field investigation of the resources and conducted research into the history and architecture of both the general study area and the farm. For the research phase, the principal investigators examined both primary and secondary sources which included published histories, deeds, National Register nominations, environmental studies, and the HPO survey files for Mecklenburg County. In developing the historic and architectural contexts for this project, the principal investigators also identified other farm properties in northern Mecklenburg County that were comparable to the Alexander Farm. Site visits were made to each of the comparable properties during the field investigation.

Field work took place in July 2019. The Alexander Farm and Alexander Farm Tenant House, as well as comparable farms, were examined and documented with photographs to assess current levels of integrity. As part of this assessment, all outbuildings and landscape features on the properties were also examined and documented with photographs. The Alexander farm and tenant house occupy

the same tax parcel, and the property is shown on the site maps included in the evaluation (**Figures 3-5**).

Figure 1
Project Location Map

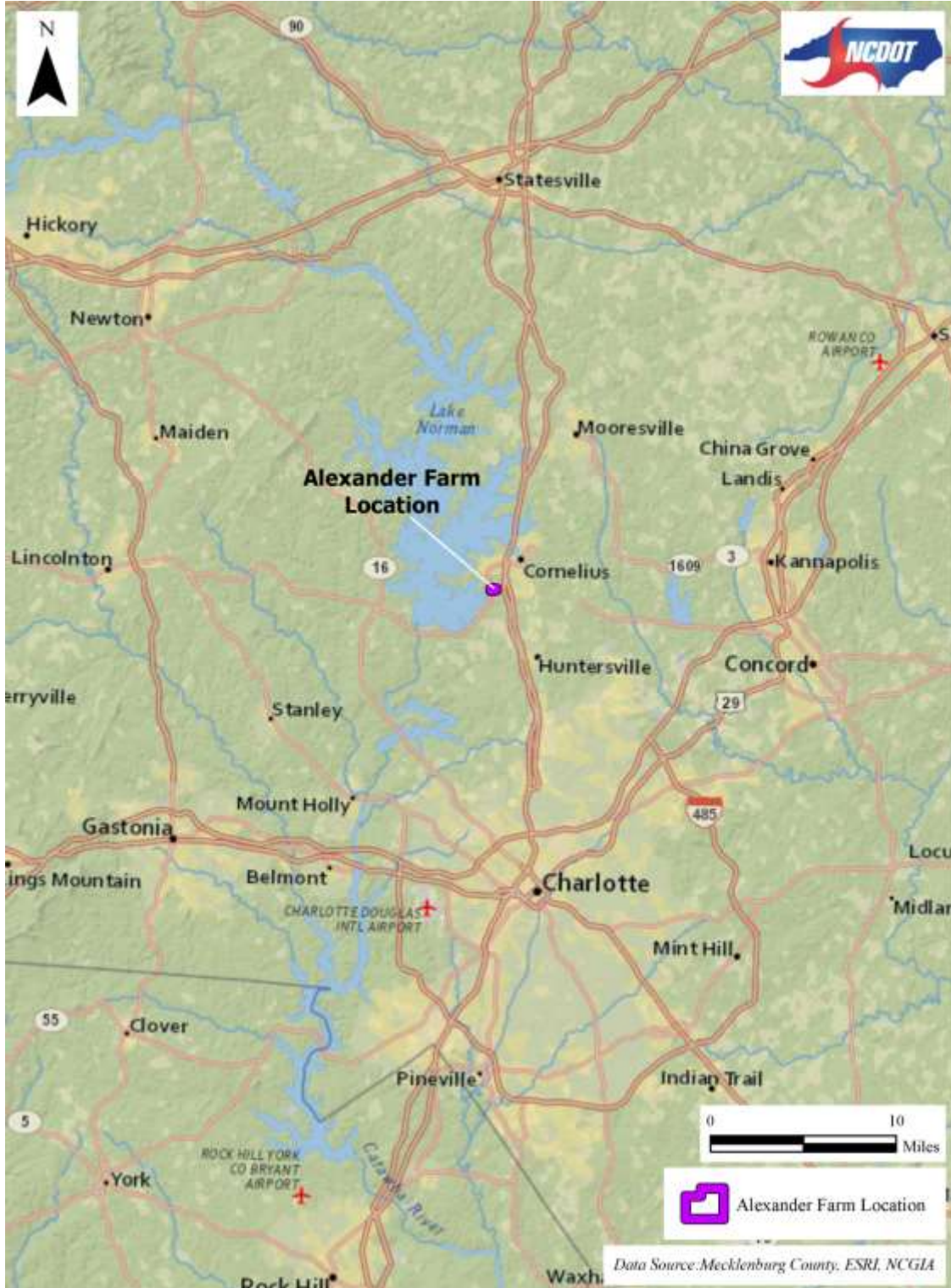
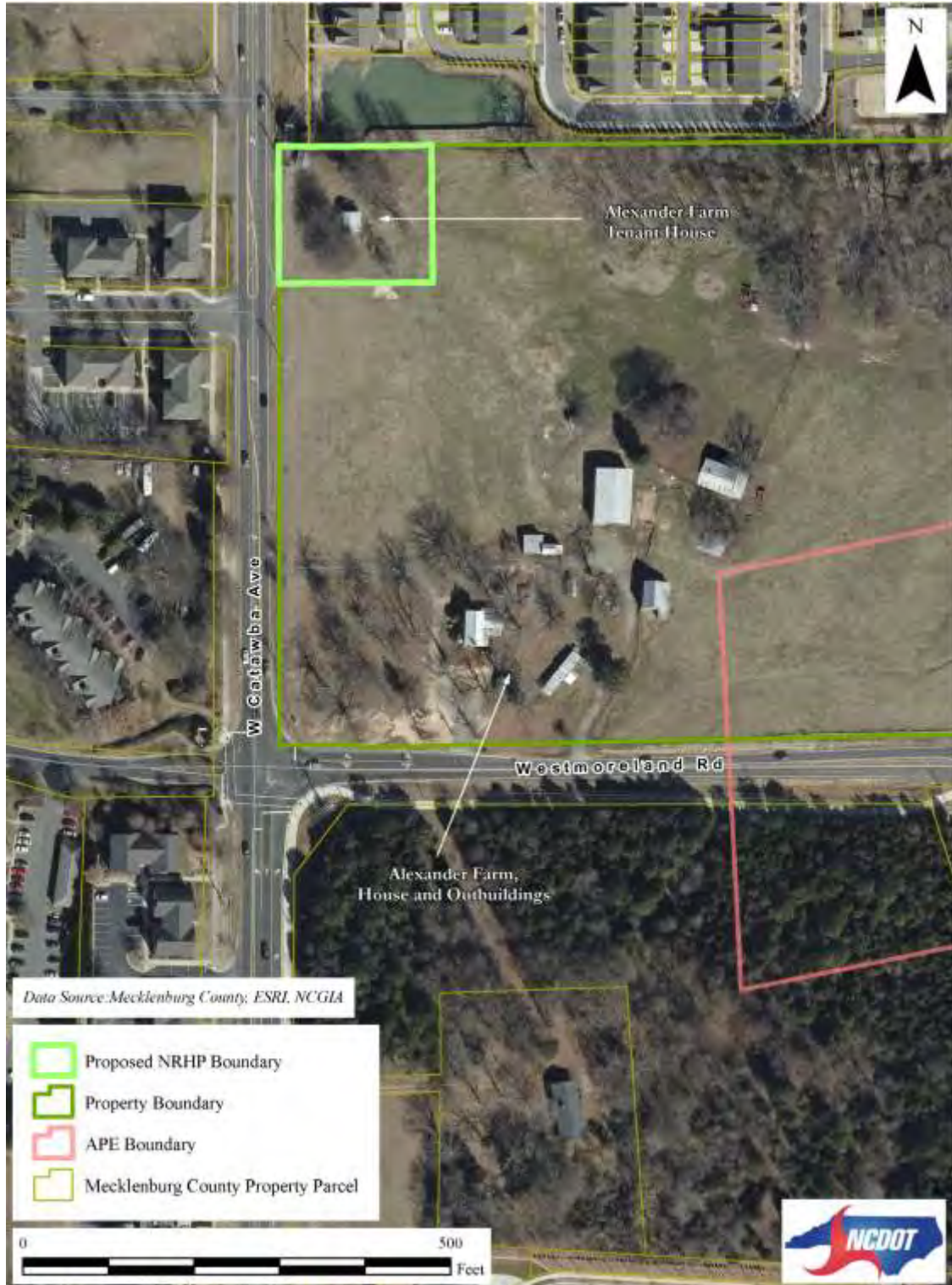


