

Survey and Research Report on the Charles E. Barnhardt House



1. **Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Charles E Barnhardt House is located at 2733 Country Club Lane, Charlotte North Carolina.

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

Country Club Lane LLC
1600 Camden Road
Charlotte, NC 28203

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 Deed Book Reference To The Property.** Deed Book 30498 at Page 729. The tax parcel number for the property is 09504315.

6. **A Brief Historical Essay On The Property.** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Stewart Gray.

7. **A Brief Physical Description Of The Property.** This report contains a brief physical description of the property 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 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the Charles E Barnhardt House possesses special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1) The Charles E Barnhardt House is an important example of the work of prominent Charlotte Architect Martin E. Boyer, Jr. The house is one of the largest and best preserved examples of the type of architect-designed housing chosen by Charlotte's elites before World War II, especially in terms of the Plaza-Midwood Neighborhood. With an impressive blending of Colonial Revival and Art Moderne styles, the Charles E Barnhardt House also demonstrates the versatility of Boyer.

b. **Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:** The Commission judges that the physical description included in this report demonstrates that the property known as the Charles E Barnhardt House meets this criterion.

9. **Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal:** The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes a designated "historic landmark." The current appraised value of the Charles E Barnhardt House is \$1, 887,900.

10. This report finds that the interior and exterior of the house and the land associated with the Charles E Barnhardt House should be included in landmark designation of the property.

Date of preparation of this report: September 2016

Prepared by: Stewart Gray

The Charles E. Barnhardt House

The Charles E. Barnhardt House is a large estate home that was built in 1938 on Country Club Lane, very near the Charlotte County Club. The estate is composed of several tracts of land, that were originally part of the Club Acres subdivision. Club Acres was developed by the Mecklenburg Realty Company, a real estate company chartered in 1910 by a group of Charlotte businessmen, including F. M. Laxton, developer Paul Chatham, banker Word Wood, and Duke Power executive W. S. Lee. But the development of Club Acres was plagued with obstacles. The area was outside of the city, far from the urban core of Charlotte, and one-and-one-half miles of suitable road had to be constructed just to access the development.¹ The busy Seaboard Railroad crossed Central Avenue, which frequently stalled travel coming from Charlotte. Also, streetcars did not provide continuous service to the neighborhood. Developers were forced to setup a separate electric streetcar system to Club Acres, which was inconvenient for commuters who were forced to change streetcars. Sales in Club Acres remained feeble until the 1920s when the automobile replaced the streetcar as the preferred method of commuting, and development along The Plaza and around the Charlotte Country Club accelerated. But into the 1930s, very

little development occurred on Country Club Lane. In 1936, in the depths of the Great Depression, cotton broker and manufacturer Charles E. Barnhardt and his wife Edna Palsley Barnhardt purchased tracts 7, 9, 11, and 12 of Club Acres from the Union National Bank of Charlotte for \$7,500.²

Charles E. Barnhardt

Charles E. Barnhardt was born in 1882, the second of eleven children of John A. Barnhardt, a prominent Cabarrus County merchant, state senator, and large shareholder and director of Cannon Mills.³ After attending Clemson College and the Philadelphia Textile School, Charles began his career as a cotton buyer for Cannon Mills. In 1906, with his father, Charles set up a small shoelace factory in Concord. By 1914 Charles had partnered with Lloyd C Withers to form Withers and Barnhardt, a Charlotte cotton brokerage firm. In 1927 Charles partnered with his youngest brother, William H. Barnhardt, to purchase the old Linden Cotton Mill in Davidson and converted the mill building into Kubar Manufacturing, an industrial plant that produced asbestos shingles.⁴ In 1929 Charles is listed in the Charlotte directory as the owner of Charles E. Barnhardt and Company: Cotton and Rayon Brokers, and as president of the Plaza Railway Inc. Charles Barnhardt's role with Plaza Railway, the small trolley line that served Club Acres and the other neighborhoods in the Plaza-Midwood area, would indicate that he had interest in real estate development in the area. By 1934 Charles had again teamed up with his brother William to form Barnhardt Brothers, a cotton yarn brokerage company.

