

**Historic Research and Landmark Identification
for
Raleigh's Regional Kit Homes and Plan Book Houses**

**Phase 1 Report
Identification of Source Materials
and
Recommendations for Full Context Report
(Phase 2)**

by

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Research Methodology and Summary of Findings

In my previous work with RHDC, I had begun some research at Standard Homes Plan Services (formerly Standard Homes) regarding modern house plans from the 1950s and early 1960s for documentation related to preparing the Battery Heights and Rochester Heights National Register nominations. In this research, I had worked closely with Leigh Cameron, owner/manager of the company, and knew they had quite an extensive collection of house plans from this time period. I therefore began my research by contacting Leigh to let her know about the project and what we were focusing upon. In addition to interviewing Leigh, I conducted an inventory of plan books which the company was using in the Raleigh area from 1926 through 1960. Jennifer Carpenter has scanned the house plan books from 1926 through the 1940s, and there are additional 18" x 24" house plan books from the 1940s that are part of the company archives which may be donated by the company to State Archives and would be available for scanning with a larger flatbed scanner. While Standard Homes did not open an office in Raleigh until 1937, I was pleased to learn that their 1920s house plans were being sold and built in the Raleigh area.¹

The RFQ also mentioned the possibility of Carolina Builders Corporation providing kits or plan books. I contacted Henry Warren, Communication and Business Specialist with Stock Supply Company (formerly Carolina Builders). Mr. Warren then gave me names of additional builders in the Raleigh area, some of whom had been in the construction business since the early part of the twentieth century. This led me to conduct interviews with several individuals, including Paul Casey, Eugene Perry, David Creech, and Smedes York. These interviews all revealed important information, much of which is applicable to this project and is noted in greater detail below.

None of these interviews, with Standard Homes, or descendants of builders, revealed any information about companies that provided full kit homes like Sears Roebuck and others had done. The closest were some of the isometric plans provided by Standard Homes, which are discussed below. It appears that Carolina Builders did not provide plans or kits, but often worked with Standard Homes and other draftsmen who provided house plans. Carolina Builders was the main building supply company in Raleigh from their founding in 1922, and it appears that the company's officers may have been involved in speculative building, or perhaps as the "holding company" for other builders' speculative ventures. There was a construction loan division of Carolina Builders Corporation, and they often served as a "bank" for local builders, providing financing at a lower cost than conventional banks, and providing building materials. C. V. York began work in Raleigh as early as 1910, and built many speculative houses in early Raleigh neighborhoods, more detail of which is noted below.

¹ The 1926 plan book notes "Standard Lumber and Construction Company", Tucker Building, Raleigh on the front cover. Leigh Cameron, owner/manager of Standard Home Plan Services, clarified that often local companies would advertise on Standard Homes' catalogs, if plans were being sold in a particular area. Standard Lumber was one of those companies (interview with Sybil H. Argintar, November 17, 2011).

Additionally, I explored city directories for more information on builders and building supply companies, including advertisements. I also searched in directories for information about the principal officers of Carolina Builders Corporation and others, and I followed up with that in seeing where these officers had built their own houses or potentially bought lots for spec houses. Some of these have been photographed. Often, in deed records, the plat and lot locations are noted, so I was able to begin photographing some potential early homes built by these companies. In interviewing Smedes York, he loaned me a copy of a book about his father and grandfather, which has also revealed some early houses built by York Construction (noted below). Old newspapers were also reviewed, for advertisements and information about Raleigh building companies.

There are additional sources to be explored, as noted below, in order to develop a full historic context for Phase 2 of the project, but it would appear there is a large amount of available resources for developing an historic context and for documenting Raleigh houses that were built from Standard Homes house plans or others, or were built by some of the most prominent builders/developers in the city.

