Landmark Designation Report for the

Franks House
Charlotte, North Carolina

Prepared by:
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March 2022, updated July 2022

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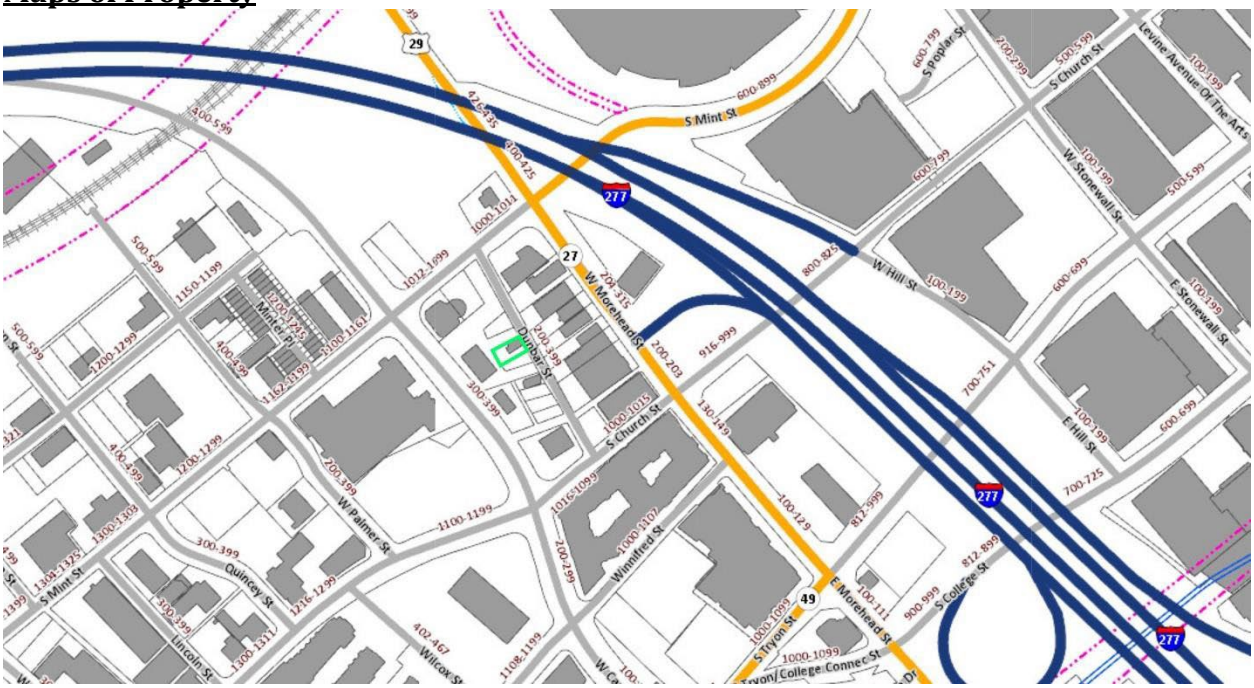
General Information

The Franks House at 305 Dunbar Street is located at the upper edge of the South End area of Charlotte, which is separated from the center city core by the John Belk Freeway/Interstate 277. The parcel is 0.084 acres. The parcel ID is 07306312. The owner is Rivafinoli Partners LLC, P. O. Box 12332, Charlotte, NC 28220.

The property owner is pursuing **exterior designation only**.

Maps of Property



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Proposed Boundary

The proposed boundary of the Franks House property to be designated as a local landmark follows the property lines of parcel 07306312 as described in Exhibit A of Mecklenburg County Deed Book 32229, Page 805.

Abstract

The Franks House is historically relevant as a rare surviving artifact of the Black community which once existed in the Third Ward neighborhood of Charlotte. It was one of several simple frame houses constructed along what was then West Morehead Street ca. 1917 to serve as rental housing for Black residents.

The Franks House is an unusual example of working-class Black homeownership in Charlotte. While most residences in Third Ward and other center city neighborhoods were poorly maintained rentals, many of the houses on the 200-300 block of Dunbar Street were owner-occupied starting in the 1920s. Arthur and Bessie Franks purchased the house at 305 Dunbar Street in 1949, and the property remained in possession of the Franks family for over sixty years.

As Black neighborhoods in the center city core of Charlotte were declared blighted and removed during Urban Renewal in the 1960s and 1970s, the Black community of Third Ward shrank until only a few residents on Dunbar Street remained. Additionally, the construction of the John Belk Freeway in the 1980s resulted in Dunbar Street and other traditional areas of Third Ward being cut off from the city center. The Franks House survived these changes that otherwise destroyed the Black community around it.

According to the National Council on Public History, when dealing with historic structures from underrepresented communities, undue emphasis should not be placed on architectural integrity in light of the circumstances of their construction and the economic circumstances in which these populations typically existed: "Too often . . . when considering a place with ties to an under-represented community, compromised elements of design, materials, and workmanship are cited as evidence that it lacks sufficient integrity for [recognition]. Yet design, materials, and workmanship may not be the most important aspects of integrity for resources associated with historically marginalized communities. Stories related to location, setting, feeling, and association are usually more relevant."[1] Given the removal of Black neighborhoods from Charlotte's central core and the ensuing scarcity of historical assets representing the Black community that once thrived in Third Ward, the integrity of location, feeling, and association embodied by the Franks House outweighs any compromised materials, workmanship, setting, or design elements of the structure, rendering the Franks House historically relevant and uniquely qualified for landmark designation.

Aspects of Integrity

Location The Franks House retains a high quality of integrity in reference to its location, as the structure has remained at its original site of construction on Dunbar Street.

[1] Sarah Kautz, Rachel Leibowitz, & Joanna Doherty, "Repairing National Register nominations: underrepresented communities and integrity," National Council of Public History, July 21, 2020, https://ncph.org/history-at-work/repairing-national-register-nominations-underrepresented-communities-and-integrity/, accessed July 19, 2022.

Design Franks family tradition holds that few changes to the form of the Franks House have occurred since the family acquired the property in 1949. The only substantial change to the form of the house is the replacement of a wood frame porch with a concrete shed porch with wrought-iron supports and railing. Overall, the mass of the Franks House is reflective of the simple bungalows and cottages common to Third Ward preceding Urban Renewal in the 1960s and 1970s.

Setting The Franks House is located along Dunbar Street, a narrow street between South Mint Street and South College Street. The topography of the property is unchanged, though the yard has gravel and grass to allow for parking at the nearby Bank of America Stadium.

Workmanship The Franks House is indicative of the economical construction techniques of early twentieth century Black tenant houses in Charlotte. While the house has had material updates which are no longer reflective of the original construction period, these changes demonstrate the necessary inclusion of electricity, plumbing, and other modern amenities not originally included. Were the Franks House wholly left unchanged from its original condition, it would be deemed unusable.

Materials While the mass of the Franks House remains unchanged, the installation of replacement materials, including vinyl siding and windows, has diminished the house's integrity of materials. The Franks House does not claim integrity based on materials.

Feeling The simplicity and humble nature of the Franks House conveys the character of the now defunct Third Ward Black residential neighborhood. The presence of major transportation infrastructure on all sides of the property is integral to understanding the changes imposed upon the neighborhood through Urban Renewal.

Association The Franks House claims historical relevance based on association with the broad pattern of Black history in Charlotte. The Franks House represents the working class Third Ward neighborhood and the rental housing constructed by White landlords in the early twentieth century. The Franks House also represents the transition of the 200- and 300-block of Dunbar Street from tenant-occupied houses to Black-owner-occupied houses, an unusual presence in Third Ward.