Outside of his business interest Charles Barnhardt was active in Charlotte's Second Presbyterian Church and was a trustee of the Presbyterian Hospital. He was a member of the Charlotte Country Club, a Shriner, and a Mason. At a Masonic convention in Portland Oregon, Charles met Edna Parsley. In 1929, Charles and Edna were married when she was forty-four years old, and he was forty-seven. By 1934 the couple was living in the Poplar Apartments in Fourth Ward and remained there while they built their home in Club Acres. The Barnhardts hired Charlotte architect Martin E. Boyer, Jr. to design their new home.

Martin E. Boyer, Jr.

Martin E. Boyer, Jr. received considerable attention for his design of the imposing 1922, Colonial Revival, J. Luther Snyder House in Charlotte's Myers Park neighborhood. After the Snyder House, Boyer became a favored architect among Charlotte's elite, designing homes in the Colonial, Tudor and Georgian styles, and is now arguably considered Charlotte's most important revivalist architect.⁵ In 1929 Boyer designed the even more imposing Hamilton Jones House in Eastover. The Hamilton Jones House was arguably the high-water-mark for the unprecedented development of the isolated and segregated, wealthy neighborhoods that began to be developed around Charlotte early in the 20th century and ended abruptly with the onset of the Great Depression.

With 85% of all architects out of work, Martin Boyer was an exception and was able to stay busy and gainfully employed throughout the Great Depression. Boyer's work files indicate that the architect produced plans for forty-eight houses between 1929 and 1941, including the 1931 Charles W. and Gladys Avery Tillett House in Charlotte, and the 1935 E. Hayes Clement House in Durham. Not limited to residential architecture, Boyer designed three new restaurants for the S&W Cafeteria Company in Charlotte (1932), Raleigh (1933), and Washington DC (1934). Boyer supervised the moving of the old Charlotte Federal Mint in 1933, an early grassroots preservation project. He designed the 1934 Harding High School in Charlotte, and along with architect PN Pease, designed the city's first public housing project, the WPA-sponsored Piedmont Courts. Perhaps the best evidence that Boyer professionally weathered the Great Depression exceptionally well, is that he designed and built a new house in Eastover for his own use in 1933.⁶



The Charles E. Barnhardt House

Boyer designed a stately house for the Barnhardts. The architect employed the Colonial Revival Style for the form and massing of the house. But the façade is dominated by two Art Moderne Style half-round bays integrated into a partial-width one-story porch. Glass blocks, metal-sash windows, and non-corbelled chimneys are other prominent modern elements. Romantic elements on the exterior include flat-clay-tile roofing, and whimsically sawn shutters. In homage to his client's livelihood, Boyer decorated the steel frames for the glass blocks door surrounds with miniature castings of cotton mill spindles. The interior is lavished with applied classical plaster mouldings, and sleek modern slab doors



The prominent rear elevation features a large paved terrace, and mixes the Colonial Revival form with flamboyant architectural elements. Especially notable is the textured effect of the wall surfaces achieved by projecting the header bricks, the deep and roughly executed pilasters, and the acanthus iron railings and the long iron anthemion crestings. Especially on the rear of the house, Boyer's eclectic use of classical, romantic, and whimsical architectural elements produces a distinctly modern, 20th-century design. The Barnhardt House is a vivid reminder that Boyer was quite capable of breaking out of the revivalist mold in terms of residential architecture in Charlotte.