Figure 2a
Area of Potential Effects (APE) Map



Figure 2b
Area of Potential Effects (APE) Map



II. PROPERTY EVALUATION OF ELIGIBILITY

Alexander Farm (MK1448)
Includes Alexander Farm Tenant House
(MK2293) (Study List 2002)
(PIN 00511105)
18324 West Catawba Avenue
Cornelius, Mecklenburg County



Dates of Construction: ca. 1886

Eligibility Recommendations:

Alexander Farm-Not Eligible

Alexander Farm Tenant House-Eligible



Figure 3. Alexander Farm and Alexander Farm Tenant House, General Site Plan

Source: North Carolina Historic Preservation Office, GIS Service

Scale: 1" = 700'



Figure 4. Alexander Farm and Alexander Farm Tenant House, Detailed Site Plan

Source: North Carolina Historic Preservation Office, GIS Service

Scale: 1" = 175'

Key:

1. House
2. Garage
3. Shed
4. Wash House
5. Granary
6. Shed
7. Mobile Home
8. Equipment Shed
9. Barn No. 1
10. Equipment Shed
11. Barn No. 2
12. Alexander Farm Tenant House
13. Alexander Farm Tenant House, Garage

Physical Description

Overview of the Farm

Now abandoned and deteriorated, the Alexander Farm occupies a 23.5-acre agricultural tract amidst modern suburban development in northern Mecklenburg County. Situated in the southwest corner of the parcel at the intersection of West Catawba Avenue and Westmoreland Road is the tree-shaded Alexander farmhouse (ca. 1886) and east of the house are two barns, an assortment of other domestic and agricultural outbuildings, and a mobile home.

The farm also contains the Alexander Farm Tenant House (MK2293) (Study list 2002) which stands north of the house. The tenant house is located in the northwest corner of the property along West Catawba Avenue, separated from the Alexander farmhouse and the farm outbuildings by several acres of former pastureland. Mature pecan trees surround this dwelling. The remainder of the Alexander tract is comprised of woodland and overgrown pastures.

The entire property is now off limits to the public, and the principal investigators had only brief and limited access to the main farm assemblage. Views of the tenant house were restricted to the right-of-way along West Catawba Avenue.



Alexander Farm, Looking Southeast Towards the Alexander House and Farm from West Catawba Avenue at the Alexander Farm Tenant House.



Alexander Farm, Overall View of House Site, Looking North from Westmoreland Road.

Alexander House

Surrounded by mature oak trees, the Alexander house faces west towards West Catawba Avenue. The frame dwelling illustrates the traditional I-house type in its two-story, single-pile form. Capped by a side-gable roof with box eaves and unusual curved cornices at the gable ends, the house has a hip-roofed porch that extends across the symmetrical, three-bay façade. The brick, exterior-end chimneys are original. The porch is now screened and has replacement box piers. The house also has a one-story, one-room rear ell with a brick, gable-end chimney and a rear shed appendage that was added later. The porch off the rear ell has been enclosed. Original six-over-six sash windows survive throughout the house, but the weatherboard siding was covered with asbestos shingles in the early twentieth century. The second-story window in the center bay of the rear (east) elevation, and the attic windows in the north gable end were enclosed with the installation of the asbestos shingles.

Although the principal investigators did not gain access to the interior, there were limited views of the center stair hall and main first-floor rooms. The interior retains its center-hall plan but has been stripped of most of its original woodwork. The stair railings and newels have been removed, and no original doors appear to survive. The mantels in the two main rooms are both modern, brick replacements.



Alexander Farm, Alexander House, Façade (West Elevation) and Side (South) Elevation, Looking Northeast.



Alexander Farm, Alexander House, Façade (West Elevation) and Side (North) Elevation, Looking Southeast.



Alexander Farm, Alexander House, South Gable End, Looking North.



Alexander Farm, Alexander House, Rear (East) Elevation and Rear Ell, Looking West.



Alexander Farm, Alexander House, Porch and Entrance, Looking East.



Alexander Farm, Alexander House, Stair hall, View from Front Door.

