

Chatham County Historical Association, Inc.

P. O. Box 93 / Pittsboro, NC 27312-0093 / 919 542-3603

www.chathamhistory.org

19 April 2003

Mr. Mitch Barron, Development Manager
Newland Carolina
P. O. Box 1486
Pittsboro, NC 27312

Dear Mr. Barron:

Thank you for escorting us to the site of your proposed Briar Chapel development to examine two older houses that might have historical significance. If I understand correctly, it will be some time before you will be submitting a sketch design to the Chatham County Planning Board, at which time the assessment of historical structures by the Chatham County Historical Association is required, but you are interested in clearing the property now owned by Newland Communities in anticipation of later approval. Our assessment, based on my observation and the more experienced eye of Carl Bigness, follows.

As you suggested, the Crutchfield house, if I can give it that name, appears too recent to be of historical value, but the wood outbuildings have some age on them and still have sound timbers that could be salvaged.

The Burgess house and outbuildings are another story. Although the site and buildings have a rich local history, they do not seem to be significant enough either historically or architecturally to consider nominating the site to the National Register of Historic Places, and thus we would not recommend to the Planning Board that they be saved. The dwelling is the only structure that might be solid enough to bear the cost of moving, though I doubt it; and, of course, part of the building and the main barn have already been razed.

There appears to be much salvageable lumber and stone remaining in the dwelling and in the outbuildings that could be recycled. The beadboard, several four-panel doors, decorative molding used to frame the doors, flooring, chimney and foundation stones, pine logs and poles, and structural timbers are still sound and could be put to good use. Wells are always a problem, being both hazards and unmatched examples of lost skills. I like to recommend saving them if a safe way can be found to do so.

We would urge you to reconsider deconstructing the house, salvaging as much as possible and disposing of the rest in an environmentally friendly way. I can provide more information about RAFT's deconstruction of the rectory/Chester house in Pittsboro or refer you to the directors at RAFT for more information on their experience.

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The Chatham County Historical Association would not be able to handle this job with volunteers, as we tried to do with the Heritage Pointe property. Carl Bigness, who has been working with us in deconstructing the Upchurch house, seems very capable and careful, and I could provide you with the name of another person involved in deconstruction if you wanted to receive another cost estimate for such a project.

With your permission I revisited the Burgess/Herndon homesite to search for a cemetery that was reported to the Association during the early stages of our cemetery survey. Jesse Fearrington had seen it in his youth and found it without much difficulty. Just to the east of the log tobacco barn and south of the boundary with the Cameron property, the cemetery measures roughly 50 feet by 60 feet, and I counted 43 fieldstones in columns about eight feet wide. The area is fairly grown over but a number of depressions are clearly visible in addition to the fieldstone markers. This cemetery should be shown on your design sketch and protected. I am endeavoring to learn more about it. Mr. Fearrington said tradition identified it as an Indian burial ground but it is obviously not Native American. It may be a slave cemetery or connected with an African American community. It is too large to be a family cemetery.

I am enclosing a copy of a 1933 map that shows the Burgess/Herndon house and two other houses that would be in the Cameron tract if they still existed. Perhaps they will show up on the ground as your project progresses.

We would like to work with you in preserving in whatever way we can the local history of this part of Chatham County, such as collecting oral histories and publicizing the steps taken to document the history of structures and recycling materials if that is what you decide to do. Thank you for starting on this at an early stage.

Cordially,



Jane Pyle

copies:

Chatham County Planning Dept.
John Simons, President, CCHA

P.S. – Since I drafted this letter I have learned of the removal of large amounts of material from the house, store, and other outbuildings. Mr. Bigness reported that this “salvage” had been done sometime between our visitation on Thursday and my search on Saturday morning; indeed, I saw the results in the store. The hurried removal can only be called trashing, and the debris left behind will complicate the kind of deconstruction that should be completed at the site.

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14 October 2004

Mr. Mitch Barron
Newland Communities
Pittsboro, NC 27312

Dear Mr. Barron:

Thank you for inviting me several weeks ago to visit the Crisp house, which was purchased by Briar Chapel early in the year. I have not written earlier in the hope that I could visit it again after it was vacated, in order to assess better its historical value and structural integrity.

I spent a short time in the Register of Deeds office in an attempt to trace the ownership and perhaps identify the original builder or time of construction. Early names that seem to be identified with the property are Atlas J. Riggsbee, maternal relative of Betty S. Crisp, and Harrison O. Durham, from whom Riggsbee purchased a piece of property in 1877.

Our brief look at the property seemed to show that extensive deterioration made moving and rehabilitation at another location an unpromising disposition of the building. There seem to be, however, historical elements that could be salvaged and reused in restoration of historical houses or for decorative ends, for example, porch posts and brackets and stored lumber in an outbuilding. A more thorough examination is needed to judge whether there are interior elements, sound beams, or other structural details worth salvage; the comment of the occupant indicated that there are such reusable parts.

As you know, the Chatham County Historical Association is concerned with the preservation and communication of local history, and we urge the imaginative reuse of historical structures, in whole or in part, to the extent possible. We would appreciate the opportunity to examine the house more carefully and to document historical features.

Cordially,



Jane Pyle

Copy: Chatham County Planning Board