Boyer's plans for the house are dated September 21, 1937, with revisions made on December 3, 1937. Work on the house may have started between these dates. In February, 1938 the Barnhardts secured a mortgage of \$20,000 for the house from the Union National Bank of Charlotte.⁷ The estimated value of the house in 1938 was \$50,000.⁸

On May 26, 1938 Charles and Edna Barnhardt visited the house while it was under construction. Charles left Edna at the house and went to inspect a pond and concrete dam on the estate. Workmen later found Charles's dead body in the lake. It was speculated at the time that he may have tripped on fish netting strung along the top of the dam and fallen in the water. News of Charles Barnhardt's death made the front page of the *Charlotte Observer's* local section. Charles was interred in the recently opened, monumental Oaklawn Mausoleum. Edna Barnhardt never moved into the house on Country Club Lane and instead made her permanent home in the Poplar Apartments.⁹

There is no record of anyone living in the house until Italian cotton broker Pietro B. Crespi moved in between 1940 and 1942.¹⁰ But by 1943, the house is listed as vacant in the city directory. In 1944 Walter R. Hollingsworth and Jennie F. Hollingsworth bought the house from Edna Barnhardt.¹¹ Hollingsworth was a Charlotte businessman involved with the Comptometer Company (adding machines) and the Charlotte Music Company (jukeboxes and phonographs). Walter and Jennie were active real estate investors.¹² The Hollingsworths lived in the house on Country Club Lane until 1948 when the property was sold to George B. and Elizabeth Crooks Cramer.¹³

Born in 1903, George was the youngest son of prominent Charlotte industrialist Stuart W. Cramer. In 1932 George became secretary of Cramer Mills. During World War II George Cramer served as a liaison officer in Washington and London. In London he met Elizabeth. The couple married and moved to Cramerton after the war. By 1947 George had partnered with his half-brother Stuart W. Cramer, Jr. to form the Charlotte textile firm, Cramer and Cramer. George and Elizabeth moved into the house on Country Club Lane in 1948, and reared two sons on the estate, R. Warren Cramer and George Bennett Cramer Jr. The couple lived in the house until George Sr. died in 1995 and Elizabeth's death in 2006.¹⁴ The Cramers continued to live in the house until it was sold in 2016. Amazingly the Cramers, during their long ownership of the property, made no significant changes to the house. The house reflects the same layout shown by Boyer in his 1937 plans. And nearly all of the interior and exterior architectural elements designed by Boyer remain, including those in the secondary spaces, such as the servant's quarters and bathrooms. The property is currently being developed into a new residential subdivision. There are plans to preserve the house as part of the new development.

¹ *The Charlotte Observer*, September 11, 1919, 4.

² Mecklenburg County Deed Book 902, page 154.

³ *History of North Carolina: North Carolina Biography*, (Lewis Publishing, 1919) 192.

⁴ "Charlotte Men to Buy Plant for New Industry," *The Charlotte Observer*, June 11, 1927, 11.

⁵ Catherine W. Bishir, Mary M. Boyer, Thomas W. Hanchett, *North Carolina Architects and Builders: A Biographical Dictionary*, "Boyer, Martin E., Jr., 2015."

<http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000589>

⁶ Stewart Gray, "Architecture During the Great Depression: A Study of Building Trends in Charlotte, North Carolina," Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 2006.

<http://www.cmhpf.org/CharlotteArchInGreatDepression.htm>.

⁷ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 943, page 69.

⁸ "C. E. Barnhardt Drowns in Lake on his Estate," Charlotte Observer, May 27, 1938, 1.

⁹ "C. E. Barnhardt Drowns in Lake on his Estate," Charlotte Observer, May 27, 1938, 1.

Charlotte Observer, May 28, 1938, 1.

¹⁰ Charlotte City Directories show Crespi at 820 Berkeley in 1940, and at 3233 Country Club Lane in 1942.

¹¹ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1123, page 199.

¹² Charlotte Real Estate Index shows Walter R. Hollingsworth and Jennie F. Hollingsworth were active real estate investors.