Historical Background

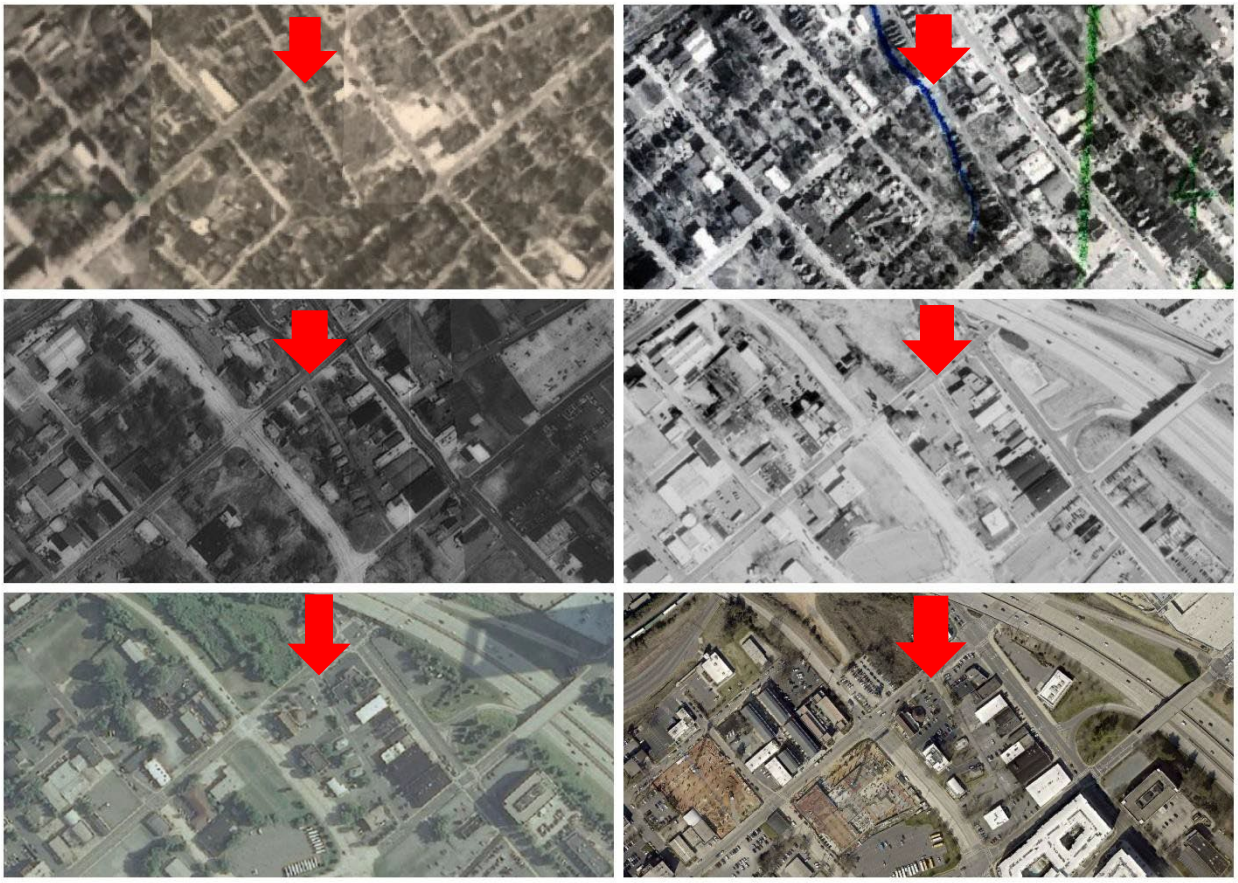

Figure 1 *The number of houses on Dunbar Street (indicated by red arrows) dwindled as the Third Ward residential neighborhood transitioned to the edge of the South End commercial and industrial district. Aerials show the area (left to right, top to bottom) in 1938, 1951, 1978, 1997, 2010, and 2021. Time Machine, Mecklenburg County GIS, http://timemachine.mcmap.org/#15/35.227/-80.843.*

The 200-300 block of Dunbar Street with its cluster of Black owner-occupied homes was an anomaly in Third Ward. But as many of the homes around this area were in poor condition, 305 Dunbar Street and adjacent residences felt the impact of federal housing policies starting in the 1930s. Later, the implementation of Urban Renewal directly impacted these properties by removing the community from around the houses, leaving a residential island surrounded by commercial and industrial properties and highway infrastructure.

The ca. 1917 wood frame house at 305 Dunbar Street is one of the last remaining vestiges of the Black community of Third Ward. In the late 19th century, racially homogenous communities began to form in the four center city wards of Charlotte. Black neighborhoods coalesced in First, Second, and Third Wards. The Third Ward Black community was anchored by Good Samaritan Hospital and St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church. Other churches, which were important neighborhood civic and social components, were located throughout Third Ward, including First Baptist Church Colored and the United House of Prayer for All People south of West Morehead Street near Dunbar Street. Most Black residents of Third Ward lived in single-family or duplex shotgun houses owned by

white absentee landlords. These simple houses were common throughout not only Third Ward but also across Charlotte's Black neighborhoods. But as Charlotte grew in population and regional influence, inner-city neighborhoods like Third Ward, which had a high concentration of poverty, were considered unsightly, unhealthy, and an impediment to the city's expansion. The onslaught of urban renewal and community redevelopment in the 1960s and 1970s supplanted these areas with commercial and industrial facilities.

The Franks House, along with many other homes along the remaining portion of the street between South Church and South Mint Streets, was somewhat able to weather the initial blow since many of its homes were owner-occupied. Arthur and Bessie Franks purchased the house in 1949, and the Franks family retained ownership for over 60 years. However, over time families moved away or received high offers for their prime real estate near uptown. Today, only two houses remain. The location of the Franks House within modern South End, which due to its proximity to uptown Charlotte and the LYNX Blue Line is experiencing a building boom, only serves to emphasize the shocking transition of many center city neighborhoods from residential to an encompassing central business district.

