United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 17). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property
   - historic name: Neill-Turner-Lester House
   - other names/site number: Five Oaks; Neill-Lester House

2. Location
   - street & number: N side SR 1836, 0.25 mi. NE of jct. w/SR 1837 (end of SR for publication
   - city, town: Sherrills Ford
   - state: North Carolina
   - county: Catawba
   - code: 035
   - zip code: 28673

3. Classification
   - Ownership of Property: private
   - Category of Property: building(s)
   - Number of Resources within Property: Contributing 1, Noncontributing 1
   - Name of related multiple property listing:
     Historic & Architectural Resources of Catawba County, N.C.

4. State/Federal Agency Certification
   - As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination / request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets / does not meet the National Register criteria. [ ] See continuation sheet.
   - Signature of certifying official: [Signature]
   - Date: March 8, 1990

5. National Park Service Certification
   - I hereby certify that this property is:
     - [ ] entered in the National Register.
     - [ ] See continuation sheet.
     - [ ] determined eligible for the National Register. [ ] See continuation sheet.
     - [ ] determined not eligible for the National Register.
     - [ ] removed from the National Register.
     - [ ] other, (explain):

   - Signature of the Keeper: [Signature]
   - Date of Action: [Date]

[Form 10-900a]
The Neill-Turner-Lester House is a two-story frame dwelling with an unusual architectural history. Believed to have been built in the first quarter of the nineteenth century during the ownership of William Neill, the house retains some of the most impressive Federal style interior detailing in Catawba County. Around 1889, Charles Henry Lester, the county's first architect, remodelled the house, adding rooms and creating the Italianate-inspired classical exterior seen today. At the same time, Lester apparently respected the quality and elegance of the Federal interiors, for he preserved most of that detailing and reproduced some of it for use in his alterations so that they would be compatible with the original character of the house. The Neill-Turner-Lester House is one of only three dwellings remaining in Catawba County known to have been designed or remodelled by Lester. (The other two are the T. F. Connor House, listed on the National Register as part of the Terrell Historic District, and the M. A. Sherrill House, near Sherrill, which is being nominated with this Multiple Property Listing.)

The Neill-Turner-Lester House ("A" on the attached Sketch Map) is located off SR 1836 near Sherrills Ford in eastern Catawba County. A long, winding lane bordered by woods and cultivated fields leads to the house, which faces southeast in its quiet rural setting which for the purposes of this nomination is limited to the yard immediately surrounding the house. This boundary house is surrounded by large oak and cedar trees. Beyond the immediate yard, the land slopes gradually downward to the river (not visible from the house).

Originally the Neill-Turner-Lester House was a rectangular structure -- three bays wide and one room deep with shed room and porch on the rear -- with gable roof, exterior end chimneys and small entrance portico. While many of these features remain, the present exterior appearance of the house owes largely to the remodelling efforts of C. H. Lester in the late nineteenth century. Italianate classicism superseded the earlier Federal style appearance. The house is still three bays wide with the main body being one room deep, but has expanded beyond the original
configuration. Now a one-story classical porch, with shed roof, Doric posts, full entablature and pedimented projecting center bay, occupies the full length of the southeast facade. A 1952 photograph shows that the porch then had a fancy sawnwork balustrade, but that had been removed by 1970, the wooden porch floor replaced with concrete, and the whole porch enclosed with screening. Projecting above the center bay of the porch is a second story room with Italianate pedimented windows of four-over-four sash with pilastered surrounds. The house is flanked on northeast and southwest by the original Flemish bond brick chimneys with handsome ramped shoulders and banded caps. The east end chimney on the original section of the house was cracked by an 1886 earthquake and an iron rod has since been attached for reinforcement. A two-story wing projects from the rear (northwest) center bay of the house and slopes downward to one-story height on the southwest end, incorporating the original rear porch. Beyond this wing and the original rear shed room is a one-story rear ell, added by Lester, with gable roof, enclosed porch on the southwest side and common bond brick chimney on the northeast side. The exterior of the house also features weatherboard siding, a gabled roof with overhanging bracketed eaves, a stone pier foundation now infilled with cinderblocks, nine-over-nine sash windows on the first story, nine-over-six sash on the second story, and six-light windows in each gable with outside upper corners clipped to accommodate the slope of the roof. What appear to be original louvered shutters with wrought iron strap hinges remain on the first story windows, while the second story windows apparently never had shutters. The six-panel front door with four-light transom remains intact. Front door and windows all have double-faced casings with beaded inner edges and molded backbands.