Outbuildings

The farm encompasses a variety of abandoned agricultural and domestic outbuildings which appear to have been erected between the late nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries. The outbuildings are located behind the house to the north and east and, with the exception of a metal mobile home, are all frame constructed. Covered with asbestos siding and deteriorating, a gable-front shed (perhaps originally a smokehouse), wash house, and garage stand close to the dwelling for convenient household use. A second shed and gable-front garage stand just east of the house, and north of this grouping is a dilapidated, metal-sheathed granary with a gable roof.



Alexander Farm, Shed (Left), Wash House (Center), and Granary (Right Background), Looking North.



Alexander Farm, Garage (Foreground), Shed, and Equipment Shed (Background), Looking East.



Alexander Farm, Mobile Home, Looking East.

Located farther to the east are two equipment sheds and two barns. The larger, three-crib barn at the northeast corner of the complex has a side-gable roof and metal-sheathed gable ends. The barn is now heavily deteriorated. The smaller gable-roofed barn has been entirely metal sheathed and has a shed extension to the east elevation.



Alexander Farm, Equipment Shed (Left Foreground) and Barn No. 1, Looking Northeast.



Alexander Farm, Barn No. 1, Looking Northeast.



Alexander Farm, Barn No. 2, Looking Southeast.

Alexander Farm Tenant House (MK2293) (Study List 2002)

As stated above, the principal investigators were denied access to the tenant house site. Although views of the property were limited, the exterior of house does not appear to have changed significantly since its 2002 survey and Study List designation. That survey did not examine the interior of the dwelling. Photographs of the tenant house from the 2002 file are included in this report (HPO File).

Facing West Catawba Avenue at the northwest corner of the farm, this tenant house was presumably built ca. 1886 when the main house was erected and the farm established. A ruinous, frame garage, dating to the mid-twentieth century, stands just north of the dwelling. Surrounded by large pecan trees, the house is a one-story, single-pile, side-gable dwelling with a later shed extension across the rear (east) elevation. The house is covered in German siding which runs uninterrupted between the side-gable main block and the rear shed extension, suggesting that the siding was installed at a later date. The German siding probably replaced the original weatherboarding during the construction of the rear addition. The roof pitch is also unbroken between the main block and rear shed and appears to have been modified with the addition. Resting on stone piers, the house has a symmetrical, three-bay façade with a six-panel door occupying the center bay. The shed-roofed porch shelters the doorway and the two flanking windows. The porch has a crimp-metal roof with exposed rafters and square piers. The main roof of the house has the same metal covering. The house retains its four-over-four sash windows. The side (north) elevation has a taller, four-over-four window in the rear shed extension. The windowless south elevation has a brick chimney in the gable end. According the 2002 survey file, the rear (east) elevation has a board-and-batten door, a four-over-four sash window, and an interior, brick flue in the southeast corner (HPO File).



Alexander Farm Tenant House, House and Setting, House Shaded by Pecan Trees and Garage in Left Background, Looking North Along West Catawba Avenue.



Alexander Farm Tenant House, Façade (West Elevation), Looking East from West Catawba Avenue.



Alexander Farm Tenant House, Façade. Source: HPO File Photograph, 2002.



Alexander Farm Tenant House, Side (South) and Rear (East) Elevations. Source: HPO File Photograph, 2002.



Alexander Farm Tenant House, Façade (West) and Side (North) Elevations. Source: HPO File Photograph, 2002.

Historical Background

According to Alexander family tradition, the two-story farmhouse was constructed ca. 1886 for cotton farmer, Eli Bell Alexander, and his second wife, Mary Goodrum Alexander, who had married in 1885. In 1903, the existing 23.5-acre tract was acquired by son, John Bell Alexander (1863-1940). The 1903 deed described the property as, "lot 4 in the division of the land of Eli Alexander...upon which lot is located the house of Eli Alexander...". The 1910 census showed the household consisting of John B. Alexander, his second wife, Elizabeth Mock, whom he had married in 1898, and three children. The property was later inherited by son, John Wilson Alexander, who appears to have operated a sizable livestock farm into the post-World War II period (HPO Files; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 352: 124; US Census, Mecklenburg County, Population Schedule, 1910).