Early History of Third Ward

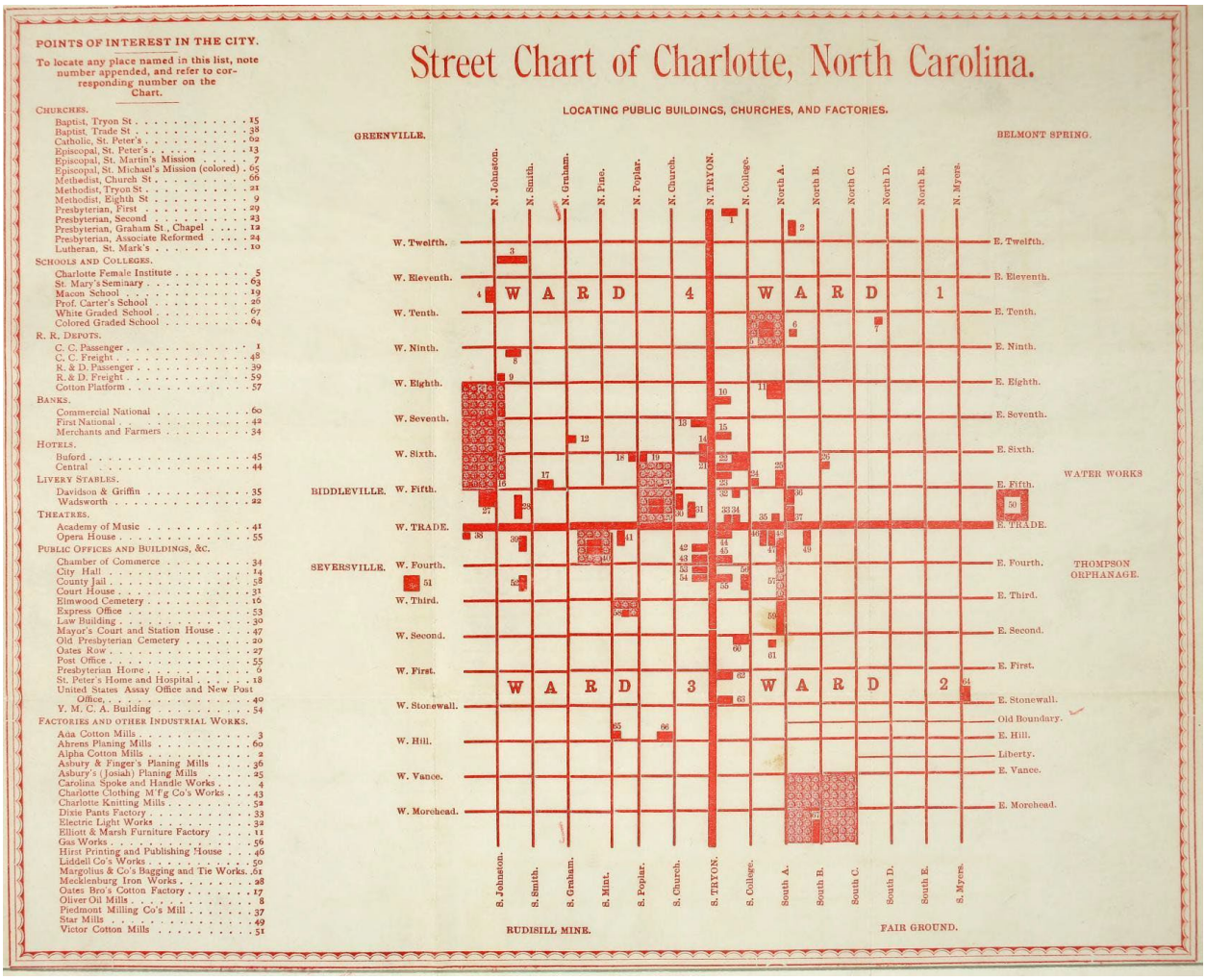

Figure 2 *Street Chart of Charlotte, North Carolina, 1889.*

When Charlotte was platted in the eighteenth century, it was divided into four sections separated by the north-south (Tryon Street) and east-west (Trade Street) roads that met where the city was sited. An 1869 survey officially designated these sections as municipal wards, with Third Ward located in the southwest quadrant. Following the emancipation of enslaved Blacks, freed people flocked to cities in search of work and community. Into the 1890s, Black and White Charlotteans typically lived next door to each other in racially mixed blocks in all areas of the city.[1]

[1] Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 41.

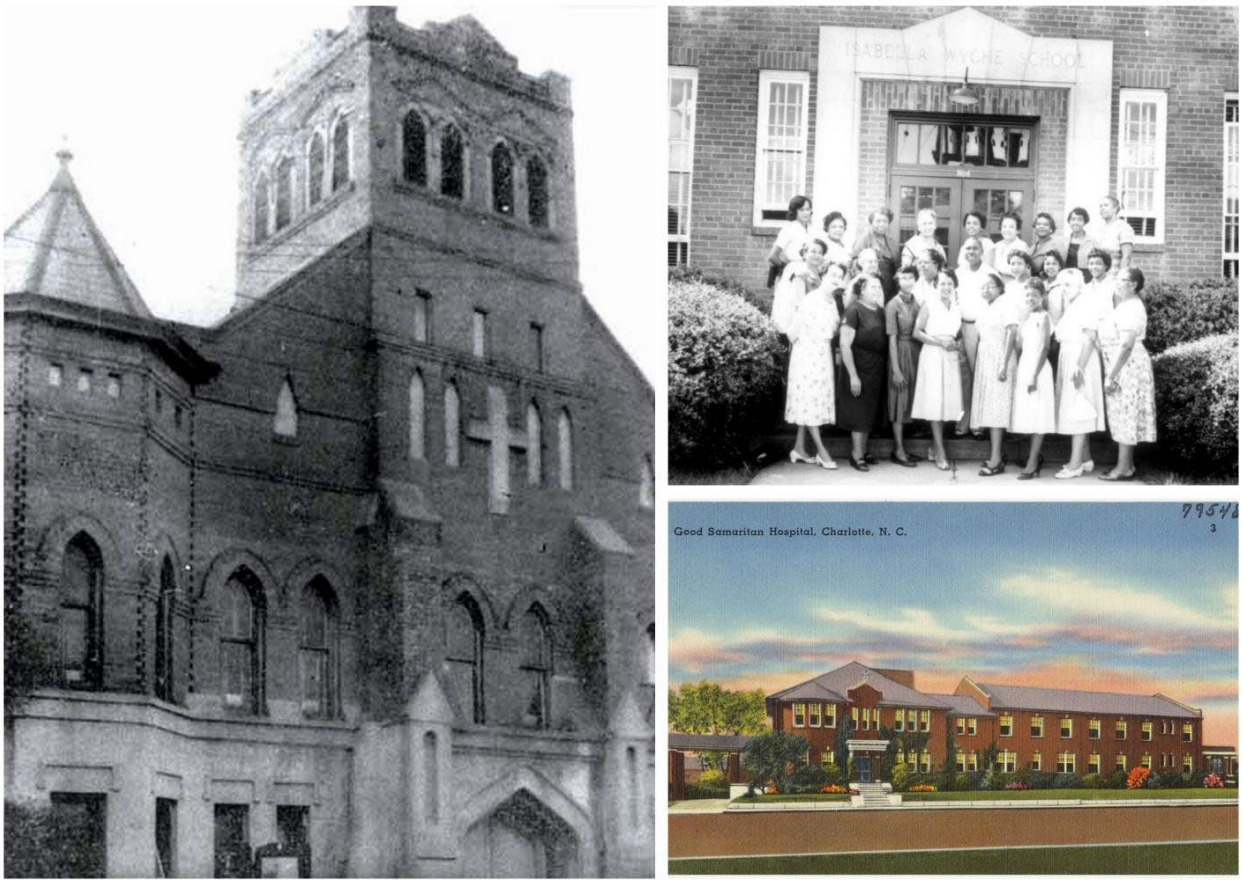

Figure 3 *The core of Third Ward was located around the South Mint Street corridor and included (clockwise from left) Clinton Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, Isabella Wyche School, and Good Samaritan Hospital.*

But in the last decade of the nineteenth century, a racial "sorting out" was underway in Charlotte. Black- and White-occupied residences had been interspersed throughout the city, but people began shifting into racially homogenous communities. One Black community formed in Third Ward around Clinton Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, founded in 1865. Good Samaritan Hospital opened in Third Ward in 1891 across the street from St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church, a mission for Black Charlotteans. More prominent Black businesses remained closer to the Square until shifting into Second Ward in the early 1900s. Comparatively, most Third Ward businesses were grocers and small service providers, such as barber shops and cafes.

