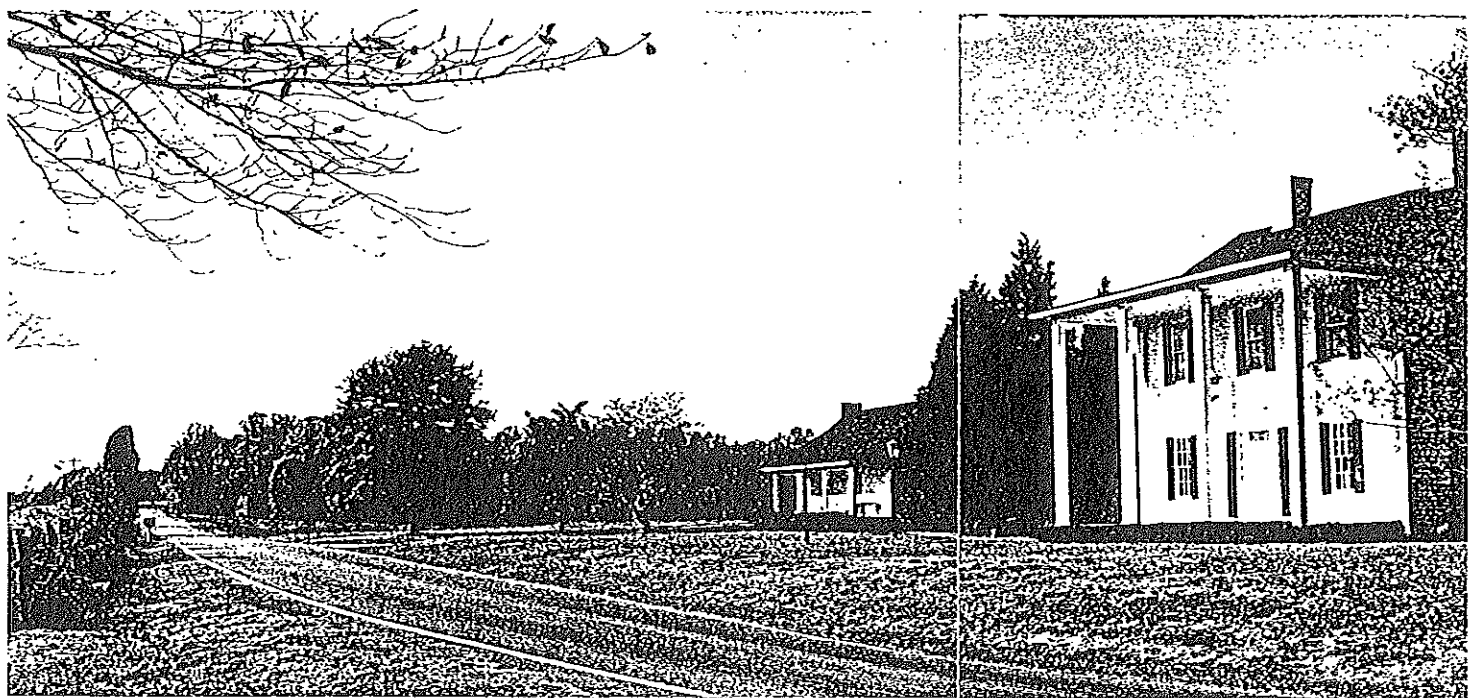


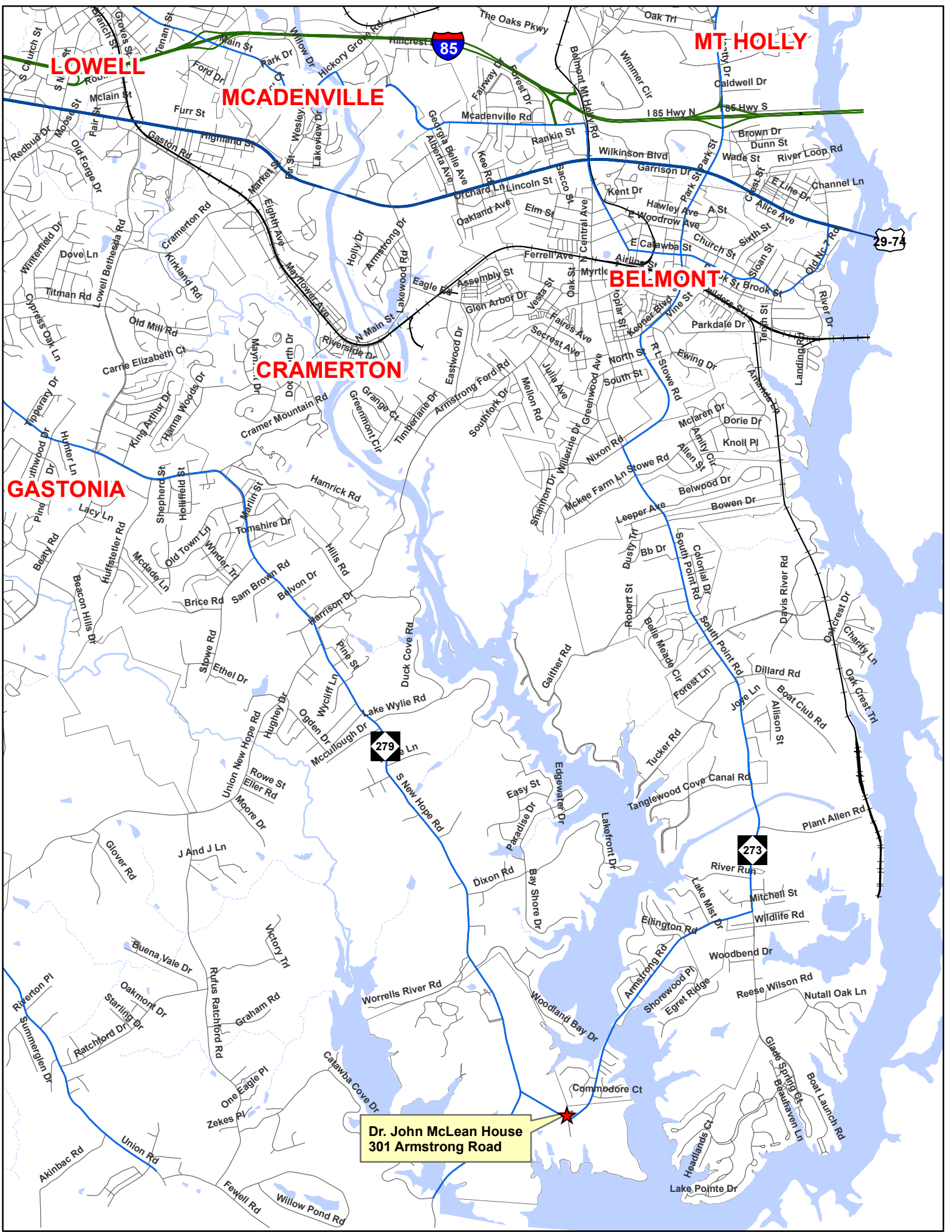
PROPOSAL OF  
DR. JOHN D. McLEAN HOUSE, 1848  
TO THE GASTON COUNTY HISTORIC PROPERTIES REGISTER  
FEBRUARY, 1989



GASTON COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Mrs. Richard Penegar, Chrmn.  
Mr. Robert C. Carpenter  
Mrs. Fred S. Cloninger  
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**LOWELL**

**MCADENVILLE**

**MT HOLLY**

**BELMONT**

**CRAMERTON**

**GASTONIA**

**Dr. John McLean House  
301 Armstrong Road**

CHAIN OF TITLE

1. Thomas Grier conveyed a parcel of land containing 220 acres, lying on the west side of the South Fork of the Catawba River to Dr. John D. McLean on November 23, 1857. This deed is recorded in the Gaston County Register of Deeds in Deed Book 2 at page 476.
2. Dr. John D. McLean died on November 27, 1880. In his will, recorded in the office of Clerk Superior Court for Gaston County in Will Book 2 at page 157, he left the above parcel of land, known as the "Houston Place" to his wife, Martha, for life with remainder to Robert A. McLean, their son. Robert A. McLean, preceding his mother in death, died on September 1, 1884.
  - 2a. On May 19, 1883 an agreement was made between the devisees of Dr. John D. McLean to clearly define and describe the boundaries of the land. In this agreement, " a tract of land known as the Grier or Houston place upon which said John D. McLean resided at the time of his death" is described. This is the same 220 acres referred to above. This agreement is recorded in the Gaston County Register of Deeds in Deed Book 11 at page 341.
3. Martha E. McLean died on April 8, 1904 and her will states: " John D. B. McLean, Martha J. Adams, and A. A. McLean (grandson) I will and devise all my real estate wheresoever situated, to be divided equally between them." This will is recorded in the office of the Clerk Superior Court for Gaston County in Will Book 3 at page 145.
4. Augustus A. McLean, who became owner of the aforementioned 220 acre tract through the devise of his grandmother, conveyed the entire tract to Charles E. McLean by Commissioner's Deed on June 5, 1905. It was necessary to appoint a commissioner to convey the property because Augustus was a minor child at that time. This deed is recorded in the Gaston County Register of Deeds in Deed Book 105 at page 473.

