

Survey and Research Report on the Walters Barber Shop



1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Walters Barber Shop is located at 112-114 South Main Street, Huntersville, N.C.

2. Name and address of the current owner of the property:

Cross Building LLC
1050 Riverside Ave.
Hopewell VA 23860

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

4. A map depicting the location of the property:



5. Current Tax Parcel Reference and Deed to the property: The tax parcel number of the property is 01904106. The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 28945, page 612.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Stewart Gray.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description prepared by Stewart Gray.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S 160A-400.5.

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Walters Barber Shop possesses special significance in terms of Huntersville and Mecklenburg County. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1) The 1920 Walters Barber Shop is an important surviving component of Huntersville's late 19th and early 20th century commercial core.

2) The Walters Barber Shop was a prominent town institution that operated in the same location for over fifty years. In small towns in North Carolina before World War II, barber shops served an important role as a center of the social activity for the male population.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description prepared by Stewart Gray demonstrates that the property known as the Walters Barber Shop meets 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 a "historic landmark." The current appraised value of the property is \$164,000.

10. Portion of the Property Recommended for Designation. The commercial building and the land associated with tax parcel number 01904106.

Prepared by Stewart Gray
March, 2016

Summary of Historic Significance



The Walters Barber Shop was built in 1920 by Huntersville businessman John Henry Walters. The storefront on the right (now 112 South Main) served as the barber shop where Mr. Walters cut hair and employed two additional barbers. The barber shop also offered shoe shines and a public shower, which was in demand as many of Huntersville's dwellings did not have in-door plumbing in the 1920s. The left storefront (now 114 South Main) was built as a "notions" store operated by John Henry's wife Annie Hellard Walters. Notions stores were a common feature of the commercial landscape early in the 20th century. The stores sold ribbons, buckles, buttons, and other items that were in demand when many women made their own, and their family's clothes.



John Henry Walters is the barber to the right, ca. 1925

With the death of John Henry Walters in 1934, the property passed to his son Tommy Walters who continued to operate the business. During the Great Depression the notions store closed, and Tommy Walters converted the second storefront into an apartment and moved his family into the space beside his barber shop around 1940. The building continued to operate as a barber shop until Tommy Walters death in 1974.



John and Paul Walters (unknown friend center) around 1946, at the rear of the Walters Barber Shop. The door to the right led to their apartment. The door on the left led to the barber shop.

Despite alterations to the façade, the Walters Barber Shop has retained much of its historic character. The majority of the exterior is essentially intact. Interior features include a pressed-metal ceiling, plaster walls, concrete floors, woodwork, and the intact original floorplan.

The Walters Barber Shop is an important historic artifact for Huntersville. Of the row of twelve commercial buildings that once lined the west side of Main Street, today only seven remain; and one of those, the Lee Mullen Building at 110 South Main, is in a highly deteriorated state. Designation and preservation of the Walters Barber Shop would help preserve the commercial history and the historic architectural character of the town. And would do much to demonstrate the important role that barber shops played in North Carolina's small rural towns early in the 20th Century.

Historic Context Statement

Huntersville was chartered in 1887. Like other towns in Mecklenburg County, Huntersville was a railroad town and grew around the Atlantic, Tennessee and Ohio Railroad, the tracks of which run parallel to Main Street. The railroad spurred the development of higher education in Huntersville with the establishment in 1878 of the Huntersville High School Academy, which was one of the first of two high schools in western North Carolina. In 1898, Anchor Mills

established a plant in Huntersville. In spite of this 19th century development, Huntersville remained a small town, essentially serving as a rural commercial hub for the largely agricultural community that occupied a large swath of northern Mecklenburg County.¹



Huntersville, ca. 1975

A small commercial row grew up along these railroad tracks in the late nineteenth century. What is significant about Huntersville and its small commercial row is that it is exemplary of the rural town in Mecklenburg County. Its development along the railroad connected the town to distant markets and made the town an important commercial center for area farmers and the distribution center for the area cotton crop. The Main Street of Huntersville is similar to the Main Streets of other small Mecklenburg towns, because, like Matthews or Pineville, it is arranged along a railroad. Travelers who went to Huntersville by train arrived in this commercial center of town.²

Long time Huntersville resident Kate Ranson Cornue recalls that "downtown" formerly occupied three blocks on Main Street. The businesses she remembers are a meat market, Cross's General Store (later the Ranson Brothers Grocery), J. R. McCurdy's Dry Goods, Sam Holbrook's Grocery Store, Mullen's Drug Store and Walters Barber Shop. A long hitching rack used to stand in front of these businesses for shoppers traveling by horse and cart.³