The interior of the Neill-Turner-Lester House is simple in form but elegantly sophisticated in detail. The original Federal style appearance of the interior remains largely intact. The major changes made by C. H. Lester in his late nineteenth century remodelling include the removal of the original stairway, the addition of a partition on the second floor to create a center hall, the addition of the second floor center bay front room for use as his office, the enclosure of the back porch along with the addition of the two-story rear wing to create the present stairway to the second floor, and the addition of the one-story rear ell for kitchen and (eventually) bathroom.

The five rooms (including the rear shed room) of the origi-
natural hall-and-parlor plan house are treated in similar fashion. Walls and ceilings are flush-sheathed, and six-panel doors and paneled wainscot remain in all the rooms. Some of the original hardware, e.g. box locks and wrought iron strap hinges, are intact. Originally all, or most, of the woodwork was grained or marbled, but nearly all of this was painted over in the mid twentieth century. Only the door and wainscot of the shed room and the second story northeast room mantel retain their fancy grained and stippled surfaces.

The first floor northeast room is identified as the most prominent room in the house by its large size and dentiled cornice. All other rooms have a more simple molded cornice. The original stairway -- now removed -- rose from back to front along the southwest partition wall. Another notable feature of this room is the nine-over-nine sash "window" on the northwest wall. It has mirrored rather than clear glass panes and balances the real window on the front wall.

Perhaps the most outstanding interior feature of the Neill-Turner-Lester House is the collection of three original mantels, (There had been four, however, the mantel in the upstairs northeast bedroom has been removed recently.) each an impressive display of the Federal style. The two first story mantels are the largest and the most ornate of the four. While these two are similar in many ways, they differ in some of their detailing. Each is a tripartite mantel with heavily molded and blocked mantel shelf and paneled and blocked frieze whose recessed panels have quarter-circle cut-outs in the corners and whose raised blocks are ornamented with similar fan or leaf-like motifs. The northeast room mantel has slender turned colonettes flanking the firebox, while in the southwest room pairs of slender fluted pilasters flank the firebox. Each of the mantels has fluted bands arranged in different ways. The smaller and slightly less elaborate mantel of the second floor relates in design to its corresponding mantels on the first floor. It is a tripartite mantel with heavily molded and blocked mantel shelf and frieze with fluted raised blocks and plain recessed panels. This mantel in the southwest room has fluted pilasters.

Other interior features include a modern kitchen, bathroom and pantry in the first story ell and a transverse stairhall behind the southwest room which leads to the second floor. The rear of the second floor includes the late nineteenth century stairway, two closets, and the enclosed stair to the attic, which
Neill-Turner-Lester House is entered from the transverse hall and protrudes into the southwest front room. The second floor partition which architect Lester added in the late nineteenth century removes space from the northeast room to create a center hall. It duplicates the paneled wainscot of the other walls. An enlarged doorway near the front of the hall leads to the southwest room, and the room that served as Lester's office (he had another office in Statesville) is entered from the front end of the hall. With its tall four-over-four sash windows on three sides, this office room is light and airy (and must have been a pleasant place in which to work.) While the original wide board flooring remains on the second story, that of the first story was covered during the mid twentieth century with narrow board oak flooring.

No outbuildings of significance remain with the Neill-Turner-Lester House today. Sharing the house lot with the house is a modern mobile home (B, noncontributing).

Note: 
Neill-Turner-Lester House, Catawba County, N.C.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally  ☑ statewide  ☐ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria

☑ A  ☑ B  ☑ C  ☒ D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)

☐ A  ☐ B  ☐ C  ☐ D  ☐ E  ☒ F  ☐ G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architecture</th>
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Period of Significance

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<th>ca. 1820; ca. 1877- ca. 1927</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Significant Dates</th>
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<td>ca. 1820</td>
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<td>ca. 1889</td>
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Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Lester, Charles Henry