5. On March 24, 1915, Charles E. and Lucy R. McLean conveyed this 220 acre tract of land to John D.B. McLean. This deed is recorded in the Gaston County Register of Deeds in Deed Book 110 at page 476.
6. In John D.B. McLean's will, he devised "all to his children who survived him and to his heirs of deceased children." He died June 8, 1936 and his will, admitted to probate on June 12, 1936, is recorded in the office of Clerk Superior Court for Gaston County in Will Book 5 at page 406.
7. The devisees of John D.B. McLean (John D. McLean, Bess M. King, Edith M. Stringfellow, Margaret M. Nichols, Anne M. Guion, Nell M. McKenzie, Charles E. McLean, Lucy McLean, widow) conveyed a 100 acre tract containing the McLean Home Place to G.E. McKee on December 21, 1936. This deed is recorded in the Gaston County Register of Deeds in Deed Book 330 at page 51.
8. On October 30, 1945, G.E. and Clemmie Mills McKee conveyed this 100 acre tract to Daniel J. Stowe. This deed is recorded in Deed Book 392 at page 208 in the Gaston County Register of Deeds. Daniel J. Stowe is the present owner of the Plantation House.

The McLean family of this area was founded by Dr. John Davidson McLean's grandfather, Alexander McLean, a Scotch-Irishman. Coming from Pennsylvania, he first located in what is now Roberson County, North Carolina. In 1757, Alexander McLean moved on to what is now Gaston County and settled along the banks of the South Fork of the Catawba River. He brought with him his infant son, William, who was to become Dr. John D. McLean's father.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. William McLean (1757-1828) became a very prominent and well-educated man. As a young boy, he was taught by a Mr. Blythe, a teacher in the region. For two years, he then went to Queen's Museum in Charlotte for instruction. After this, he studied medical works at home and in 1777, at the age of 20, was offered an appointment as surgeon's mate in the Continental Army. After the war, he completed his medical education at the University of Pennsylvania and received his diploma in 1787. He came back to the South Fork area, and soon built an extensive practice as well as farmed. In 1814, he was elected to the office of state senator from Lincoln County.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. John Davidson McLean's mother was Mary Davidson, a daughter of Major John Davidson, a signer of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. She married Dr. William McLean on June 19, 1792 and had ten children.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. John Davidson McLean was born on October 2, 1794 and raised not far from this house that is the subject of this sketch. Little is known about Dr. John Davidson McLean's childhood education. However, it is known that his father "had one of the most valuable and extensive libraries of anyone in this area."<sup>4</sup> In Dr. William McLean's will he estimated his books

and notes to be worth eight or nine thousand dollars.<sup>5</sup> So one can assume that the McLean children were raised in an intellectual and cultural environment.

As a man, Dr. John D. McLean followed in his father's footsteps and "added to his duties and responsibilities as a planter the profession of physician."<sup>6</sup> He practiced more than sixty years and was one of the fine and upright characters of his day. He practiced far and wide, rode horseback through all kinds of weather and over every class of road, and in the absence of apothecaries he carried his medicine in the saddle bags.<sup>7</sup> Since he was too old for active military service during the Civil War, he stayed home to attend to the women, children, and wounded soldiers who returned from the front.<sup>8</sup>

On October 14, 1826, Dr. John Davidson McLean married Jane Brevard Davidson, daughter of General Ephriam Davidson. This marriage produced an infant son, born July 29, 1829 that lived only a few minutes. Two months later, Jane Brevard Davidson McLean died on September 25, 1829.<sup>9</sup> She is buried in Bethel Church Cemetery, York County, S. C.