Although the number of tenant families who lived and labored on the Alexander farm is unknown, the 1880-1940 censuses record numerous African American tenant farmers in the vicinity. Reputedly, a longtime resident of the Alexander Farm Tenant House was African American farmer, John N. Norman, who had been born in 1892. The 1940 census lists Norman as a farm laborer and the head of a household that included his wife, Cameline (born 1894), and eight children. Cameline and the two oldest sons were also identified as farm laborers. (In the census, sharecroppers were classified as farm laborers, i.e., employees of the farm owners.) It is not known how long the Norman family or any other farm tenants lived in this house. However, cotton production in Mecklenburg County dropped off by fifty percent between 1930 and 1940, and tenant farming in the county and throughout the South declined sharply in the years before and after World War II (for a discussion of farm tenancy in the county, see Criterion A in this report). Although the house has been vacant for decades, the farm remained in the Alexander family until 2015 when the property was sold to a development company (Mecklenburg County Deed Book 10978: 16; US Census, Mecklenburg County, Population Schedules, 1880-1940; HPO Files).

National Register Criteria Evaluation

For purposes of compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the Alexander Farm (MK1448) is recommended **not eligible** for the National Register under any criterion because of a loss of integrity. The property was originally surveyed in 1988 during the rural Mecklenburg County architectural survey sponsored by the HPO.

The Alexander Farm Tenant House (MK2293) (Study List 2002), which stands at the northwest corner of the farm property, is recommended for individual eligibility under Criterion A for both Agriculture and Ethnic Heritage: Black. The period of significance begins ca. 1886 when the tenant house was constructed and ends ca. 1950 when the dwelling stopped serving as a residence for farm tenants. This tenant house was inventoried individually during the 2002 survey of African American resources in Mecklenburg County and was added to the Study List subsequently.

Integrity

The Alexander Farm does not possess the seven aspects of integrity needed for National Register eligibility. The farmhouse and most of the associated agricultural and domestic outbuildings no longer retain sufficient integrity of design, workmanship, and materials for eligibility. Now in poor condition, the asbestos-shingled farmhouse (ca. 1886) has an altered porch and a heavily altered

interior. The outbuildings are also deteriorated, and many have later asbestos-shingle or metal sidings. In contrast to the surrounding modern development, the rolling, wooded farm does retain its historically agrarian setting, feeling, and association. Mature trees still shade portions of the farm, and former pastures fill other sections of the parcel. The property corresponds to the 23.5-acre tract which was described as lot 4 in the 1903 deed of trust to John Bell Alexander.

The Alexander Farm Tenant House does possess the seven aspects of integrity needed for National Register eligibility. Sited amidst mature pecan trees, the tenant house still has its historic farm setting, feeling, and association. Notably, the house retains its original geographical relationship to the main Alexander farmhouse and the complex of barns and other agricultural outbuildings. Pastures clearly separate the tenant house from the other buildings on the farm. The one-story, frame tenant house also has sufficient integrity of design, workmanship, and materials for eligibility under Criterion A. The original side-gable, single-pile, three-bay form is intact, and the rear extension and German siding were probably added in the early decades of the twentieth century within the period of significance. Finally, the house retains key stylistic elements, including original windows, porch, and chimney.

Criterion A

The Alexander Farm is recommended **not eligible** for the National Register under Criterion A (Event). However, the Alexander Farm Tenant House is recommended **eligible** for the National Register individually under Criterion A for Agriculture and Ethnic Heritage: Black. To be eligible under Criterion A, the property must retain integrity and must be associated with a specific event marking an important moment in American prehistory or history or a pattern of events or historic trend that made a significant contribution to the development of a community, a state, or a nation. Furthermore, the property must have existed at the time and be documented to be associated with the events. Finally, the property's specific association must be important as well (National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin 15*: 12).

Although once a substantial cotton farm in northern Mecklenburg County, the Alexander Farm no longer has sufficient integrity to illustrate important agricultural patterns during the historic period. The cropland was converted to livestock pastures in the mid-twentieth century, and the agricultural and domestic outbuildings are altered and now in deteriorated condition.

Although in recent decades numerous farmsteads have been lost to suburban growth, Mecklenburg County still contains a collection of farm complexes established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the northern part of the county, the Edward M. Rozzell Farm (MK2697) (National Register 2005) encompasses the ca. 1880 Rozzell farmhouse, log barn, well house, and granary. Its tree-shaded grounds buffer the property from suburban residential development near the Catawba River.



