

RALEIGH HISTORIC LANDMARK DESIGNATION APPLICATION AND REPORT

1. **NAME OF THE PROPERTY:** (If historic name is unknown, give current name or give street address)

Historic Name: Willis Graves House

Current Name, or Address _____

2. **LOCATION:** 802 Oberlin Road Raleigh, Wake
street city and/or county 919-

3. **LEGAL OWNER:** Name Mr. and Mrs. Spurgeon Fields day phone: 829-0093

Address 802 Oberlin Road Raleigh NC 27605
street city state zip

4. **APPLICANT/CONTACT PERSON:** Name Raleigh Historic Districts Commission day phone: 832-7238
street city state zip

Address P.O. Box 829, Century Station, Raleigh, NC 27602
street city state zip

5. **REASON FOR REQUEST:** Historical and architectural significance.

6. **GENERAL DATA:**

a. Date of construction and alterations: Built between 1884 and 1891; recent ^{minor} alterations

b. Outbuildings: Yes _____ No If yes, number _____

c. Approximate acreage or dimensions: 0.39 acre

d. Architect, builder, carpenter and/or mason: _____

e. Use: Original Residence Present: Residence

f. Is the property income producing? Yes _____ No

7. **CLASSIFICATION:**

a. Category: building(s) structure _____ object _____ site _____

b. Ownership: private public: local _____ state _____ federal _____

| | | |
|---|--------------|------------------|
| c. Number of resources within property: | Contributing | Non-contributing |
| buildings | <u>1</u> | <u>1</u> |
| structures | _____ | _____ |
| objects | _____ | _____ |
| sites | _____ | _____ |

d. National Register of Historic Places status (check one): Entered (date) _____ ;
nominated: eligible _____ not eligible _____ ; not requested ; removed (date) _____

e. Has the property been recorded during a historic survey by the City of Raleigh or the NC Historic Preservation Office? By whom and when Elliott K. Wright, June 12, 1989

RALEIGH HISTORIC DISTRICTS COMMISSION, INC.

P.O. BOX 829, CENTURY STATION

RALEIGH, NC 27602

8. **SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT:** _____ date 19 Oct. 1993

9. SUPPORTING INFORMATION: (For items c., d., and e., please type or print on separate sheets of paper and attach to this application)

a. Photographs: At least TWO current exterior black and white photographs of different views must be provided. Photographs must be labeled in pencil with the name of the building, structure, object or site, the address, and the date. Additional exterior or interior views and views of other structures on the property will be helpful. Color, black and white photographs and/or slides are acceptable for additional documentation.

b. Maps: Include a map showing the location of the property. A tax map with boundaries marked is preferred. A sketch map is acceptable but please note street names and numbers. Other structures on the property should also be shown. Include a "North" arrow.

c. Justification for land to be designated: Describe the physical appearance of the surrounding land area and its use.

d. Architectural description and significance: Describe the architectural features, additions, remodelings and alterations. Include a statement regarding the architectural significance of the building.

e. Historical significance: Note any significant events, personages and/or families associated with the property. Detailed family genealogies are not necessary. Please list any additional sources of information.

10. PLEASE RETURN TO:

Raleigh Historic Districts Commission
Post Office Box 829
Century Station
Raleigh, NC 27602

9c. Justification for land to be designated:

The land included in this designation is the legal parcel associated with the Willis Graves House, an architecturally significant house in Raleigh's African-American history.

9d. Architectural description and significance:

The Willis Graves House is significant as a rare, intact, surviving example of a two-story Queen Anne residence built in one of Raleigh's black communities around the turn of the century. A 1988 survey of Raleigh's black neighborhoods recorded 1445 historic buildings. Of those 1445 buildings, ten were two-story Queen Anne houses. Of the approximately eighty buildings recorded in Oberlin in the survey, the Graves house is the only two-story Queen Anne residence. Although the numbers verify the significance of the Graves House, its configuration would be considered imaginative and distinct in any community.

The Graves House is a mass-plan, two-story, frame house with a complex roof featuring a pyramid-roofed square tower and a decoratively shingled projecting gable surmounting a two-story projecting bay. The design and materials of the wraparound porch are essentially intact: paired, turned posts; turned trim under the porch cornice; and an arched porch entry on brick piers. The historic sawn diamond-patterned railing appears to have been recently replaced with square balusters. There is a stained glass transom above the front door.