Churches were the social center of Third Ward and other Black communities. First Baptist Church-Colored, founded in 1867 when former enslaved Black members of First Baptist Church, was located at the corner of South Church Street and Dunbar Street. Residents from Third Ward as well as Black families from around Charlotte were members. The family of Vermelle Diamond walked from Second Ward to First Baptist Church every

Sunday.[2] Hattie Leeper, better known as Charlotte's first black female DJ Chatty Hatty, grew up in Third Ward and attended Gethsemane Baptist Church on Winnifred Street. She recalled,

> "Your church was your guiding force. You went to Sunday school, you stayed for service, everything going on through the week you were there, and we were busy with constructive cultural things at all times."[3]

Walter Dial, who was born and raised in Third Ward in the 1930s and 1940s, also remembered a childhood centered around the church:

> Our biggest hangout as a kid was the church. Not for the religious part of it, that was the outlet we had. No television and a lot of us didn't even have radios but, you had programs going on at the church.[4]

White property owners erected groupings of tenant houses in First Ward, Second Ward, and Third Ward during this period, effectively relocating working class and poor Black residents into segregated areas. Tenant houses in the Black neighborhoods of Charlotte were predominantly simple frame structures, either shotgun houses or small cottages. Shotgun houses were a common tenant housing, cheap to construct and narrow so several could be built next to each other along a street or alley. Typically, these homes along with other housing constructed for Black tenants were shoddily built and lacked basic amenities. V. S. Woodward, who headed the Associated Charities in Charlotte, described the conditions of substandard housing to a women's club in 1910. He noted that these houses had "not a bath room, a toilet, or even running water in any of them; not a vestige of paint on the exterior."[5] Another hall-less cottage, typically four or five rooms in a square or rectangular configuration, was also ubiquitous in Charlotte. The houses on Dunbar Street in Third Ward were the latter type.

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[2] Vermelle Diamond Ely, Price Davis, Wright Hunter, Calvin Davis, and Naomi Davis, oral history interview by Katheryn B. Wells, March 25, 2004, transcript, *Student Project on Second Ward*, J. Murray Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, https://repository.charlotte.edu/islandora/object/uncc%3A2744, accessed September 8, 2021, 9.

[3] "Chatty" Hattie Leeper, oral history interview by Christina Wright, December 11, 2006, transcript, *Legacy Interviews on the Charlotte Region*, J. Murray Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, https://goldmine.charlotte.edu/index/islandora/object/uncc:370, accessed September 8, 2021, 6.

[4] Walter Dial, oral history interview by Hope Murphy, May 12, 2004, transcript, *The Era before Brown v. Board of Education,* J. Murray Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, https://repository.charlotte.edu/islandora/object/uncc%3A185, accessed September 8, 2021, 11.

[5] V. S. Woodward, "Housing and Its Relation to Health in Our City," 1910, quoted in Hanchett, 236. Two shotgun houses, built in the 1890s at 153 and 155 West Bland Street in the Blandville area near the old gold mines, were preserved and designated as local landmarks in 1985. The houses were more recently relocated from the Afro-American Cultural Center on East Seventh Street to 236 Norwood Drive. See Dan L. Morrill, Representative Shotgun Houses, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, May 8, 1985.

Most Black rental houses were owned by White absentee landlords, many of whom had never seen their properties. Their only worry, as uncovered by the *News*, was "to provide the minimum of repair that will make it unnecessary for him to build a new house." The newest low-rent houses in Charlotte in 1937 had been built four years previous, with much of the inventory at least twenty years old. The reason was that the city health code required new construction to provide plumbing, a cost estimated to be at least a quarter of the cost to build.[6] Vermelle Diamond Ely, who grew up in a middle-class Black family in Second Ward but attended church in Third Ward, echoed this sentiment, saying the landlords were largely to blame for the poor condition of their rentals. She noted, "It was ghetto and it was because of the rental owners, people that owned the rental houses that would not fix those houses up."[7] A majority of the rental houses in Black neighborhoods like Brooklyn and Third Ward had been owned by White families for years. As the original owners died and their heirs had moved away from Charlotte, they relied upon property management companies to maintain their investments. The number of blighted rentals seemed to increase with the number of absentee owners.

By 1930 Third Ward was a mix of White-owned and Black-tenant occupied residences, businesses, and industry. A large portion of the area had been purchased by James B. Duke in the 1910s for use by Duke Power Company, Southern Public Utilities Company, the terminal for the Piedmont & Northern electric interurban railway. The neighborhood, wrote Charlotte historian Thomas Hanchett, had become "the most heavily nonresidential of the center city wards."[8] Third Ward simultaneously transitioned from a racially-mixed area to majority Black. Walter Dial remembered, "[White residents] were there first but, as the blacks moved in back in the 20s and early 30s the whites maintained their area and naturally their homes were much better quality than what we lived in."[9]

[6] "Survey of Slums Shows Families in Misery," *Charlotte News*, February 7, 1937.
[7] Ely, et. al. interview, 23.
[8] Hanchett, 190.
[9] Dial interview, 10.

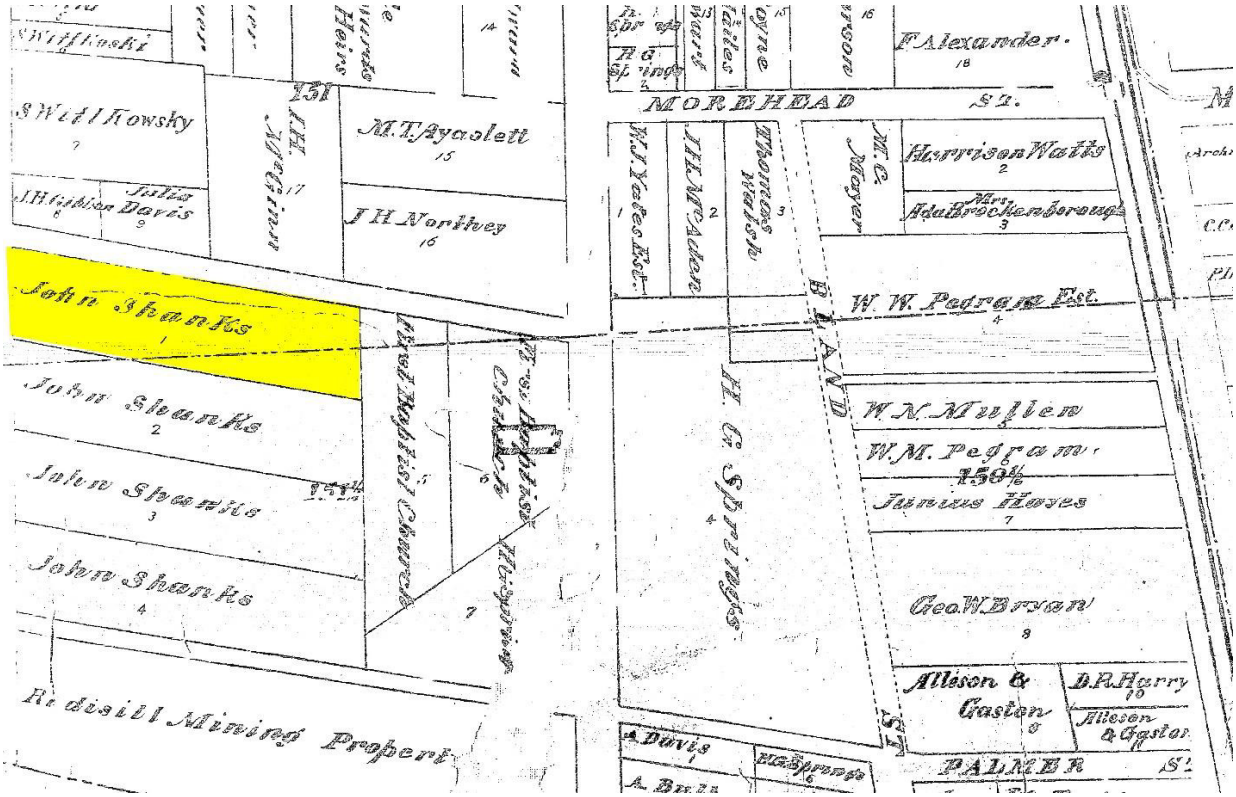

Figure 4 *Morehead Street was extended west from South Church Street in 1876. The future location of 305 Dunbar Street and its neighbors is highlighted in yellow. B. W. Butler, Map of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, NC (1892).*