Edward M. Rozzell Farm, ca, 1880, 11647 Rozzelles Ferry Road, Looking East.

Located in the Long Creek community near Huntersville, the Albert McCoy Farm (MK1510) (National Register 2000) also exemplifies farm patterns in northern Mecklenburg County during this period. The farm consists of the ca. 1886, L-plan McCoy house, a grape arbor, single-crib log barn, and frame smokehouse, well house, and privy. Approximately 100 acres of rolling farmland with a farm pond surround the complex.



Albert McCoy Farm, ca. 1886, 10401 McCoy Road, Looking West.



Albert McCoy Farm, ca. 1886, 10401 McCoy Road, Looking West.

Individually, the Alexander Farm Tenant House is recommended **eligible** for the National Register under Criterion A for Agriculture and Ethnic Heritage: Black. Built ca. 1886 and expanded and remodeled in the early twentieth century, this tenant house is an exceedingly rare surviving example in Mecklenburg County of the dwellings built for African American farmers.

Farm Tenancy in Mecklenburg County

In response to the economic devastation and social upheaval following the Civil War, farm tenancy swept the South. In North Carolina, the number of tenants soared from 53,000 to 93,000 between 1880 and 1900. By 1890, one in three white farmers and three out of every four African American farmers were tenants. In 1930, tenants made up nearly half of the 15.5 million people who farmed in the South. In the aftermath of the Civil War, landowners, lacking cash for wages, and freed blacks and landless whites, both seeking farmland, had established a system of labor and capital based on tenancy and the crop-lien system of credit. Although the categories of tenants included independent renters of farmland, most were share tenants and sharecroppers (or simply “croppers”). Share tenants provided some of their own livestock and tools and perhaps a portion of the seed and fertilizer. In return, they received two-thirds or three-quarters of the annual crop. Sharecroppers usually owned no farm equipment or work animals. Contributing only their labor, they received no more than half the crop at season’s end. Families farming on shares typically worked twenty-acre to forty-acre plots provided by the landowners, cultivating the region’s main money crops of cotton or tobacco (Mertz 1989: 29-31; Hibbard 1913: 484-486; www.ncpedia.org/anchor/sharecropping-and-tenant).

Some sharecroppers gradually climbed the tenancy ladder to own land, but the overwhelming majority lived in chronic debt. At the start of the planting season, they used short-term loans from merchants and landowners based upon liens on their anticipated crop production to purchase household essentials. This crop lien system often kept tenants trapped in poverty as poor weather conditions or falling market prices foiled loan repayment plans and carried debts over from year to year. In North Carolina, an 1887 report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics asserted that the crop lien system was, “a worse curse to North Carolina than droughts, floods, cyclones, storms, rust, caterpillars, and every other evil that attends the farmer”. Reflecting conditions across the state and throughout the South, a 1922 study of tenancy in Chatham County, North Carolina, observed, “Croppers are distinctly the under-crust of the farmers in the South—the bottom-rail, the underdog”. The 1922 report also found that on occasion white tenants would receive land through inheritance or marriage, but that was rarely the case for African Americans who were overwhelmingly also the children of landless sharecroppers (Johnson 2006; Dickey 1922: 14; www.chathamhistory.org/pdfs/HowFarmTenantsLivedinChathamCounty).

In Mecklenburg County, where cotton was the premier cash crop, tenant farming dominated the agrarian scene into the Great Depression. Mecklenburg was among North Carolina’s major cotton producers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and in 1900 led the state in cotton production. By 1920, African American tenants—overwhelmingly sharecroppers—operated 1,647 of the 4,344 farms (38 percent) in Mecklenburg County. Only 150 blacks owned their farms. White tenants operated 1,184 farms (27 percent) in 1920 (Stathakis and Grey 2002: 10-11; US Census, Mecklenburg County, Agricultural Schedule, 1920).