A Brief History of the Walters Barber Shop

In 1920, barber and Huntersville businessman John Henry Walters built a two-store-front commercial building on Huntersville's Main Street. The barber shop was located in the northern storefront of the building (now 112 South Main). John Henry cut hair himself and during the 1920s employed two additional barbers, Luther Douglas and Lorne Davis. The barbershop featured three barber chairs, electric lights, and indoor plumbing with a large boiler with a

capacity of over 100 gallons. The Walters Barber Shop offered more than just haircuts. The building contained two 8' x 8' shower rooms in the rear of the building. A shower cost twenty-five cents; and the barber shop provided the soap, a towel, and a dressing room. This was an important amenity in a town where indoor plumbing was not universal. Farmers from the surrounding country side and mill hands from the nearby Anchor Mill relied on the Walters Barber Shop for both grooming and basic hygiene. According to Paul Walters, John Henry's grandson, the Walters Barber Shop also served the community as a gathering place for the town's men. And the barbers were privy to all of the town's news and gossip. "The barber knew everything in a town like Huntersville."⁴

John Henry died in 1934. This left his 23-year-old son Tommy with the responsibility of maintaining the business. Tommy had to scrape together enough money to buy the barbershop and his father's other properties on the "courthouse steps." And then the young barber, who had been cutting hair since he was 15 years old, was faced with running the business during the Great Depression. Tommy married Annie Hill late in 1934, and they had their first child, John, in 1936.⁵

Annie Hellard Walters's notions business closed at some point during the Great Depression, and in 1940 Tommy decided to move his young and growing family into the empty storefront that shared the building with the barbershop. Tommy and Annie Hill's oldest child, John, was only four years old when the family moved into the former commercial space, the couple's second child, Paul, was three. By erecting partition walls across the width of the narrow space, Tommy divided the former store into multiple rooms. The frontmost room was a living room that doubled as Tommy and Annie Hill's bedroom. Past the front room were two more bedrooms, then a kitchen and toilet in the rear. The rooms opened into each other, as they would in a shotgun-style house. Paul Walters remembers that the living room could be an especially bright room due to the large plate-glass storefront windows. He also recalls that at all hours, loud, fast trains rolled down the nearby tracks, shaking their storefront home. After moving into the store building, the couple had two more children: Patricia was born in 1941, and Betty was born in 1944.⁶



Walters Family, ca. 1944. Left to right: John, Paul, Betty, Annie Hill, Patricia. The dog is Brownie.

The barbershop and the family's quarters were connected by a single door in the frame wall that separated the spaces. The family got their hot water from the large boiler in the barber shop, and one of the shop's two shower rooms became the family's private facility. Heat in the family's living space was provided by a "Warm Mornings" coal heater, though Paul Walters remembers that they would burn "anything" in the heater to heat the home. A second heating stove, a trash burner-type, was located in the kitchen along with a kerosene cooking stove. Paul and John would pull a goat wagon along the railroad track, looking for coal that would fall from the steam locomotives and tenders. The coal or any other burnable scraps could be used to heat their home. Paul Walters recalls that when he was a child rats were a significant problem in Huntersville. Rats could tunnel into the "soft" concrete floors of the building and one of the kids' favorite pastimes was watching rats get caught in the big rat traps that they set out.⁷

The flow between the family's apartment on the south side of the building and the barber shop on the north side of the building was fluid. The males in the family took their showers in the barber shop. The family's only radio was located in the barber shop, and they would sit in the shop at night listening to the broadcasts. The boys worked in the barber shop shining shoes.⁸

Tommy Walters was not able to hire additional barbers as his father had, and worked alone for the rest of his career. According to Paul Walters, business during the Great Depression was bad. The prosperity of the war years was tempered for the Walters Barber Shop because so many young men, his best customers, were in the military services. Tommy would keep the barber shop open in the evening until there were no more customers, which was typically around supper time. Aside from the family using the shop as an extension of their home, friends of Tommy

would sometime come by afterhours including a barber shop quartet that would practice in the space.⁹

In 1952, at the urging of Annie Hill, Tommy Walters built a new house on Concord Road, and the family moved out of the Main Street building. During World War II Annie Hill had begun working a shift at the Anchor Mill in Huntersville. Around 1950 she began attending beauty school and trained to become a beautician. With the southernmost storefront available, Annie Hill opened the Annie Hill Walters Beauty Shop in the space. For the next two decades, Annie Hill and Tommy ran their businesses side-by-side. Both businesses did well during the 1950s, although the bathing business at the barber shop ended when plumbing was installed in all of the mill village houses after World War II. Business at the barbershop fell off significantly during the 1960s as men began to let their hair grow longer, while the Annie Hill Walters Beauty Shop thrived. Tommy worked as a barber in his shop until his death in 1972. Annie Hill continued to work in the building until around 1974 when she moved her beauty shop to Highway 115. Annie Hill leased the building to various barbers and beauty salons until 1980.¹⁰



Walters Barber Shop, ca. 2000

Cecil Bradford bought the property from Annie Hill in 1980.¹¹ The two commercial spaces were subdivided into smaller commercial spaces, and the original storefronts with recessed entrances were rebuilt with flush frame walls. The final tenants included a beauty shop and a record store. The building has been vacant since around 2010.