The Evolution of Dunbar Street[10]

East Morehead Street was a wide boulevard up to South Tryon Street. Once it entered Third Ward, the irregular street grid in the lower portion of this ward gave West Morehead Street a zigzag path near the Rudisill and St. Catherine's mine lands. This extension was added in 1876 along lands owned by John T. Schenck, Charlotte's leading Black citizen in the post-Civil War period. He sold this property to J. H. Wearn in November 1892, who sold a portion of it to Rev. C. E. and Leila Todd in 1901.[11]

Rev. Charles Edward Todd came to Charlotte in 1887 from South Carolina to help plant an Associate Reformed Presbyterian church. A graduate of Erskine College, he served as pastor of First A.R.P. Church for eight years before returning to his hometown of Due West, South Carolina to serve as president of Erskine College. He resigned that position in 1899 due to poor health and returned to Charlotte. During his second stint at the church, Todd and his wife Leila began to set roots in Charlotte by purchasing George Stephens' house on

[10] West Morehead Street was extended between South Tryon and South Cedar Streets in 1926 to tie into Wesley Heights and provide a cross-town connection for the growing south side of Charlotte to the west toward Mount Holly. The extension realigned Morehead Street in a straight line. Its former path was renamed Dunbar Street, though the name West Morehead Alley would linger for a few years. *Charlotte Observer*, October 3, 1925.

[11] Mecklenburg County Deed Book 84, Page 352; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 152, Page 594.

South Boulevard. They also bought several investment properties, including approximately .5 acres of land in Third Ward on West Morehead Street.[12] However, Rev. Todd's health continued to decline, and by spring 1902 he had moved back to Due West. He died just shy of his fortieth birthday in September while seeking treatment at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. Leila and their six children had returned to Due West, though she retained the Charlotte tenant properties. Real estate investments were commonly purchased to serve as a form of life insurance. Rev. Todd wrote in his will,

> "I give and devise all my other property, real and personal, to my beloved wife, Lelia [*sic*] Todd, in trust for her own use during widowhood, in providing a comfortable support for herself, and a suitable maintenance and education for our children, with full power to dispose of any and all real and personal estate, at such time and upon such terms and such manner as she may deem best for all concerned."[13]

A Charlotte property manager explained over half century later,

> Years ago, a husband would take out maybe a life insurance policy or buy some property so when he'd die he could leave a little property or some money to his widow. A large amount of this type of property is owned by widows or estates, people who've had it 15, 20, 30 years. There are doctors and lawyers too. We have some who own quite a bit.[14]

In the case of Leila Todd, she would own Black tenant houses in Second and Third Wards until 1941, when she deeded her Charlotte holdings to her son John Cowan "Jakie" Todd.

[12] Mecklenburg County Deed Book 152, Page 594.
[13] Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1067, Page 577.
[14] "Who Owns Housing for the Poor," *Charlotte News*, April 10, 1976.

Figure 5 *Rows of houses lined West Morehead Street (later Dunbar Street) in 1911 (top) and 1929 (bottom). The Todd property is highlighted in yellow, and the Franks House is denoted with its modern address number 305. Sanborn Map Company.*

Sanborn maps from 1911 and 1929 show that the half-acre parcel owned by Leila Todd had eight houses along Dunbar Street, with two additional dwellings at the south end of the property accessed along an alley. According to property records, the two extant houses at 217 and 305 Dunbar Street were built ca. 1917. Some of the Todd renters were longtime residents. Ellen Moore was the longest tenured renter, living at 231 West Morehead Street (later 305 Dunbar Street) from around 1920 until her death in 1942. She lived with her sons Edgar and George Moore. Clarence Freeman rented 301 Dunbar Street from 1936 to around 1945. Most tenants were short term, with new residents in the houses each year.[15]

Jakie Todd also lived in South Carolina where he had just taken the position of state probation and parole officer after twenty years as football and basketball coach at Erskine College. Having no interest in owning property in Charlotte, in 1942 he sold the Dunbar Street houses to E. Julian Webb, Jr., whose father E. J. Webb, Sr. owned several Black rental properties. Julian Webb moved to Statesville in 1946, and that year he sold most of the

[15] *Charlotte City Directory* (1920), 809; Ellen Moore, Certificate of Death, 1942; *Charlotte City Directory* (1936-1937), 820; *Charlotte City Directory* (1945-1946), 49.

Dunbar Street rentals. But instead of selling them as a group to another White investor, Webb sold them to Black Third Ward residents.

Figure 6 *Dunbar Street between South Mint and South Church Streets piloted a city street improvement program in 1946. The photo shows before and after the unpaved street had been regraded. Charlotte News, May 3, 1946.*

Working-Class Black Homeownership

Black working-class homeownership was a historical anomaly in Charlotte. In 1937 the *Charlotte News* identified that only 10% of Black residences in Charlotte were actually Black owned. Black home ownership on Dunbar Street was well established as far back as the 1920s. Brothers James and Hoyle McBrayer purchased adjacent homes at 213 and 215 Dunbar Street in 1923. They died in 1926 and 1928 respectively, but their widows Era and Essie remained residents of Dunbar Street for decades. James and Florence Oliphant, who with their seven children had moved from Edgefield, South Carolina, in 1921 to a three-room shotgun house on South Graham Street, purchased 217 Dunbar Street in 1927.[16] Purchasers of Dunbar Street properties from Julian Webb in 1946 were John and Mary Walk (221 Dunbar Street), Nellie Jamison Kemp (301 Dunbar Street), Wade and Carrie Walk (307 Dunbar Street), Andrew "Andy" and Ola Wilson and James and Lillie House (309

[16] "Mrs. Lucie W. Ryder Sells West Morehead St. Land," *Charlotte Observer*, August 28, 1923; "The Roses Remain," *Charlotte Observer*, October 17, 1999.