A way of life in Mecklenburg County and throughout the agrarian South into the 1930s, farm tenancy dropped sharply during the 1940s and the decade following World War II. The decline was set in motion by depressed cotton prices and the devastation of the boll weevil during the 1920s and Great Depression. At the same time that cotton cultivation became more difficult and costly,

New Deal government programs were created to reduce farm output and thereby raise crop prices, spurring the elimination of tenant plots and the displacement of tenant families. In Mecklenburg County, cotton production plummeted fifty percent during the 1930s. As war-related industries boosted the economy, tenant farmers found factory jobs and steady wages in Charlotte and other urban areas. After World War II, growing suburbanization coupled with farm mechanization further pushed tenant families off the land while the promise of a better way of life pulled them into the towns and cities. Whereas in 1940, sixty percent of the farms in the county were still operated by tenants, by 1950, the proportion had fallen off to just thirty percent (958 of the county's 3,215 farms). Reflecting the postwar trend of sharply declining tenancy across the rural South, by 1959, farm tenants made up only fifteen percent of the 1,427 farms in Mecklenburg County. Of these 207 tenant farms, 147 were operated by African Americans. Because of the widespread decline in sharecropping during this period, the US agricultural census stopped using that classification by 1959 and instead used the more general term, tenant, to describe those who rented their farm dwellings and plots. By the 1960s, traditional farm tenancy and cotton production had virtually disappeared from Mecklenburg County (US Census, Mecklenburg County, Agricultural Schedules, 1940-1969; Stathakis and Grey 2002: 11; www.ncpedia.org/anchor/sharecropping-and-tenant; Johnson 1941: 187).

With the end of tenant farming in the county during the postwar era, few tenant houses have survived, and the Alexander Farm Tenant House is one of only two known to remain in Mecklenburg County. The other is the ca. 1900 McAuley Tenant House, located on the McAuley Road Farmland (MK2840) (Local Landmark 2006; Determination of Eligibility 2012) near Huntersville. Consisting 750 acres of mixed hardwoods and rolling fields, the McAuley Road Farmland includes part of the original W.C. McAuley farm and survives today as a rare rural landscape in suburban northern Mecklenburg County. Similar to the Alexander tenant dwelling, the McAuley Tenant House has a side-gable, single-pile main block with a two-room plan. A one-room ell and shed appendage extend to the rear, and a shed-roofed porch shelters the three-bay façade. Recent changes to the house include vinyl siding and removal of the ruinous, brick, exterior-end chimney. The paired windows on the façade probably date to the mid-twentieth century (Gray 2006).



McAuley Road Farmland, McAuley Tenant House, ca. 1900, Looking East from McAuley Farm Road.

Although eight other tenant houses have been also previously recorded during surveys in 1988 and 2001-2002, none survives. The 2001-2002 inventory of African American architectural resources in Mecklenburg County identified two ruinous examples in northern Mecklenburg County along Huntersville-Concord Road: Both the Tib Morehead Tenant House (MK2277) and the Washam Farm Tenant House (MK2278) have been demolished since 2002 (Stathakis and Gray 2002: 10; HPO Files).

Criterion B

The Alexander Farm and the Alexander Farm Tenant House are **not eligible** for the National Register under Criterion B (Person). For a property to be eligible for significance under Criterion B, it must retain integrity and 1) be associated with the lives of persons significant in our past, i.e. individuals whose activities are demonstrably important within a local, state, or national historic context; 2) be normally associated with a person's productive life, reflecting the time period when he/she achieved significance; and 3) should be compared to other associated properties to identify those that best represent the person's historic contributions. Furthermore, a property is not eligible if its only justification is that it was owned or used by a person who is or was a member of an identifiable profession, class, or social or ethnic group (National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin 15*: 14).

Neither the Alexander Farm nor the Alexander Farm Tenant House are eligible under Criterion B, either individually or collectively, because neither of these resources is associated with persons whose activities were demonstrably important within a local, state, or historic context.

Criterion C

The Alexander Farm and the Alexander Farm Tenant House are **not eligible** for the National Register under Criterion C (design/construction). For a property to be eligible under this criterion, it must retain integrity and either 1) embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; 2) represent the work of a master; 3) possess high artistic value; or 4) represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction (National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin 15*: 17).

Although illustrating the traditional I-house type, the Alexander House does not have sufficient integrity for individual eligibility under Criterion C. Now in poor condition, the house has asbestos-shingle siding, replacement porch posts and later screening, and a heavily altered interior. Specifically, the stair railings and newel, doors, and most of the interior trimwork have been removed from the interior, and the mantels are modern. In addition, none of the outbuildings within the farm complex has individual architectural significance under Criterion C. Most are deteriorated and have replacement asbestos-shingle or metal sidings. The large, frame, gable-roofed livestock barn on the northeast side of the complex is severely deteriorated.