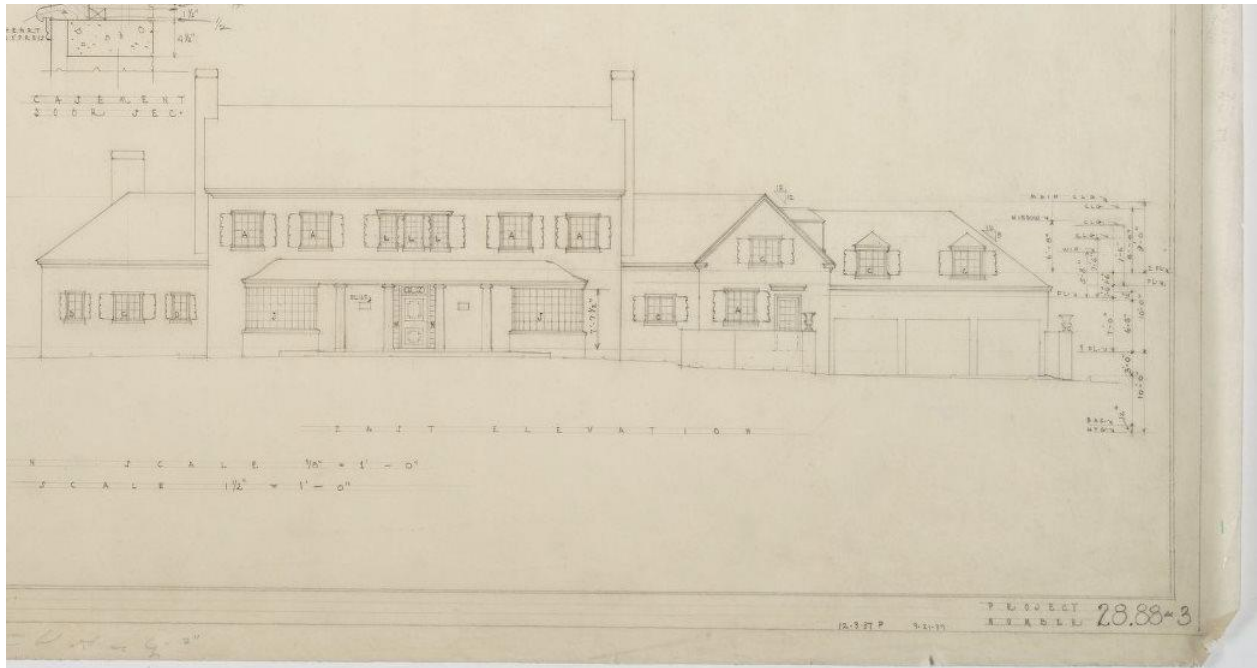
¹³ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1312, page 36.

¹⁴ "History," http://cramermountainclub.com/club/scripts/library/view_document.asp?NS=ABOUT&DN=HISTORY.

Architectural Description



The Charles E. Barnhardt House sits on a 15-acre estate in the Club Acres neighborhood of Charlotte. The two-story house faces east and is roughly centered on the large lot. A pond is located on the eastern edge of the site. Club Acres was originally plotted with large, typically two acre, lots. But as the neighborhood evolved the land was divided into smaller lots. Most of the houses to the south, east and the west of the Barnhardt House date from the 1940s and sit on half-acre lots. Immediately to the north of the Barnhardt House, the neighboring homes date from the late 20th century and sit on a quarter-acre lots. There is currently a development plan for the property that would subdivide the land into thirty-six quarter-acre lots, with the house retaining a 1.25-acre parcel.



The brick Barnhardt House contains approximately 6,500 square feet of interior living space. The façade of the two-story principal section is symmetrical and is dominated by a partial-width porch that is engaged over two half-round bays. Each bay contains a curved fifteen-by-five-light steel sash. The porch roof is also