Documentation to Date

Carolina Builders Corporation

Carolina Builders Corporation was incorporated on May 26, 1922 (North Carolina Secretary of State Certificate of Incorporation). Their place of business was 219 North Dawson Street in Raleigh, a building which is no longer extant. The purpose of the corporation, as noted in the incorporation papers, was to "...conduct and operate lumber mills, planing mills, finishing, cutting, dressing and drying lumber plants, for the purpose of buying, selling and trading in all kinds and grades of lumber and lumber material....to operate brick plants, kilns, cement plants, and any other manufacturing plant, and to buy, sell and deal in any of the above named materials, or any other materials or commodities or products, at retail or wholesale, and to operate a finishing lumber plant, especially suited and fitted for the handling of finishing materials for building of residences and other houses...to operate wood and coal yards, at retail and wholesale; to handle sewer pipe, terra-cotta, and other building material of every kind and description, and to have a right to manufacture same ready for market, or purchase same as either jobber or wholesaler". The company, as noted above, was set up as a building materials manufacturer and supplier as its primary purpose. The original shareholders included T. B. Ward of Wilson, North Carolina; J. J. Barnes of Raleigh, North Carolina, and S. B. Ballentine, of Rocky Mount, North Carolina, each owning a third of the company.

However, in interviewing Henry Warren, the senior employee and communication/business specialist at Stock Supply Company (as Carolina Builders Corporation is now known), he noted that in addition to supplying materials, the company had an active construction loan division which worked closely with many Raleigh developers, and that Benson himself developed land. Builders would buy land through them at a lower interest rate than banks were offering, use their materials, and often utilize Standard Homes plans. Often builders were building houses

on a speculative basis, but some were for specific clients. Mr. Warren also noted that Ben Taylor, a local architect, also developed a lot of plans.²

City directory research, beginning in 1922, noted that the officers of the company included Baxter B. Benson (president 1922 – 1955); J. J. Barnes (Secretary-Treasurer 1922 - 1927); W. H. Bason (sales manager 1923 to 1924; Vice-President 1925 to 1941); R. T. Vick (Secretary-Treasurer 1928 – 1941); T. B. Ward (Vice-President 1922 – 1925); Ralph L. Moore (Vice-President 1942 - 1953); J. Y. Hornbuckle (Secretary 1942 to at least 1960); and Clifton L. Benson, nephew of B. B. Benson, (Treasurer 1942 to at least 1960).³ Additional officers, in the more recent years of the company, have included Ralph K. Ingram (Vice-President 1954 to at least 1960); M. Ray Descaro (Vice-President 1954 – 1955); and T. Grady Boykin (Vice-President 1958 to at least 1960). While not yet fully documented, a perusal of deed indexes where the company officers were listed as grantees and grantors, indicates many of them were actively involved either as a “holding” entity for the construction loans, or perhaps as speculative development on their own, of numerous Raleigh properties.⁴

It is clear, however, that the company, Carolina Builders Corporation, was involved in development, since they are listed as a grantor of several properties in the Raleigh neighborhoods of Bloomsbury, Boylan Heights, Glenwood, Oakwood, Mordecai Place, and Hayes-Barton. They granted, in the time period of 1925 to 1938, at least thirteen properties to individuals for building houses, possibly speculatively, but more likely as part of their construction loan division. After World War II, they continued in this capacity, selling, in the time period of 1948 to the early 1960s, at least twenty-seven properties (Wake County Deed Indices, 1922 to 1962). A few of these houses have been located and photographed and are included at the end of this report.⁵

While the speculation going into this project was that Carolina Builders Corporation also sold kit homes, it does not appear that this was the case. However, they were a significant company involved not only in supplying materials for the building booms in Raleigh in the 1920s and later, but were serving as developers of the community as well through their construction loan programs.

² Warren, Henry. Interview with Sybil Argintar, November 3, 2011.

³ B. B. Benson, in his obituary of February 1, 1955, is noted as the founder and president of Carolina Builders Corporation, along with serving as president of First Federal Savings and Loan. Benson was a member of the Raleigh City Council. His home, at the time of his death, was located at 2115 Woodland Avenue.