Nineteen years after her death, Dr. John D. McLean married Martha Edith Bigger in 1848.<sup>10</sup> It is thought that Dr. McLean's house and pharmacy/office were built following this marriage. The 220 acre parcel of land that the house and pharmacy/office are located on was purchased from Thomas Grier, grandson of Andrew Hoyle, on November 23, 1857<sup>11</sup> and suggested dates for the structures range from 1858 to 1869.<sup>12</sup> The house originally had eight rooms, four upstairs and four downstairs, each with its own fireplace. A rare feature of this house is closets, a luxury in this era.<sup>13</sup>

This marriage produced five children: John Davidson Brevard McLean(1852-1936), James Augustus McLean(1854-1882), William Speight McLean(1859-1898), Martha Jane McLean(1857-1928) married R. H. Adams, and Robert Alexander McLean(1864-1884).<sup>14</sup>

After a long and useful life, Dr. John Davidson McLean died on November 27, 1880 at the age of 86. He is also buried at Bethel Church Cemetery, York County, S. C.<sup>15</sup> At the time of his death, Dr. John D. McLean owned over 1300 acres in South Point Township, Gaston County.<sup>16</sup> In his will, Dr. McLean divided his large estate among his children, wife, and brother Robert H. McLean. He left the "Houston Place", the name of the tract of land upon which he resided, to his wife in a life estate and then to Robert Alexander McLean, their youngest son.<sup>17</sup> However, Robert died from typhoid fever on September 1, 1884 at the age of 20 years.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, when Martha McLean died on April 8, 1904, she left her property which included the "Houston Place" to be divided equally between her two surviving children, JDB McLean and Martha Jane Adams, and also her grandson, Augustus A. McLean<sup>19</sup> whom she helped raise.

The "Houston Place" was so named because a Thomas Houston, then of Lincoln County, owned and resided there. In 1812 he gave his property of at least 800 acres to his son Mason Houston,<sup>20</sup> According to local legend, these Houstons are closely connected to the famous Sam Houston, Governor of two states, Tennessee and Texas. However, research of Sam Houston's genealogy does not support this claim.<sup>21</sup>

After Martha's death, her grandson, Alexander Augustus McLean, became the owner of the "Houston Place." He then sold it to Charles E. McLean on June 5, 1905.<sup>22</sup> However, it is believed that Charles never lived



in this home.<sup>23</sup> On March 24, 1915, Charles sold it to his father, John D. B. McLean.<sup>24</sup> It is not known how many years John D. B. McLean lived in this house; however, it was during this period that the name changed to "Seven Oaks." According to family sources, Nell McLean McKenzie (daughter of JDB McLean) named the home for the seven large oaks that surrounded the house then.<sup>25</sup>

John Davidson Brevard McLean(1852-1936), owning over 600 acres of land followed family tradition and became a "prosperous and high class farmer."<sup>26</sup> He was also active in his community. "In 1908 he was elected county commissioner, filling the post for two terms. In 1910, he was elected Sheriff of Gaston County and was re-elected in 1912, being a very efficient and very popular sheriff for four years."<sup>27</sup> John D. B. McLean's son, John D. McLean, also lived in this house until it was sold following his father's death in 1936.<sup>28</sup> It was this McLean that compiled the unpublished book William McLean and Allied Families.

Mr. and Mrs. G. E. McKee owned the house from 1936 to 1945.<sup>29</sup> Daniel J. Stowe, local textile industrialist, bought the 100 acre tract containing the house and office/pharmacy on October 30, 1945.<sup>30</sup> Mr. Stowe renovated the house and in 1967 opened an antique shop renaming it "The Plantation House." It became a very popular shop which attracted antique lovers from all over the area. It was in operation until December, 1985.

From the "Houston Place" to "Seven Oaks" to "The Plantation House", this house and its people represent an important part of Gaston County heritage.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Robert Cope and Manly Wade Wellman, The County of Gaston: Two Centuries of a North Carolina Region (Charlotte, 1961) (hereinafter cited as Cope and Wellman), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Cope and Wellman, p. 26; Minnie Stowe Puett, History of Gaston County (Charlotte, 1939) (hereinafter cited as Puett), p. 124.