Versions of the I-house type—commonly with side-gable roofs, three-bay facades, and exterior end chimneys—were constructed throughout Mecklenburg County and the region from the late eighteenth century through the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century. They were usually the houses of successful farmers and reflected rural economic and social attainment (Mattson and Huffman 1990: Section F, pages 9-11; Bishir and Southern 2003: 30, 44).

The number of late nineteenth and early-twentieth-century I-houses in Mecklenburg County has declined in recent decades amidst rampant suburban expansion, but a collection of notable examples survives. As described above under Criterion A, the ca. 1880 Edward W. Rozzell farmhouse (MK2697) (National Register 2005) remains an illustrative example of a postbellum I-house. The side-gable, three-bay dwelling retains its weatherboard siding, brick, exterior-end chimneys, six-over-six sash windows, and hip-roofed porch with chamfered posts. The interior also remains substantially intact with original mantels, doors, and staircase.

Also standing in northern Mecklenburg County, east of Huntersville is the ca. 1900 Ferrell House (MK1288). The Ferrell House has a broad, three-bay façade, original weatherboard siding, and a hip-roofed porch. A number of the original two-over-two sash windows also remain intact. The interior, with its center-hall plan, is said to be well preserved.



Ferrell House, ca. 1900, 12951 Asbury Chapel Road, Looking West.

One of the more intact postbellum I-houses in the county is the ca. 1869 John Hunter House (MK1733) (Local Landmark 1982) on Sardis Road, near Matthews. Distinguished by a pair of later roof gables over the broad, three-bay façade, the Hunter house has original weatherboard siding, brick, exterior-end chimneys, a shed-roofed porch with chamfered posts, and six-over-six sash windows. Sidelights and transom frame the central entrance (Morrill 1982; HPO File; www.cmhpf.org/homehistoricproperties.htm).



John Hunter House, ca. 1869, 5607 Sardis Road, Looking North.

The Alexander Tenant House is also **not eligible** under Criterion C for architecture. Although the house has sufficient integrity for eligibility under Criterion A, the dwelling appears to have been altered in the early twentieth century with a rear shed extension, German siding, and a modified roof pitch. The property is now vacant, and the principal investigators could not gain access to the interior to assess its integrity.

The one-story, single-pile form with two-room (or double-pen) plan and shed-roofed or hip-roofed porch was a traditional domestic form and one commonly used for tenant houses throughout the region. By the Great Depression, this simple house type, along with its resilient inhabitants, had become an iconic image of the rural South (Glassie 1968: 102-106).



“House of Negro Tenant Family. Pittsboro, North Carolina. July 1939.” Lange, Dorothea, Photographer. Library of Congress.

Criterion D

The Alexander Farm and the Alexander Farm Tenant House are **not eligible** for the National Register under Criterion D (potential to yield information). For a property to be eligible under Criterion D, it must meet two requirements: 1) the property must have, or have had, information to contribute to our understanding of human history or prehistory; and 2) the information must be considered important (National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin 15*: 21).

Neither the farm nor the tenant house is eligible under Criterion D because neither is likely to yield any new information pertaining to the history of building design or technology.

National Register Boundary Description and Justification

The proposed National Register boundary for the Alexander Farm Tenant House has been drawn according to the guidelines of National Register Bulletin 21, *Defining Boundaries for National Register Properties*.

The tenant house sits within the 23.56-acre tax parcel that formed the Alexander Farm tract, but the proposed National Register boundary encompasses only the tenant house, the ruinous garage (a noncontributing resource), and the tree-shaded setting of approximately 0.60-acre. As shown on the accompanying map (**Figure 5**), the National Register boundary follows the right-of-way along West Catawba Avenue (also the current property line) and the existing northern border of the

current tax parcel. The southern border generally follows a farm lane that led to West Catawba Avenue, and the eastern border follows the edge of a pasture behind the tenant house site.

Figure 5
Alexander Farm Tenant House
Site Plan and Proposed National Register Boundary



Source: North Carolina Historic Preservation Office, GIS Service

Scale: 1" = 180'

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