⁴ B. B. Benson bought at least twenty-two lots; J. J. Barnes bought eighteen lots; H. G. Moore bought five lots; W. H. Bason bought five lots; R. T. Vick bought three properties; Ralph L. Moore bought ten lots; J. Y. Hornbuckle bought four tracts; M. Ray Descaro bought a single lot of 17.5 acres; and C. L. Benson bought six tracts.

⁵ In viewing the Standard Homes house plan books from the 1920s, a couple of these homes have been tentatively identified as using their plans. These are noted with the photographs.

Standard Homes Company

Standard Homes Company, founded in 1921 by A. Gales Johnson in Washington, D.C., became one of the largest plan book companies in the nation. Johnson, who began his interest in home building in Detroit, Michigan in 1916, through his work with Lewis Ready Cut Homes, quickly moved to setting up his own company, United Home Builders, and served as a salesman for many Detroit contractors. At this time, he developed his first plan book. World War I halted his plans for a bit, but he then moved to Toledo, Ohio and concentrated on selling plan books. In 1921 he moved to Washington, D.C. and set up shop there as Standard Homes Company, where he continued to sell books until 1950. In 1937, Johnson set up a southern office in Raleigh, North Carolina, which has remained in business until today.

The company through the years has employed many draftsmen and architects to develop standardized plans and work with customers in modifying these plans to suit their individual needs.⁶ Typically, the plan books would include a photograph of a built home, with some minor modifications available at a small additional cost. The individual or a builder would select a plan, which included a list of materials, and then construct a home. A full set of plans could be purchased, typically for \$20, which included a foundation plan, floor plan, elevations, framing sections, and detail sheets, along with the materials list. In the company archives are copies of plan books from as early as 1926, many of which, according to Leigh Cameron, were used in the Raleigh area since Johnson often sold plans throughout the southeast even before he opened the Raleigh office. In addition to the floor plans and photos of the books, there were notable quotations added which created a view into the some of the social history of the time. A typical one in a 1926 catalog noted that "...large, cumbersome kitchens are no longer wanted by the modern, efficient housewife who does her own work...". These plans included more compact kitchen designs.

The company did not produce any new plans through the 1930s, but was in full force again beginning in the 1940s and on through the post-World War II boom times. Full kits, including pre-cut lumber, were not what Standard sold, but they came close to this with their 1940s isometric plans, which were intended to be used by the average homeowner to serve as his own general contractor. These drawings were fully three-dimensional and showed exactly how everything was to be put together. Materials still had to be purchased separately, however. But the intention here was economy and a "do-it-yourself" approach to home-building.⁷ Additionally, in the 1958 catalog, "Full-Value Homes", it was noted that many of the designs were "Suitable for In the Shop Construction". Builders, utilizing "...standardized dimensioning, use of stock materials, and use of pre-selected stock window and door units, make these designs ideal for trouble-free 'in the shop' construction for those builders and developers prior to movement to the building site. Special, detailed panel and truss plans are available on these

⁶ Leigh Cameron noted that Sears Roebuck tried to buy out Standard Homes, but no agreement was ever reached.

⁷ These plans, developed from 1948 to 1949, were utilized primarily in the D.C. office, but also in the Raleigh area. The isometric plans available included the Avalon, Elkridge, Melrose, Preston, Somerset, Stafford, and Woodley.

designs....". So a builder/developer could create a "kit" of sorts and then transport all the components to the job site. But the company never sold "pre-fab" kits like Sears did.