Dunbar Street), and Fred and Matilda "Tillie" Nixon (311 Dunbar Street).[17] The final property sold of the original Todd rental houses was 305 Dunbar Street, which was purchased by Earl and Carrie Davis in August 1949. Most of the buyers of the houses were Black and lived in Third Ward, except for Nellie Kemp who lived in Second Ward and the Davises in Fairview Homes in Greenville but were former Third Ward residents. The Davises never lived in 305 Dunbar Street and sold the house a few months later to Arthur and Bessie Franks.[18]

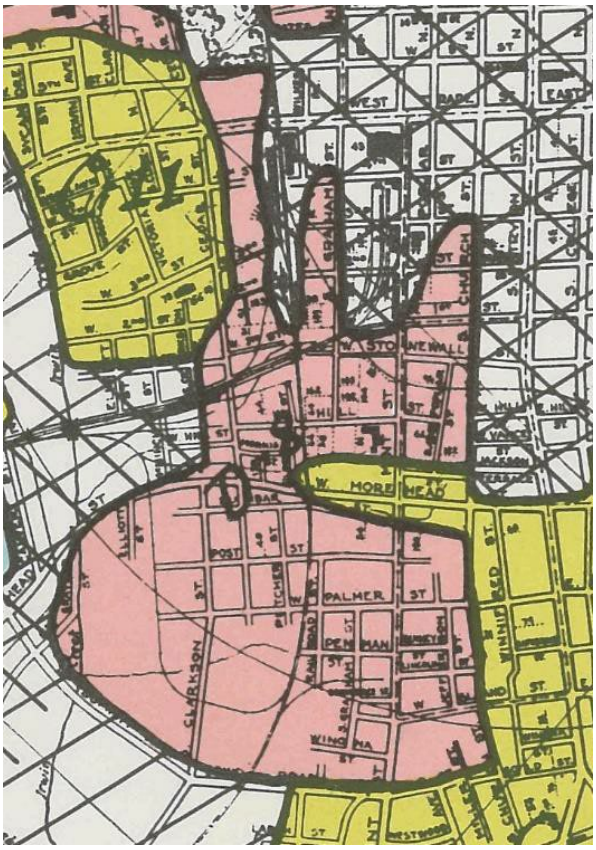

Figure 7 *The Black neighborhood of Third Ward was classified as area D8. Official Map of Charlotte, N.C., 1935, Residential Security Map, Home Owners' Loan Corporation, May 1937.*

Government policy targeted the poor-quality housing in Black neighborhoods starting in the 1930s. In the 1937 report by Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) appraisers, most of the Third Ward residential area was graded D, the lowest grade. The HOLC report stated that the D8 area was 95% Black with only 25% of homes owner-occupied—most of which were white residences. Most houses were small frame cottages averaging 25 years old, selling for around $1,800 or renting for $12 per month. In the clarifying remarks section, the report commented, "Major portion of properties in this area all cheap grade of negro houses built for rental purposes," which would have included even the Black-owned houses on Dunbar Street.[19]

[17] Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1184, Page 6; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1195, Page 151; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1190, Page 135; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1184, Page 4; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1195, Page 152.
[18] Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1387, Page 9, 1948-1949 Charlotte City Directory.
[19] "Charlotte, N.C., D-8," Area Description, Home Owners' Loan Corporation, March 8, 1937.

Figure 8 *Charlotte City Council approved a radical rezoning of the city in 1947. Most of Third Ward including the 200-300 block of Dunbar Street (highlighted in yellow) was rezoned as Industrial. J. N. Pease & Co., City Building Zone Map of Charlotte, NC (1947).*

These HOLC classifications were considered when the City of Charlotte began to formulate a process to implement city planning policies. In 1947 the city adopted a sweeping rezoning of downtown, with the residential areas of the First, Second, and Third Wards rezoned as industrial. While this rezoning included the Black owner-occupied houses on Dunbar Street, city policy showed that officials considered this section to be salvageable. In May 1946 the section of the street between South Mint and South College Streets was chosen to be the test site for an unpaved street improvement program. The *Charlotte News* reported, "The street was shaped up and covered with gravel for a width of sixteen feet." But City Council said that they were restricted from permanently paving the street since owners along the street would owe an assessment, which likely would have been unaffordable for most of them.[20]

Black homeownership on Dunbar Street again was noted in 1962, when the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission published a study of in-town neighborhoods. Titled *Residential Blight in Charlotte*, the report identified areas of the city which officials considered "blighted" and in need of either remediation or removal. Using defined tracts from the 1960 U. S. Census, Third Ward was studied as part of Tract 1 which included the downtown area. Just over 1,300 residential units were identified, but only 54 were not rental properties. Most were considered to be either in need of extensive repairs or unfit for habitation. While the 200-300 block of Dunbar Street was comprised primarily of owner-occupied residences, these were assessed to require serious repair—unsound

[20] *Charlotte News*, May 3, 1946.

porches, broken steps or railings, rotted soffits and eaves, sagging roofs, and other deficiencies. The report noted that, when it came to tenant-occupied properties, "There will be many instances where owners of such buildings may prefer demolition over costly repairs when confronted with compliance with the housing code."[21] This would not necessarily be the case for the Dunbar Street homeowners. Building permits show that owners on Dunbar Street had already been improving their homes. Arthur and Bessie Franks had an electric range installed in 1955 and a water heater added in 1957. The Garretts at 217 Dunbar made repairs, installed three electric outlets in 1958, and put in a gas water heater in 1970. At 301 Dunbar, Nellie Jamison had natural gas connected in 1967, serving a range, water heater, and space heater.[22]

Figure 9 *The house at 307 Dunbar Street, next door to the Franks House (visible at right), was demolished in 1966. Charlotte Redevelopment Commission Records, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, https://repository.charlotte.edu/islandora/object/mss%3A65514.*

In contrast to the homes on the 200-300 block of Dunbar Street, all the houses west of South Mint Street were rentals for Black residents, and these were targeted by local government as blight. In February 1965 demolition of 84 structures containing 108 units

[21] Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission, *Residential Blight in Charlotte* (September 1962), 7.
[22] [building permits].

began with 300 additional structures to be rehabilitated.[23] The rentals along Dunbar Street were steadily demolished. The tenant houses at 312, 316, and 318 Dunbar Street, the last houses on the north side of the street, were demolished in 1962. 307 Dunbar Street reverted to a rental after the Walks defaulted on their loan in 1950, and Julian Webb purchased the house at auction. It was rented until after 1958 and sat vacant until the City of Charlotte Redevelopment Commissioned purchased it for demolition in 1966.[24]