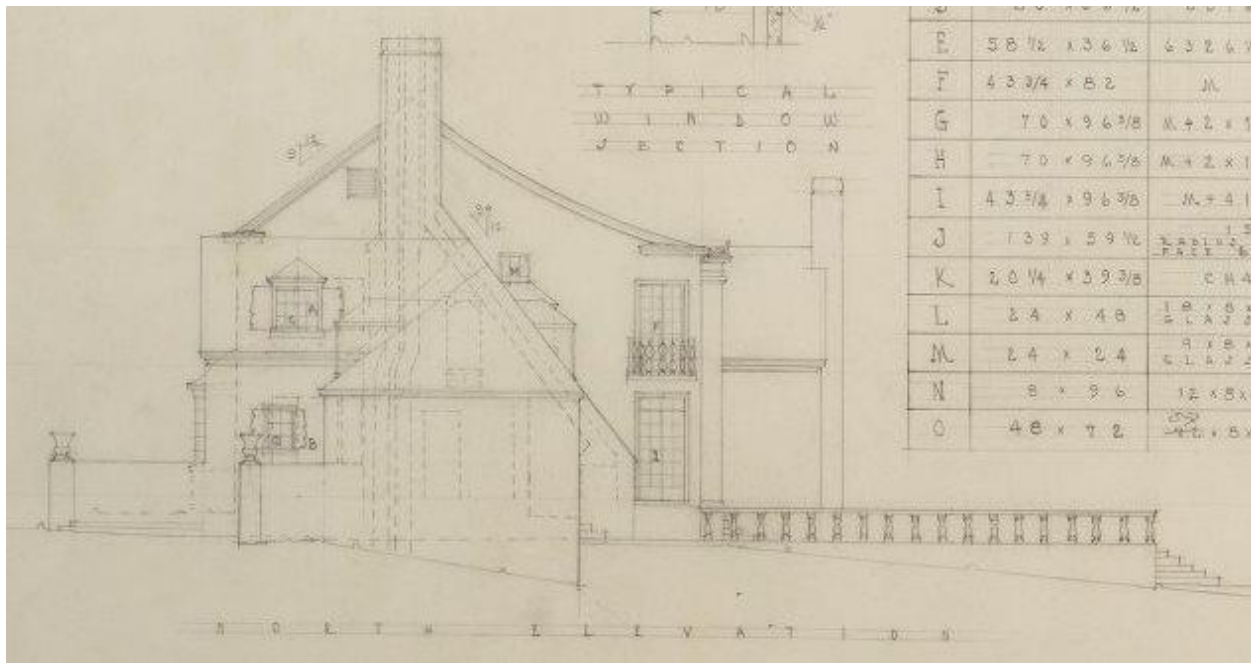
supported by four Ionic columns with fluting on the upper halves of the shafts. The porch shelters a two-panel door with cross-shaped panels. The door is topped with a wooden five-curved-light transom. Side lights are composed of floor to ceiling glass blocks set in a steel frame that is decorated with medallions cast in the shape of a spindle from a textile mill. An original screen door mimics the design of the panel door. The porch ceiling features recessed panels and a large dental-like series of mouldings in line with the columns. The façade's wall is laid in common bond with three rows of stretchers separating each row of headers. The second floor is pierced by seven windows. The center three are set close together and each contains eighteen glass blocks set in a metal sash with the spindle medallions found on the sidelights. The other four window contain steel casements, each with two three-light sash surrounded by ten fixed lights. All of the windows are topped by splayed brick lintels, and feature wooden sills and fancifully carved board shutters. All of the shutters are operable by interior cranks. The shutters over the casements are pierced with eye-holes that allow the shutters to close over the projecting hinges. The wall is topped by a relatively simple cornice with fluted moulding. The roof is covered with flat clay tiles. Near the bottom course, a copper gutter is set in the shingles with downspouts hidden in the soffit.