Architect/Builder

Lester, Charles Henry

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Summary

The **Neill-Turner-Lester House** is a unique circa 1820 Federal style frame farmhouse built by early settler William Neill, which in the late nineteenth century was owned and renovated by Catawba County's first architect, Charles Henry Lester. The house is located near Sherrill's Ford, on the banks of the Catawba River/Lake Norman in southeast Catawba County. William Neill and his son William were typical antebellum farmers, as was Fielding Turner, who purchased the farm in 1850. Turner's daughter Susan married the architect Lester, a native of Connecticut, in 1877, and she inherited the house and farm. In 1889 Lester remodelled the house, adding an Italianate Revival style front porch supporting a central second story gabled office room for himself, while retaining the important Federal features of the house. The house is significant under Criterion B because it was the principal residence and office of noted Catawba County architect Charles Henry Lester from circa 1877 throughout his productive career, which ended circa 1927. The house is significant under Criterion C both as a significant example of Federal style architecture in Catawba County and for its Italianate Revival remodelling circa 1889 (Property Type: "Houses of Catawba County: Antebellum & Postbellum.") The interior is particularly noteworthy for its Federal detailing including panelled wainscot (some retaining original grained and stippled surfaces), dentilled and molded cornices and elaborate tripartite mantelpieces.

[See continuation sheet]
The Neil-Turner-Lester House is located near Sherrill's Ford in the Mountain Creek Township of southeast Catawba County. Situated only a few hundred yards from the Catawba River, it is one of the few ancestral homes in the area not lost to the waters of Lake Norman in 1963. The oldest and central section of the present structure, probably built around 1820 by William Neill, is a two-story Federal style plantation house with end chimneys. In 1889 the house was significantly altered with the addition of several rear rooms, a full-length front porch with classical details, and a gable-roofed second-story room over the porch. Charles Henry Lester, Catawba County's first architect and then a resident of the house, was responsible for the renovations. Lester's daughter and son-in-law have occupied the house in recent years.

It is impossible to determine the original construction date with any certainty from available records. Some accounts have suggested that the house may have been built around 1770 (thus making it one of the oldest houses in the county). Yet the architectural style and an examination of its fabric indicate that it was constructed around 1820. William Neill (also spelled as Neil or Nail) owned the property during those years. He had patented several grants in the vicinity of the Catawba River as early as 1795 and had acquired other tracts by purchase. On November 29, 1809, he married Elizabeth Neil. Thus, it is a reasonable assumption that the house was built in the years after his marriage when his family began to grow in size. Neill was a small farmer; he owned six slaves in 1810 and nine in 1820. Upon his death in 1829 Neill provided that his widow should receive various personal items including kitchen furniture and beds, plus $100 for "the good maintenance of the plantation I now live on." He left various combinations of land, cash, and other items to his children. To his son and namesake William he left "the tract of land I now live on in Lincoln [now Catawba] County and his choice of three Negroes," plus farming tools, a wagon, and half of his household furniture.

The younger William Neill was also a farmer, though on a scale somewhat larger than his father. He owned fourteen slaves in 1830 and nine in 1840, a year in which he paid tax on 260 acres. In addition to the land he had received from his father Neill had a ten-acre island in the Catawba River, since known as Neill Island, by way of a land grant from the state in 1830.
Neill's agricultural pursuits were typical of the yeoman farmer of the antebellum period, yet his budgeting of the proceeds apparently was inadequate. In 1849 he had accumulated a $1,999 debt which he could not pay. As a result the Catawba County sheriff sold his 260 acres in the following year to the highest bidder. Fielding Turner—(1814-1866) purchased the property on April 8, 1850, for a price of $3,015.50. Although other members of the Turner family were involved in textiles, notably Columbus Lafayette Turner with his operations upstream at Monbo and Long Island in the postwar years, Fielding Turner was strictly a farmer. Even before he purchased Neill's property he ran a sizable farming operation. In 1840 he paid tax on 200 acres and three slaves. In 1860 he estimated the value of his newly-acquired 260 acres at $4,000; his fourteen slaves were adjudged a value of $5,930. He cultivated 100 of those acres, with plantings of corn, wheat, and a small amount of cotton. He kept some livestock, principally sheep, swine, and cattle. Fielding Turner and his wife, the former Paulina Ward (1814?-1890?), had six children, three daughters and three sons. Their oldest daughters, Jane and Nancy, married into the Shufords and Sherrills, two locally prominent families. Their oldest son, Josephus (1841-1894), enlisted as private in Company A of the Twelfth Regiment of North Carolina troops, known as the "Catawba Rifles," in 1861. Following his discharge in 1863 (for unaccounted reasons), he studied medicine. He was the only practicing physician in the Sherrill's Ford area during the latter part of the nineteenth century. He apparently remained single and continued to live with his mother and sister Susan for much of that time. In 1889 he served a single term in the state senate. Fielding Turner's second son John (1843-1863) enlisted in Company C of the Twenty-Eighth Regiment, comprised entirely of Catawba soldiers, in 1861. He died of injuries received at Spotsylvania, Virginia, in 1863. Fielding Turner's remaining son, Alonzo, was too young for the war and was, like his father, a farmer. The family's youngest, Susan (1855-1928), married Charles Henry Lester and inherited the homeplace following the death of her father in 1866 and of her mother around 1890.