In perusing the plan books, popular styles that are seen in many historic neighborhoods are in evidence. For example, in the 1926 and 1929 catalogs are examples of the Dutch Colonial Revival, Four-Square, Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, Cotswold Cottage, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Craftsman Bungalow. Many of these styles continued to be used in later years, especially the Bungalow, which appeared as late as some of the 1950s catalogs. Plan books in the 1940s were filled with Minimal Traditional styles, with a few Ranch style houses beginning in the early 1950s. The company resisted for a time providing plans for the Ranch style, deeming it to be uneconomical in plan. As the movement grew, however, the Ranch style, along with Split Level, became prominent plans in the books.

Many Standard Homes plan houses are still in existence in the Raleigh area. While not yet documented, Leigh Cameron has noted there are many examples in Raleigh on St. Mary's Street, in Boylan Heights, near North Carolina State University, Cameron Park, Fairview Road, Glenwood, and in many other historic neighborhoods. Leigh also noted that in addition to working with Carolina Builders Corporation, Briggs Hardware and City Lumber Company also supplied building materials.⁸

York Construction Company

York Construction Company was founded in 1910 in Raleigh by Charles Vance (C. V.) York (1876 – 1941). As noted in the book J. W. Willie York: His First Seventy-Five Years in Raleigh, by Linda Harris Edmisten, "...twentieth century Raleigh and York Construction are almost synonymous...".⁹ York had begun his construction career in 1901, but when Raleigh's first boom time hit, he moved there to take advantage of the booming residential construction business. He built his first family home in 1910 at 425 South Boylan Avenue in Boylan Heights (originally 495 South Boylan Avenue), the only brick home at the time in the neighborhood.¹⁰ He bought several lots in Boylan Heights and built spec homes, including the first multi-family home at the corner of South Boylan and West Cabarrus Streets.¹¹ York built many buildings in the Raleigh area, including houses, churches, hotels, commercial buildings, and public works projects. Of the company's residential work, York Construction also built the first ten houses in the Bloomsbury neighborhood, along with developer James Pou. York also built Capital

⁸ Cameron, Leigh. Interview with Sybil Argintar November 17, 2011.

⁹ Edmisten, Linda Harris. J. W. Willie York: His First Seventy-Five Years in Raleigh. Raleigh, North Carolina, 1987, p. 5.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 16.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 17.

Apartments, the first multi-story dwelling in Raleigh.¹² Business slowed during World War I, but York was able to get many Federal government contracts. Residential construction picked up soon after this, with many new subdivisions being built, including Hayes-Barton, Wilmont, Mordecai Park, Fairmont, Anderson Heights, and Hillcrest. C. V. York was instrumental in the construction of many houses in the Hayes-Barton neighborhood, working closely with developer/planner Dan Allen.¹³ With his great success, York built a second family home at 2017 Fairview Road in 1923, along with the house directly across the street.¹⁴ C. V. York's son, James Wesley (J. W.) "Willie" York, began working in the construction business in 1929, soon after he graduated from high school. During the Depression years, York was again fortunate in that he was able to obtain contract work with the Federal government. Willie York obtained his civil engineering degree in 1933, and he then went into business with his father as C. V. York & Son, an entity which lasted until 1941. In the late 1930s, as the Depression years were drawing to a close and the Federal Housing Administration had been formed to provide housing loans again, C. V. York bought several lots on Craig Street and Anderson Drive to build houses, when the "...demand was for very inexpensive houses...".¹⁵ Additionally, some other houses built included the J. L. VonGlahn House in the Budleigh section northwest of Hayes-Barton, in 1938.¹⁶ It is likely, but not yet documented, that York Construction utilized some Standard Homes building plans. The company, in the 1930s, employed Tom Cooper, an architect, to draw up some of their plans.¹⁷

Willie York took over the business in 1938, when his father was becoming ill. After C. V. died in 1941, he became head of York Construction Company. Construction in Raleigh, as elsewhere, came to a grinding halt when World War II began, but a major construction boom occurred right after the War. Willie York built Cameron Village, York Industrial Center, Ridgewood, Cary Village Shopping Center, many Raleigh schools, and the Wake County Courthouse, among many others. York Construction Company, like Carolina Builders Corporation, also built some speculative housing, as noted in Wake County deed indices where York Construction Company is a grantor of properties.