South Wing

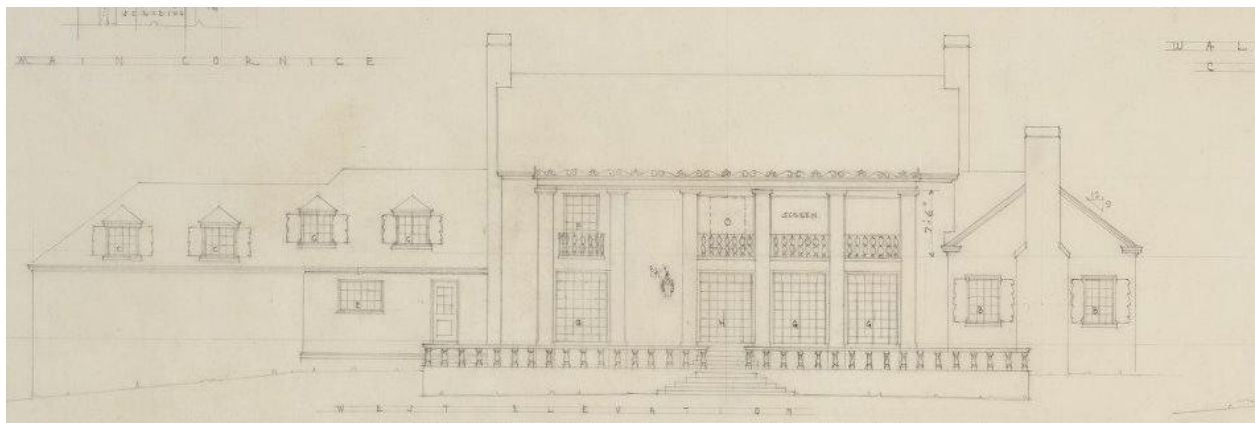


North Wing



The north elevation of the principal section of the house features a shouldered chimney centered on the roof ridge. To the rear of the chimney the elevation is

pierced by double, twelve-light metal doors on the first and second stories, with a bowed iron guardrail decorated with acanthus leaves on the second floor. Otherwise, the elevation is largely obscured by a one-and-one-half-story wing that contains the kitchen, servants' quarters, and garage. The wing is six bays wide. The first bay contains a short two-sash casement window. To the north of the window, a secondary gabled wing projects and contains a panel door and a two-sash casement window, and a short two-sash casement window set in the gable. A curving brick wall extend from a small brick stoop at the door. The wing extends as a hipped-roof three-bay garage. Two small hipped-dormers, each containing a short two-sash casement window, sit above the garage bays. The north elevation of the wing is blank.



The prominent rear elevation features a large paved terrace. The elevation is dominated by the five bays formed by six two-story, deep and roughly executed Doric pilasters. The walls in these bays feature alternating projecting headers in each alternating course. The center bay and the two bays to the south contain double, twelve-light metal doors, bordered by six-light sidelights, and topped with six-light transoms. On the second story the bays contain original full-width iron guardrails decorated with acanthus leaves, and tall ca. 1950 casement windows, that enclosed a recessed second-story porch. To the north of the center bay is an uninterrupted section of wall with alternating projecting headers. The northmost bay contains twelve-light metal doors on the second floor, with a bowed iron guardrail decorated with acanthus leaves. On the first story, the bay contains double, twelve-light metal doors, bordered by six-light sidelights, and topped with a six-light transom. The pilasters support a simple cornice topped with a full-width row of anthemion castings.

The rear elevation of the north wing features a recessed porch which functioned as service access to the garage and kitchen. The porch features replacement slab doors and a short eighteen-light window. The wing features four dormers.

Interior

The architectural integrity of the exterior of the Charles E. Barnhart House is also found in the interior. With the exception of the installation of carpeting over most of the original floors, there have been no significant changes to the interior of the house. The interior utilizes classically inspired details such as floral freezes and capitals, niches topped with scallops, and pilasters. At the same time, modern elements such as slab doors and glass block are prominent. In most rooms the modern and classical elements and forms are freely mixed. The curving staircase features a turned brass newel, a simply moulded mahogany rail, and cast iron balustrade featuring classically inspired foliage wreaths.



Notable rooms include the entrance hall with a curving staircase, that opens into a living room and a dining room. All lavishly adorned with high-relief plaster trim.





In contrast, the library is executed in mahogany, including pilasters with carved capitals.



The bedrooms, service rooms, and servant living quarters have also retained a high level of integrity. Notable is the spoon-form plaster trim utilized in the kitchen.