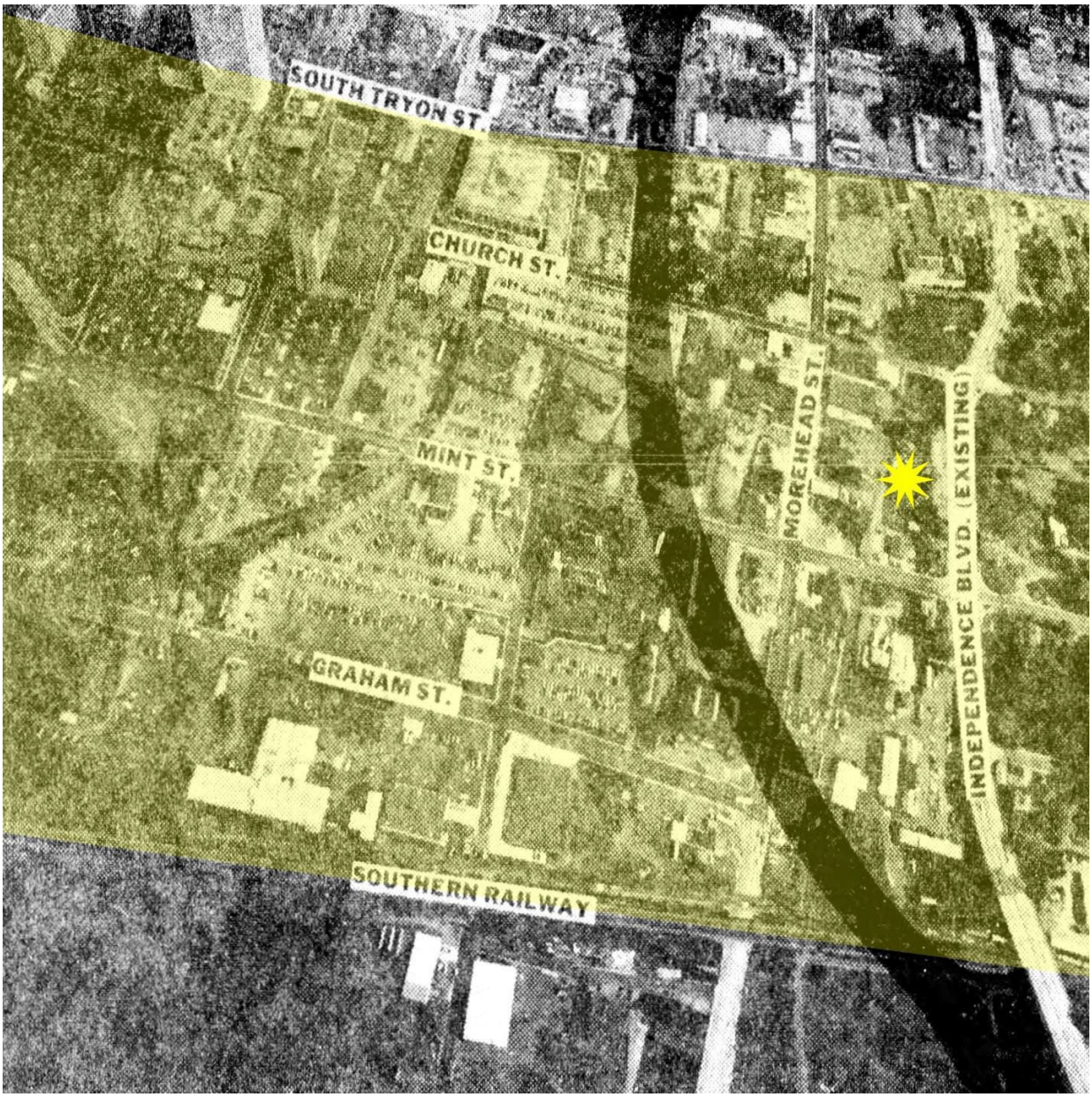

Figure 10 *The proposed route of Independence Freeway, later John Belk Freeway/Interstate 277, effectively cut off Dunbar Street (305 Dunbar marked by the yellow star) and the southern portion of Third Ward (the entirety of which is highlighted in yellow) from the center city core. Charlotte Observer, May 8, 1978.*

[23] "Demolition," *Charlotte News*, February 25, 1965.
[24] Mecklenburg County Deed Book 2757, Page 523; Charlotte City Council Minutes, August 8, 1966.

Gradually, the number of houses along Dunbar Street dwindled. By 1977 only around 90 families remained in the Third Ward area designated as West Morehead, with 30 having been relocated over the previous twelve months. As Third Ward transitioned from a residential neighborhood to a commercial area, the city began to officially abandon streets, including Palmer Street (between Jefferson Street and Winnifred Street) in October 1982, as well as an alley portion of South Church Street. Two years earlier, South Church Street between Carson Boulevard and West Bland Street had been abandoned. With the construction of the I-277 John Belk Freeway around the southern portion of uptown Charlotte, Dunbar Street was cut off from Third Ward, and the portion west of South Mint Street was removed.[25]

The Franks Family

Three generations of the Franks family experienced the tumultuous change of Dunbar Street from part of the Third Ward Black neighborhood to a residential island within a commercial and industrial area of the city separated from the center city core by a freeway. Just before Christmas in 1949, Arthur and Bessie Franks made a down payment of $100 to purchase a house at 305 Dunbar Street from Earl and Carrie Davis. As daughter Jessie Franks Irby would say later, she was excited to have a larger home where she did not have to share a bedroom with her parents or wake up in the middle of the night because the rent collector was banging on the door. They would have a bathroom in the house rather than the outhouse in the backyard. For the Franks family, this was a major improvement over the shotgun houses they had rented on South Graham and South Mint Streets since 1925.[26]

Figure 11 *Bessie and Arthur Franks pose by their house at 305 Dunbar Street in the early 1950s. "The Roses Remain," Charlotte Observer, October 17, 1999.*

Arthur Franks was born in 1906 in Laurens County, South Carolina, the son of farmers Sam and Mattie Franks. He came to Charlotte as a boy to live with an uncle, and it was likely here that he met Bessie Brown. A native of Arkansas, Bessie's family had moved to Spartanburg, South Carolina around 1920. They were married on March 29, 1925, in a ceremony officiated by Rev. W. A. Forney, pastor of Myers Chapel A. M. E. Zion Church in the Cherry neighborhood of Charlotte. Arthur and Bessie had three children, son Arthur Jr. (1925) and daughters Florence Ruth "Tena" (1927) and Jessie Lee (1930).

The Franks family first appeared in the Charlotte city directory in 1928, renting a house for $24 per

[25] "Abandons Streets," *Charlotte News*, October 27, 1982.
[26] "The Roses Remain," *Charlotte Observer*, October 17, 1999.

month at 711 South Graham Street in Third Ward. Arthur worked at Brown's Cafe, though he, his brother Samuel, and roomer Jonah Wilson were recorded as laborers for a building contractor in the 1930 U. S. Census. Arthur's sister Alice also lived with his family. Around 1938-1939, the Franks moved to another rental house at 808 South Mint Street near Good Samaritan Hospital. While this house was much cheaper at $10 per month, it was not in very good condition. There was no running water or electricity, and it was heated by a troublesome wood stove in the kitchen.[27] In September 1949 the *Charlotte News* interviewed a firefighter answering an alarm at the house, which had caught fire from sparks from the stove. He said, "I've been down here three times myself in the last couple of years. Same house. Same roof. Same chimney. Same shingles. It looks like they would get tired." There may have been more calls, as he continued, "I don't know how many times the other shift has been down here."[28]

When Arthur and Bessie purchased the house on Dunbar Street, Jessie remembered that they had to wait to move while her uncle Dan repaired the wood siding on the exterior. Over time, the Franks modernized their home. In August 1955 they had an electric range installed, and in May 1957 they added a water heater. According to a building permit in December 1970 to repair the bathroom floor, the house was heated with oil. A fire damaged the kitchen in winter 1973.[29]

[27] 1928 Charlotte City Directory, 334; 1930 U. S. Census; 1940 U. S. Census.
[28] "Fires at Same Address Become a Bit Monotonous," *Charlotte News*, September 9, 1949.
[29] City of Charlotte Building Permit No. 6762, August 4, 1955; City of Charlotte Building Permit No. 795, May 21, 1957; City of Charlotte Building Permit No. 10,340, December 7, 1970; City of Charlotte Building Permit No. 11,089, February 14, 1973; "The Roses Remain."