<sup>3</sup>Puett, p. 124-125.

<sup>4</sup>John D. McLean, William McLean and Allied Families (Belmont, N. C., 1953) (hereinafter cited as McLean), p. 55.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>6</sup>"John Davidson Brevard McLean", History of North Carolina, V, North Carolina Biography (Chicago and New York, 1919) (hereinafter cited as History of North Carolina), p. 113.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>McLean (quoting from Dr. William McLean's Family Bible), p. 66.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, p. 16-A.

<sup>11</sup>Gaston County Register of Deeds, Book 2, p. 476.

<sup>12</sup>Kim Withers Brengle, The Architectural Heritage of Gaston County, N. C. (Gastonia, N. C. 1982), p. 243.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>McLean, p. 16-B.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Gaston County Superior Court, Will Book 2, p. 157.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>McLean, p. 16-B; Interview with Miss Hattie McLean, granddaughter of Dr. John D. McLean, August, 1986.

<sup>19</sup>Gaston County Superior Court, Will Book 3, p. 145.

<sup>20</sup>Lincoln County Register of Deeds, Book 25, p. 459.

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21 Zella Armstrong, Notable Southern Families (Baltimore, 1974),  
p. 179.

22 Gaston County Register of Deeds, Book 105, p. 473.

23 Interview with Miss Hattie McLean, August, 1986.

24 Gaston County Register of Deeds, Book 110, p. 476.

25 Interview with Mrs. L. L. McLean, May, 1986.

26 History of North Carolina, p. 113.

27 Ibid.

28 Interview with Mrs. L. L. McLean, May, 1986.

29 Gaston County Register of Deeds, Book 330, p. 51.

30 Gaston County Register of Deeds, Book 392, p. 208.  
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## The Dr. John McLean House and Office

Located in the Southpoint Township of Gaston County, the McLean House is attractively sited on a curve in the Lower Armstrong Road (state road <sup>2544</sup>...). The house faces south toward farm land that once made up the land holdings of the McLean property. Although it has undergone several renovations, the building still retains much of its original fabric which dates from the mid nineteenth century.

The house has a central hall, double pile arrangement with double interior chimneys and a kitchen ell addition. It is a wooden construction with clapboards and simple corner boards. The foundation includes original granite slab posts and twentieth century brick underpinning. The three bay facade is highlighted with a two story, flat-roofed portico. This portico is a twentieth century replacement for what would have been a one story porch. Composition shingles cover the gable roof and portico as well as the ell. There is a boxed cornice at the eaves, but not on the gable ends.

Windows in the main part of the house are sash type, six-over-six. These windows are found on both floors and in the attic at the gable ends (east and west). Windows in the ell addition are sash type with a mixture of six-over-six and four-over-four. All windows have the same surrounds, very plain with minimal molding and simple sills. Replacement shutters with fixed louvers decorate all windows of the McLean House.

The central front door is framed with sidelights and transom. The muntins for these windows are quite decorative, formed of three triangular sections per light. The panel beneath the sidelights is raised. The door is a double leaf type with two panels in each leaf. A matching door is found at the other end of the first floor, central hall. This rear door has no transom nor sidelights.

Examination of the property was done when the house was undergoing a modernization. It was completely unfurnished which helped to reveal the simple charm of the house's very plain architectural detailing of the interior. All window and door surrounds are unmolded wood. The foot high baseboards have one simple bead. Flooring throughout the main portion of the house is pine in planks of varying widths. Interior doors are two or four panel, depending on use. Four panel doors are lead from the halls into rooms. All interior walls and the ceilings are made of planed, wood planks. This includes walls with fireplaces. The depth of the chimneys between rooms is utilized in the McLean house by the creation of built in closets. The wall planks are laid horizontally. A crown molding is found in all rooms.

The southwest parlor is distinguished from the other rooms in that the wood trims (crown molding, window surround, baseboard, and mantel) are varnished and not painted the white color found throughout most of the house. The fireplace located on the north wall is decorated with a Greek Revival mantel which has simple, molded pilasters and an equally simple frieze. The closet door double leaf with two panels each. The closets have a

cabinet appearance in that the doors do not extend to the floor but stop at the baseboard which continues around the room.