Fielding Turner's death came at the age of fifty-two, near the end of the year 1866. With the division of his estate in January 1867, each of the surviving children received a tract of land with cash compensation to account for any differences in value. Susan Turner received the house and lot of 140 acres with
an estimated value of $1,500. However, it is apparent that her mother Paulina retained ownership through her lifetime. In the 1870s and 1880s she was annually taxed on 148 acres with a value of from $1,550 to $2,050. In addition she also paid taxes on two houses, two mules, four or five heads of cattle, and about ten hogs. About 100 acres of the farm were cultivated by either family members or renters with plantings primarily in corn and wheat as well as an acre each of apple and peach trees. The exact date of Paulina Turner's death was not determined; however her name dropped from tax lists after 1890 when she was in her mid-seventies.17

Charles Henry Lester (24 May 1849-1940) married Susan Turner on January 24, 1877. Born in New London, Connecticut, he came to Catawba County in 1872. Generally regarded as Catawba County's first architect, Lester was responsible for building many homes in the county in the late nineteenth century. He also built the cotton mill at Monbo, the school at Sherrill's Ford, and the Hub Theater in Hickory, as well as buildings in Statesville (where he kept a second office), Winston, and at Davidson College.18 Lester did not describe himself as an "architect," a term which as used today would not describe the work he did. His description of himself as a "house carpenter" in the 1880 census and a "brick contractor" in the 1900 listing give a better approximation of his work.19

The first of Charles and Susan Lester's six children was born in 1879, and the last in 1896. Thus the enlargement of the house in circa 1889 was carried out, in part, to provide space for their growing family. In addition, Lester built for himself a home office over the full-length porch (in recent years it has been screened in). Other renovations included a new stairway to the second floor and the construction of several rooms to the rear of the house, among them the first inside kitchen (the outbuilding formerly used for that purpose was destroyed in the 1930s). Lester called the place "Five Oaks" after the large trees which provide the house with abundant shade. A few years after the death of his mother-in-law Paulina Turner, C. H. Lester paid taxes on 148 acres valued at $1,600.20 Susan Lester died at the age of seventy-three in 1928 and left all her property to her husband.

C. H. Lester's productive years were spent designing a variety of buildings in Catawba County, however, exact dates on many of these are not available. It is known that he built the
Sherrills Ford School in 1922, when he was 73 years old, and is believed to have built the Balls Creek School in 1927. These are presumably some of the last buildings for which he was responsible. He continued to live in his house, later in his life sharing it with his daughter and her husband until his death in 1940 at the age of ninety-one.  

Lina Lester, the youngest child of C. H. and Susan Lester, born in March 1896, married Albert Setzer in 1925. In 1929 the elder Lester sold them the ten-acre island in the Catawba River. Presumably they were not consigned to dwell on it but were allowed to live in the main house. Albert Setzer, member of an established Catawba County family, cultivated parts of the farm until his later years. He was also a fox hunter and raised champion hounds on the property. In 1941 Albert and Lina Setzer received from the other heirs of C. H. Lester all rights to the property. The Setzers were residents of the house through the 1970s.
FOOTNOTES

1Catawba Weekender, 30 April 1965. The name of Scruggins (or Scroggins) has also been associated with the house. Yet an examination of census records and deed books for Lincoln (later Catawba) County in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries turned up no one in the area by that name.


3Lincoln County Marriage Bonds, North Carolina State Archives.

4Third and Fourth Censuses, 1810, 1820.

5Lincoln County Will Book 1, p. 156.

6Fifth and Sixth Censuses, 1830, 1840; Lincoln County Tax Records, North Carolina State Archives.

7Lincoln County Land Grants, Book 6, p. 457.