Architectural Description

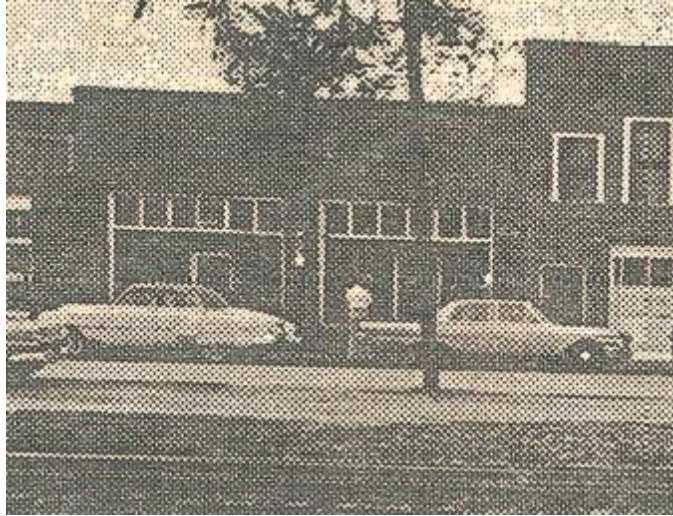


The Walters Barber Shop is a one-story, flat-roofed commercial building in a small row of commercial building along Main Street in Huntersville. The building faces east and abuts the sidewalk along Main Street, and sits 65 feet west of the former AT&O Railroad line that runs north-south through Huntersville and parallels Main Street. To the north the Walters Barber Shop is abutted by the ca. 1945 two-story, brick Lee Mullen Building at 110 South Main. Another storefront building once abutted the barber shop to the south, but was demolished in the 1980s. The barber shop sits on a .268-acre lot that is otherwise vacant. Maxwell Avenue runs along the rear of the property.





The façade features two storefront openings. Each opening originally featured a recessed door centered between large plate-glass windows that rested on brick knee walls, and were topped with a large transom composed of six roughly square sash.



Walters Barber Shop, ca. 1965

The openings have retained the outer members of the plate-glass window frames, the transom window frames, and portions of the brick knee walls. The transom window sash are in storage. Currently the openings are filled with framing covered with plywood panels and pierced by replacement doors. The façade features a veneer of nicely finished brick laid in running bond, over the structural brick wall which is laid in American bond. The two bays are each topped with a soldier course. The front wall is topped with a parapet. The parapet is topped with a parged corbelled brick cap.



The blank brick wall of the south elevation has been covered with stucco. The wall is topped by a stepped parapet. Two engaged, simple rectangular brick flues rise from the parapet wall.



The rear of the building is four bays wide. It is sheltered by a non-original hipped porch supported by metal posts. The rear wall is laid in American bond, and is covered with stucco. The fenestration is symmetrical. The center two bays contain doors. The original door frames are extant, but now contain modern replacement doors. The doors are topped with single-light-sash transoms, now covered with plywood. The outer bays are window openings, now infilled with framing and plywood panels and contain air conditioner units.



The interior of the building is divided equally by an original frame wall that runs from the front to the rear wall. A single doorway in the interior wall in the rear section of the building connects the two spaces. The interior space was divided late in the 20th century into four roughly equally sized commercial spaces. Four small bathrooms were added, each serving one of the commercial spaces, to the middle of the building, separating the front from the rear sections. The original concrete floor is extant in the two front sections, but a new raised (6 inches) concrete floor was added in the rear of the building, probably to accommodate the plumbing for the bathrooms.



The building features a pressed tin ceiling throughout. The ceiling is now obscured by a drop ceiling. The exterior walls are plastered. Some of the original plaster of the interior frame wall has been replaced with wallboard. Simple moulded trim around the doors, and ceiling has survived. An original large mirror in the barber shop has survived. It features decorative moulding around the glass, and brackets that once supported a shelf.



¹ P.M. Stathakis "Historical Overview of Commercial Row," from "Commercial Row of Four Buildings at 100, 102,104, & 106 Main Street, Huntersville, N. C." 1992.

² This paragraph taken largely from P.M. Stathakis "Historical Overview of Commercial Row"

³ This paragraph taken largely from P.M. Stathakis "Historical Overview of Commercial Row"

⁴ Entire paragraph and quote, Interview with Paul Walters 2-18-16

⁵ Interview with Paul Walters 2-18-16

⁶ Interviews with Paul Walters 2-18-16 and 2-22-16

⁷ Interview with Paul Walters 2-22-16

⁸ Interviews with Paul Walters 2-18-16 and 3-7-16

⁹ Interviews with Paul Walters 3-7-16 and 3-9-16

¹⁰ Interview with Paul Walters 3-7-16

¹¹ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds 09263-780 09/23/1997