The northwest room's closet butts up to that of the southwest parlor and has the same double leaf door. The mantel in this room is even simpler than that found in the parlor. Its unembellished frieze band gracefully curves over the fireplace opening. The pilasters are distinguished by only two, carved straight lines indicating fluting. This room is expected to be used as a dining room based on its placement to the ell kitchen.

The one story ell is attached to the house at the northwest corner and contains an passage way to the main house, a modern kitchen and pantry area, and a small bathroom. A simple stoop serves as the entry on the west side. The L-shaped porch on the east side is covered with a shed roof as well as the engaged roof extension of the ell. The porch has simple square posts which support a plain cornice.

The ell is an early twentieth century addition that was done with some of the same sensitivity that the current renovation employs. The clapboards, window framing, and most window sizes are identical to those used in the original part of the house. The interior walls are horizontal wood planks with the same crown molding seen the other first floor rooms. The chimney and fireplace are completely new replacements. The contemporary installation of kitchen cabinetry was placed with care and has not disturbed window placement.

The care of the current renovations is seen in the installation of the furnace in the closet area between the

southeast and northeast rooms. The southeast room like that of the southwest has a Greek Revival mantel with as much embellishment as will be found at the McLean House. The slightly molded pilasters support an equally plain entablature with angular designs in the frieze band that recall the muntin treatment of the front door transom.

The northeast room has been renovated into a contemporary bath. Placement of the lavatory and a closet against the north wall precludes the use of a porch door which is covered on the inside only. It remains visible from the exterior. Likewise the fireplace and mantel of this room has been retained but covered over with the installation of an enclosed tub with shower. The toilet was installed against the tub enclosure wall, placing it near the closet which now houses the furnace.

The second floor is reached by the central hall stair. The slightly rounded stair rail is supported by plain, square balusters. Typical of this house, the only decorative element of the stair is found in the graceful curve of the stair brackets. A hall closet with two panel door is located under the stairway.

Rooms on the second floor are almost identical with closets flanking the fireplaces which have the same very simple mantel pieces. Like the one found in the northwest room on the first floor (dining room), the mantelpieces have only a gracefully curving entablature. This is supported by pilasters which have been scribed with two straight lines in some cases or left plain. Hearths are like those on the first floor, beveled slabs of stone.

Two differences in the second floor rooms are minimal. The northwest room has lost its north window due to the addition of the ell. Its placement is easily seen on the exterior. The window opening was infilled with clapboards, leaving the window surround intact. The other difference seen on the second floor is the finish treatment of the southeast room. During the renovation, the present owner has chosen to remove all paint from the walls and woodwork, revealing the wood grain in all the portions of the room.

Open stairs from the second floor lead up to the attic. Their plain design is even less decorative than the main stairway. There are no decorative brackets on these step ends. A ceiling door opens into the attic which is partially floored. Although duct work and insulation cover most of the attic floor area, the second floor ceiling joists are still visible. Rafters made mostly of poles are nailed to a very thin ridgepole. Rafters and beams in the attic reveal a combination of both mortise and tenon and newer nail construction.

Other structures on the property include Dr. McLean's nineteenth century office building and several contemporary storage structures. These include a small barn and two small sheds. The sheds are metal and wooden, the types purchased at home building centers. The contemporary well house is made of cement block.

The doctor's office stands near the house on its west side. Until a few years ago, this structure remained fairly true to its original state. A recent renovation and modernization has altered and enlarged the structure to almost double in size.



The office still has its gable roof with engaged porch. Like the house, the office has a composition shingle roof. The eaves with boxed cornice match those of the main house. Simple square posts support the cornice of the porch. The chimney at the west end is a modern replacement.

At the time of the Gaston County property survey, the office still retained its three bay facade of two doors with central window. This has been altered to a single door (west end) and a smaller replacement window in the center. Contemporary aluminum siding covers the clapboards on the original portion of the office. This was added at the time of the north side addition. This enlargement has added several rooms and creates a T-shaped structure. Though some of the original building has been masked by this recent renovation, the roof line, cornice work and window surrounds were done with sensitivity to the original style.

The grounds of the McLean House should be noted for their plantings which include some old boxwood, indicating a formal garden arrangement between the house and office. There are also several large crepe myrtles. Some examples of large oak trees remain on the grounds. These trees are reported to have given the property its name of Seven Oaks.