Other Raleigh Builders

Some preliminary research has found that there were other builders and companies in the Raleigh area, smaller than York Construction in all likelihood, but building in the same time period of 1910 to 1945. Howard Satterfield is one of these builders, who built from "...stock

¹² Ibid, p. 18.

¹³ Ibid, p. 24. Allen sold lots to other builders as well to keep up with the demand.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 26.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 51. A 1940 *Raleigh Times* article notes the house at 1621 Craig Street was built by York.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 52

¹⁷ Ibid.

plans and pattern books which he personalized to suit the residential needs and desires of his clients...". He built the George Little House in Raleigh, and built approximately fifteen houses per year from 1925 to 1930.¹⁸ The May 18, 1940 75th Anniversary edition of the *Raleigh News and Observer* notes many additional builders, including Jonathan Danielson, who "...constructed many of the finest homes erected here since 1922...". City directories from 1910 to 1945 list many other builders, most of which are sub-contractors. The general contractors listed in this time period include Stephens Construction Company, Wake Construction Company, Brice Construction Company, Charles V. York, Walter Barrow, W. J. Grantham, Campbell-Warner Company, Robert Lassiter, John E. Beaman, Percy Ashby, and many others. There were only two general contracting companies in 1910, seven by 1915, three in 1920, and a total of thirty-four in 1925. By the mid-1930s, there were only seventeen companies listed as general contractors, with these numbers increasing through the 1940s. Caution is advised here, however, because city directories often listed sub or specialty contractors as general contractors, and many of these were very small operations and not large builders like York Construction and others. Of the bigger companies, however, only a handful remain in business, and it is likely that further documentation will focus upon these companies.

Bibliography

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Cameron, Leigh. Owner/manager Standard Homes Plan Services. Interview with Sybil H. Argintar, November 17, 2011.

Casey, Paul. Formerly with Construction Loan Division of Carolina Builders Corporation, Interview with Sybil H. Argintar, November 3, 2011.

Creech, David. President, Creech Homes. Interview with Sybil H. Argintar, November 4, 2011.

Edmisten, Linda Harris. J. W. Willie York: His First Seventy-Five Years in Raleigh. Raleigh, North Carolina, 1987.

<https://www.secretary.state.nc.us/corporations/ARReportsList.aspx?PitemId=4893677>

National Register historic district nominations for older Raleigh neighborhoods (Hayes-Barton; Bloomsbury; Glenwood; Oakwood; Boylan Heights; Mordecai Place)

Perry, Eugene. Perry Construction. Interview with Sybil H. Argintar, November 3, 2011.

Raleigh City Directories 1909 – 1960.

Raleigh News and Observer articles and advertisements (including 1940 anniversary issue, 75th Anniversary edition, 1865-1940, May 18, 1940)

Standard Homes Plan Books 1926, 1929, 1940s to 1960 (catalogs from 1926 to 1950 have been scanned). Catalogs include:

¹⁸ Bishir, Catherine, Charlotte V. Brown, Carl R. Lounsbury, and Ernest H. Wood III. Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990, p. 310.

“Better Homes at Lower Cost”, 1926, 1929, 1946, 1949, 1950, 1954, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960.

“Homes of Today”, 1929, 1948, 1956, 1958, 1959, 1960.

“Homes of Comfort at Low Cost”, 1929, 1941, 1948, 1952, 1958, 1959, 1960.

“Homes of Brick and Stucco”, 1929.

“Homes at Low Cost”, 1950.

“Homes for Your Street and Mine”, 1953.

“Desirable Duplex Homes”, 1958, 1959, 1960.

“Full-Value Homes”, 1958, 1959, 1960.

“Homes of Color”, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960.

Standard Homes Full Scale Plan Books 1948 and 1949.

