

LOCAL LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT
The Gatekeeper's House, ca. 1888 (Exterior Designation)
312 Lanier Avenue, Asheboro, N.C.
Asheboro Township, Randolph County, N.C.

LOCAL LANDMARK SIGNIFIANCE SUMMARY

Basil John Fisher, a native of Scotland and one of three young British army officers, came to the United States in the mid 1880's to help manage a gold mine in Asheboro, N.C. Fisher acquired a 384-acre estate which centered around Fisher's Road, now known as Sunset Avenue. The property included almost everything west of Park Street between Salisbury Street and Wainman Avenue. Captain Fisher's home was known as the "Mansion House" and stood on the vacant lot just west of the modern Masonic Temple. His home was a two and one-half story structure at least twice the size of any other house in Asheboro. Fisher had many service structures on the estate with the Gatekeeper's House being the only surviving structure. The Gatekeeper's House, constructed in 1888, remained on the original property and served as a private residence for many years. In the Spring of 1964 the house was in danger of being destroyed because of development on the property and was offered to The Asheboro Women's Club, the Asheboro Junior Woman's Club and the Business and Professional Woman's Club. The house was moved to the present location of 312 Lanier Avenue. It is now owned by the Asheboro Woman's Club and is used for various club meetings, weddings, receptions, teas and is notable for being the location of a political rally for former President Bill Clinton when he came to Asheboro campaigning for his wife, Hillary Clinton.

Captain Basil John Fisher moved from Asheboro in 1895 where he acquired a large estate in Greensboro, N.C. His real estate dealings in Greensboro created the elegant turn-of-the-century "Fisher Park" neighborhood which is now a locally designated historic district.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE (Reference Materials)

Architectural History of Randolph County, N.C. Lowell McKay Whatley, Jr., Randolph County 1779-1979, Randolph County Historical Society, Randolph Arts Guild, City of Asheboro, and Randolph County, A Brief History, L. Barron Mills Jr.

The end of Asheboro's post civil war slump seems to have been signaled by a "wave" of immigration. The arrival of three young foreigners between July and November, 1886, produced a cultural impact on the town second only to the impending arrival of the railroad. The population of Asheboro had remained static for nearly a century and most families were related in some way. Basil John Fisher, C. Slingsby Wainman, and Charles St. George Winn were the vanguard of outside residents the railroad was destined to introduce. The nationality, strange

ways and free spending immediately set them apart from the Asheboro townspeople, who accorded all three the deferential title of “Captain”. One tradition says that the three were British army officers retired from service in India, who had been recruited to manage one of the county’s gold mines. This might have basis in fact, for the Hoover Hill gold mine was then owned by a syndicate based in London. Taking up temporary residence in the Central Hotel, all three men seem to have completed homes within the next two years.

These three homes, including the Fisher Gatekeepers House, are an example of the standard North Carolina vernacular central-gable houses, which boasted elaborate eave and porch post brackets, a sawn-baluster porch railing and arched window sashes set in pedimented frames. Such materials were available in ready-made form from local “sash and blind” factories throughout the state. The W.C. Petty Company in Archdale could have provided the trim for the houses including the Gatekeepers House.

Fisher, the wealthiest of the three men, acquired a 384-acre estate. His land centered around what is now Sunset Avenue (then called Fisher’s Road) and included almost everything west of Park Street, Salisbury Street and Wainman Avenue. His home was universally called the “Mansion House” and stood on the vacant lot just west of the modern Masonic Temple. The 1890’s saw the deaths of one of Fisher’s young daughters and both of his British friends. It may have been the weight of this tragedy which in about 1895 caused him to sell his estate and move to Greensboro. The Fisher estate was then subdivided, opening up much of west Asheboro to construction and development. In 1919, the Fisher mansion was converted into Asheboro’s second hospital, which closed in 1931. On October 21, 1934, the former mansion was completely destroyed by fire.

The Gatekeepers House is the last surviving structure from this estate. In 1964, the Gatekeepers House was in danger of being destroyed because of development on the property. The house is now owned by the Asheboro Woman’s Club after being moved to its present location of 312 Lanier Avenue.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Like most 19th century residences the architecture is a combination of styles. It has a few Victorian elements: wrap-around porches and decorative moldings; but the pointed arches over each window are reminiscent of the Second Gothic Revival. The interior has survived thanks to several “face lifts” by Interior Design students at Randolph Community College, and the constant care by the members of the Asheboro Woman’s Club. What might be an ordinary cottage seems extraordinarily spacious due to lofty 12’ ceilings and an open floor plan. Original wavy glass panes remain in many of windows and 6” heart pine flooring has been maintained. Recent renovations to the interior, by the Woman’s Club, includes adding vintage lighting, butter colored walls and accenting the original moldings and windows. The exterior was also repaired and painted.

The Gatekeeper's House has retained the architectural integrity of the original structure and is noted for its elaborate eaves and porch post brackets. It has sawn baluster porch railings and arched window sashes set in pedimented frames. Such materials were available from local "sash and blind" factories throughout the state. There have been no alterations or remodeling to the exterior of the structure. In 2006 a handicap ramp was added to the east side of the house.

MAP, PLANS, & PHOTOS

A Geographical Information System (GIS) air photograph map, (produced by the Randolph County Planning Department reflecting the structure and its relation to nearby structures and streets is included as part of this report. Floor plans are maintained by the Randolph County Tax Department and are available for review by the Randolph County Historic Landmark Commission. Digital photographs, including interior, are submitted as part of this report.

STATEMENT OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The ca. 1888 Fisher Estate Gatekeepers House meets local historic landmark criteria as it represents identification with a person who significantly contributed to cultural, historic, and economic development of the City of Asheboro and Randolph County, N.C. Its unique location represents an established and familiar visual feature of the City of Asheboro and Randolph County, N.C.

Hal Johnson, Chairman
Randolph County Historic Landmark Commission