The house has been sheathed in wide synthetic siding and original window trim has been covered with synthetic trim. One-over-one double-hung sashes on the second story and rear of the house appear to be replacements, but Queen Anne small-paned, stained-glass windows are intact in the decorative front gable and in the first floor bays. A metal awning has been installed on the front of the wraparound porch, but turned trim is intact beneath the awning. Decorative shingles are intact in the south gable.

There is a hip-roofed shed addition on the rear which appears to have been built after the main body of the house. A smaller hip-roofed shed and gabled ell have been added to the earlier shed addition and the space between the latter two has been infilled. An historic stuccoed corbelled chimney and later chimney pierce the rear of the roof of the main body of the house and a modern exterior brick chimney has been added to the back of the gabled ell.

The interior of the house has a center hall plan. The stairway has turned, painted posts and balusters, and a landing. On the first floor, fireplaces have mirrored, painted overmantels with brackets under the mantel shelf,

and piers and an overshef above the mirror. The living room has an arched alcove with brackets on either side.

9d. Historical significance:

The Graves-Field House was built sometime between 1884 and 1891. Willis M. Graves, a brick mason, purchased the house lot from Jacob S. Allen on January 21, 1884 and built the house before 1891.

The house has historical significance as the home of Willis Graves, one of Oberlin's early settlers and a respected figure in his community (Reid, p.643). Born in Mississippi in 1867, Graves was considered an "Oberlin pioneer". He was a long-time justice of the peace and a "highly respected leader of his race". (**News and Observer**, August 8, 1948) Graves was a church leader as well; as early as 1885 he was one of approximately 15 officers of Wilson Temple United Methodist Church (State Historic Preservation Office file). From 1901 to 1916, Willis Graves' occupation was listed in the city directory as brick mason, plasterer, and carpenter. In the community, he was considered a brick mason.

Willis and Eleanor Graves (born 1870) had several children: Willis M., Jr., Christine L. (born 1890), Mildred (born 1892), Leroy (born 1894), and George. Christine, Mildred, and George were teachers. Willis M. Graves, Jr. was a bricklayer and Leroy was, at different times, a bricklayer, teacher, tailor, and laborer, depending on the economy at the time.

The 1917 city directory listed Willis Graves as a grocer. Apparently Graves ran a store and post office out of his house at the time. (Cecil Flagg interview, "Raleigh's Roots") At the time of the 1920 census, Graves owned his home free of a mortgage. He listed his occupation as bricklayer and he worked for wages.

In 1922, Christine Graves Harris and Mildred Graves, his two daughters, inherited the property (State Historic Preservation Office survey file- Wake County Book of Deeds, Book 437, p.203). Christine, Mildred, and Willis were reported living in the house in 1923-1924. 1934 was the last year Willis and Leroy Graves were listed in the city directory.

James Coppedge, a black man, occupied the house during 1938 (State Historic Preservation Office survey file).

In 1938, John Graham, a railroad fireman, bought the house from Home Owners' Loan Corp (Wake County Book of Deeds, Book 795, p.6) Graham and his wife, Alice, lived there until 1945, when they sold the house to Mr. and Mrs. Spurgeon Field, present owners of the house (Culture Town).

Mr. and Mrs. Spurgeon Fields have owned the house since 1945. Mr. Fields was a chauffeur for Josephus Daniels, President Wilson's Secretary of Navy and editor of the News & Observer.

Bibliography:

Hill's Raleigh City Directory. Richmond, Virginia: Hill Directory Co., 1905-1934.

Maloney's 1901 Raleigh City Directory. 1901.

Elizabeth Reid Murray. Wake: Capital County of North Carolina, Vol.1. Raleigh, North Carolina: 1983.

The News and Observer, August 8, 1948, "Oberlin Village Emerged During Reconstruction". Willis G. Briggs, Section IV, p. 1.

"Raleigh's Roots: An Oral History of Raleigh's African American Communities". Raleigh, North Carolina: Raleigh Historic Properties Commission, Inc., 1989.

State Historic Preservation Office survey files.

United States Census, 1920.