Figure 12 *Arthur Franks cuts firewood in 1970. He had lost a leg due to a blood clot but still continued working up in Charlotte's canopy. "Wooden Leg Can't Ground Tree-Man," Charlotte Observer, February 2, 1970.*

Arthur Franks made his living as a tree surgeon. He had begun in the business as a boy, working for an older man in Charlotte for 75 cents a day. They cut down the Wallace Tree on Tryon Street, the "biggest tree in town," and cleared trees from the construction site of the Charlotte Hotel. Arthur worked for his employer for around 20 years, and when the owner retired, "I jus' took up his trade…" Arthur continued in the tree business for at least 50 years. When the *Observer* interviewed him in 1970 after he had lost a leg to a blood clot, Arthur was still working. Bessie recalled that, not long after he left the hospital, he received a call to cut a tree. She said, "And he went out, and

took it down, and he went up in that tree four or five times, to cut limbs. They drawed him up with a rope."[30]

Figure 13 *Arthur and Bessie Franks at their home with family members. Photo courtesy of Regina Irby Jordan.*

The Franks home was a bustling place with many visitors. On Sundays after the family had attended church at nearby First Baptist Church at the corner of South Church and Dunbar Streets, a crowd of up to 50 people—relatives, fellow parishioners, and even a few strangers—would walk down to 305 Dunbar to eat. Jessie said her mother, known to everyone as "Big Mama," would prepare a meal of fried chicken, potato salad, green beans, and cornbread. She would feed everyone, especially people she saw digging in the trash cans for something to eat behind nearby Leon's Grill, telling them, "Come on here. You ain't got to eat out of a trash can." Jessie remembered, "My mother was good to everybody who came there. It was a loving house." Jessie's six children would beg to stay the night with Big Mama, and she would drive them over from their Oaklawn Park home. Daughter Regina and her siblings spent many weekends at their grandparents' house. She remembered her grandmother Bessie kept a very clean house and spread white linens on the dining table. The love in the house was so strong that, ten years after her mother died in 1984, Jessie purchased the shares to the property from her siblings.[31]

[30] "Wooden Leg Can't Ground Tree-Man," *Charlotte Observer*, February 2, 1970.
[31] Regina Irby Jordan telephone interview with Susan V. Mayer, February 26, 2022; "The Roses Remain."

Daughters Tena and Jessie also shared their father's entrepreneurial spirit. Both were trained hair stylists and operated their own salons. Tena opened her first salon, Tena's Little Beauty Shop in a house in Third Ward, which she described as "a hut really."[32] She later opened Tena's House of Charm on Beatties Ford Road. Jessie, who got her start working for Tena at their house in 1945, owned Irby's Salon of Beauty in East Independence Plaza. According to daughter Regina Irby Jordan, Jessie worked until she was well into her nineties. She was honored in 1999 in a Queens University exhibit as one of fourteen women who made substantial contributions to Charlotte's Black community.[33]

Figure 14 *"Tena Doby (right) celebrates the opening of the new location for her hair salon, Tena's House of Charm, with her mother, Bessie Franks, and sister Jessie Franks Irby in 1961." Charlotte Observer, January 15, 2005.*

Arthur passed away in August 1975, and Bessie followed a decade later. The Franks siblings inherited the property, which was now one of a few houses left in the portion of Third Ward cut off from the center city core by the opening of the John Belk Freeway. Family members lived there for a time, and in 1994 Jessie bought out the rest of the family's share in the property. She made repairs and updates to the house, including adding central heat. When the Carolina Panthers began play in their new stadium, Jessie rented out the yard for gameday parking. Finally, in 2017 Jessie sold the property to the owner of the office building behind the house. A branch which once ran behind the Dunbar Street

[32] "She Works with Heads," *Charlotte Observer*, July 5, 1970.
[33] "Queens Exhibit to Honor Black Women," *Charlotte Observer*, April 10, 1999.

houses, which had a plank over it to access Bessie's garden, was gone, but the house remains as a reminder of the once bustling Third Ward neighborhood.[34]

[34] Mecklenburg County Deed Book 7937, Page 991; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 32229, Page 802.

Architectural Description

Figure 15 *View of the Franks House looking south from Dunbar Street.*

The Franks House is located on a 0.084-acre parcel in the highly-urbanized South End neighborhood just outside the center city core of Charlotte. Dunbar Street, a narrow paved street which bears more resemblance to an alley, is surrounded by major arterial roads West Morehead Street (north), South Mint Street (west), Carson Boulevard (south), and South College Street (east). Adjacent properties include a parking lot (west), a low-rise office building (south), vacant lots between the house and the only other remaining former residence at 217 Dunbar Street (east), and the back of commercial properties facing West Morehead Street (north). The parcel is flat with a steep slope at its rear with trees growing at the southwest corner. The house is sited at the west side of the parcel with a grass-grown gravel drive to the left.

Built ca. 1917, the Franks House at 305 Dunbar Street is one of the last remaining extant residences of the Black community of Third Ward. The house is a one- story gabled asphalt-shingled frame bungalow with an ell extending off the back elevation. Vinyl siding and foam insulation have been installed over vertical grooved wood panel siding. Windows have been replaced with double-hung vinyl windows. The house is built upon brick piers with brick stacked along the exterior edge of the foundation. Two brick

chimneys extend through the roofline, one at the front elevation near the side-gabled roof peak, and another at the south elevation of the ell.

The front elevation of the Franks House is approached from Dunbar Street via a concrete ramp. The shed porch is an extension of the side-gabled roofline and has a concrete pad with wrought iron supports and railing. The elevation has two distinct bays— the left bay with a window and four-panel front door with fanlight and screen exterior door, and a gabled bay with a centered window.

Figure 16 *The left elevation looking west.*

The left elevation faces east and provides the best view of the rear ell. This section is also two bays wide. The primary section of the house is gabled with two windows set at either end of the bay, and a louvered vent is located at the gable peak. The rear ell is also gabled, and its bay features a narrow window adjacent to a square brick chimney through the roof eave.

Figure 17 *The right elevation looking east.*

The right elevation faces west and shows the most alterations to the house. A window is located near the front elevation. Centered in this bay are the electrical meter and other utility connections. A six-panel door was added to the right end of the primary mass of the house.

Figure 18 *The rear elevation looking north.*

The gabled ell at the rear elevation has a centered six-panel door accessed by brick steps. A shed porch at the left has been enclosed with a small window added, centered in the side elevation. Visible from this elevation, which faces south, is a window centered in the cross-gabled bay of the primary mass of the house.

Views inside the attic of the Franks House show the quality of construction and materials used ca. 1917.

Figure 19 *A view of the roof structure at the chimney rising through the primary mass of the house. Looking north.*

Figure 20 *Visible are the roof structure and louvered vent in the exterior wall of the left elevation looking east.*

The updates to the Franks House noted above, several of which are no longer reflective of the original construction period, demonstrate both the necessary inclusion of such modern amenities as electricity and indoor plumbing unavailable in that locale at the time of original construction and the economical construction techniques of early twentieth century Black tenant houses in Charlotte. Failure to make those changes over time would have rendered the house uninhabitable and, like the other residences on Dunbar Street, a probable target for demolition. Instead, in part because of those changes and replacement materials, the Franks House has largely retained its original form and mass since 1949. As such, the Franks House has survived as a rare reflection of a bygone past – the simple bungalows and cottages once common to Third Ward before their elimination by Urban Renewal in the 1960s and 1970s. Local landmark designation for the Franks House thereby comports with the recent guidance of the National Council on Public History noted in the Abstract, in that the house provides a singular representation of the working class Third Ward neighborhood, the rental housing constructed by White landlords in the early twentieth century, and the unique transition of the 200- and 300-block of Dunbar Street from tenant-occupied houses to Black-owner-occupied houses. Such stories of the historically marginalized Black community of Charlotte's Third Ward are, in the words of the National Council on Public History, the "more relevant" considerations.[35]

[35] Kautz, Leibowitz, & Doherty, "Repairing National Register nominations: underrepresented communities and integrity."

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