“Standard Homes Plan Service, Inc.”. Unpublished brochure of company history, provided by Leigh Cameron.

Wake County Deed Indexes for purchase of lots by builders/building supply companies as spec houses.

Wake County Plat Books for plats of older neighborhoods including Boylan Heights, Bloomsbury, Hayes-Barton, Mordecai Place, Glenwood, Oakwood.

Warren, Henry. Communication/Business Specialist with Stock Building Supply (formerly Carolina Builders Corporation). Interview with Sybil H. Argintar, November 3, 2011.

York, G. Smedes. Chairman, York Properties, Inc. Interview with Sybil H. Argintar, November 17, 2011.

Additional sources to be contacted/reviewed in Phase 2:

Contact and interview John Thompson, J. M. Thompson Company, builder

Contact and interview Cliff Benson III, son of Cliff Benson of Carolina Builders Corporation

Identify any additional major building companies in the noted time period of 1910 – 1945

(North Carolina Yearbooks, business directories, Howard Satterfield, Jonathan Danielson)

Identify any additional major building suppliers (Briggs Hardware; City Lumber Company)

Identify additional draftsmen/architects who were designing standard house plans in the 1910 to 1945 time period (Ben Taylor, Tom Cooper and others)

Conduct a driving interview with Leigh Cameron, Standard Homes, to match their plans with Houses built in historic Raleigh neighborhoods (Leigh has noted she knows many of these)

Identify several houses which are true to the original Standard House Plans, and photo the exterior and interior, with permission; have full set of plans with this documentation if available

Identify several houses built speculatively by Carolina Builders Corporation, York

Construction Company, and others, or which were built for these companies’ officers, and photograph the exterior and interior, with permission.

Review National Register nominations for more background material and historic context once houses are identified as noted above

Recommendation for Phase 2

As mentioned briefly above, research in Phase 1 has revealed that there does not appear to be any companies that were providing full kit homes like Sears Roebuck, Montgomery Ward, and others were doing in the same time period. However, Standard Homes was providing house plans from the 1920s on, even though the company did not locate a second office in Raleigh until the late 1930s. Standard Homes was a national company, and in viewing their house plan books, it is easy to see the significant impact they had not only in Raleigh neighborhoods, but all over North Carolina and the greater United States. They did provide, in the late 1940s, several house plans in an isometric format which could be utilized as an early type of “do-it-yourself” plan for a skilled homeowner, but materials were not included as in a true kit home.

Carolina Builders Corporation, while first and foremost a building supplier, did get into the development business to a certain degree through their construction loan division and the likelihood that many of the company’s officers were also speculatively buying and selling lots. C. V. York, while primarily a builder, also worked closely with local developers and bought and sold some lots on his own for speculative housing. The waters muddy a bit when trying to separate out the builders, suppliers, and developers, as their roles overlapped. In many cases it appears they utilized Standard Homes plans, but many also had their own draftsmen in-house, or worked with other designers, some of whom will be researched in greater detail in the next phase of work.

With this in mind, and the fact that a true picture of Raleigh’s development cannot be separated out from the builders who constructed these house plans, it is recommended that the focus of the project be altered slightly to be entitled:

“Major Residential Builders, Suppliers, and Plan Book Companies of Raleigh, North Carolina, 1910 to 1945”

It is not often that detailed information about the plans for a house and who constructed it is available. With the extensive archive of materials uncovered to date, this appears to be a perfect opportunity to present this type of information.

Potential for Third Phase of work:

Interviews and research in this phase has also revealed that there were many builders in Raleigh Post WWII, including Key Homes (Key Realty Company, founded ca. 1963), Willie York, Perry Construction (founded in 1959), and others. Standard Homes provided many house plans in this time period as well, and was very active in the residential building boom in Raleigh at this time. While out of the scope of the current project, it is recommended that a third phase of work be considered covering the 1945 to 1965 period, the modern period of Raleigh development.