8Catawba County Deed Book 3, p. 630.

9On C. L. Turner and his textile mills, see Hickory Daily Record, 25 August 1965.

10Lincoln County Tax Records, North Carolina State Archives.

11Eighth Census, 1860, Population, Slave, and Agricultural Schedules.


Catawba County Estates Records, Fielding Turner folder, North Carolina State Archives; Catawba County Deed Book 6, p. 69, and Minute Docket Book 1, p. 316.

Catawba County Tax Records, North Carolina State Archives; Tenth Census, 1880, Population and Agricultural Schedules.

Newton News-Enterprise, 14 May 1979; Hickory Daily Record, 14 July 1965. Among the Catawba houses which Lester built was Monbo Heights, the home of textile mill founder C. L. Turner. Described as "the focal point of area society at the turn of the century," the house later burned. Turner's Monbo Mills were completely destroyed by the 1916 flood of the Catawba River.

Tenth and Twelfth Censuses, 1880, 1900, Population Schedules. An exhibit featuring C. H. Lester's tools and supplies was held at the Catawba County Historical Museum in 1979.

Catawba County Tax Records, North Carolina State Archives. Lester was also taxed on his library, tools, furniture, and gun in the 1890s.

Catawba County Will Book 5, p. 47. C. H. Lester last paid taxes in 1935. In that year, however, the tax lists indicate that his son-in-law Albert Setzer had assumed the responsibility of paying a portion of the tax.

Newton Observer, 23 June 1952.

Catawba County Deed Books 314, p. 543; 323, p. 61; and 178, p. 557.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Catawba Weekender, 30 April 1965.


Newton Observer, 23 June 1952.


Neill-Turner-Lester House, Catawba County, N.C.

3. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67)
has been requested

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings

Survey # __________________________

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering

Record # __________________________

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one (1) acre.

UTM References

A Zone 17 Easting 51 0 3 0 Northing 3 9 4 9 0 0

C Zone Easting Northing

B Zone Easting Northing

D Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The Neill-Turner-Lester House lot follows the fence line delineating
the rectilinear house yard. Specifically, begin at the West corner of the fence; then
turn Northwest, go 211 feet; then turn Northeast, go 173 feet; then turn Southeast, go
211 feet; then turn Southwest, go 173 feet (following across the driveway in a straight
line where there is a gap in the fence line) to the beginning point, which is the West
corner of the fenced yard.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries are drawn to include the immediately surrounding yard as setting for
the historic resource and to exclude noncontributing outbuildings on associated acreage.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Barbara Kooiman, compiler; Laura A. W. Phillips, description; Michael Hill, history
organization Catawba County Historical Assn., Inc.
date 7/29/89
street & number Rt. 1, Box 76 AB
city or town Conover
state N.C. zip code 28613
telephone 704/256-3040

See continuation sheet
Except as otherwise noted, the following pertains to all photographs:

1) Neill-Turner-Lester House
2) Sherrills Ford vicinity, North Carolina
3) Laura Phillips
4) March 1983
5) North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, NC

A. 3) Barbara Kooiman
   4) June 1989
   6) Exterior, north

B. 6) Exterior, northwest (Note: shed in background has been replaced by mobile home.)

C. 3) F. Bogue Wallin
   4) April 1979
   6) Exterior, west

D. 6) First floor, northeast room, mantel

E. 6) Second floor, southwest room, mantel

F. 6) Wainscot and door of shed room

G. 6) Second floor hallway

NOTE: Most of the photos used in this nomination were taken in 1983 and 1979. All resources have been thoroughly field checked by Barbara Kooiman in 1989 and, with the exception of untended foliage and weathering of exterior surfaces as shown in photo A, have been determined to be unchanged from their appearance and condition portrayed in photographs taken prior to 1989.
NEILL-TURNER-LESTER HOUSE
CATAWBA COUNTY, N.C.
SHERRILL'S FORD VICINITY
SECTION 4 MC, BLOCK 2, LOT 5 (partial)

BUILDINGS
A- NEILL-TURNER-LESTER HOUSE (C)
B- MOBILE HOME (NC)

SCALE
1" = 100' (approx.)
C = contributing
NC = noncontributing

Map Drawn by B. Koimian, 7/89
Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS and USC&GS
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1965. Field checked 1969
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grid based on North Carolina coordinate system