

LOCAL DESIGNATION REPORT – ROWAN CO. HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION

I. General Information

1. The Kesler Newsom Kepley Farmhouse
2. 7255 Bringle Ferry Road
3. Tax parcel # 643-028
4. The estate of Jack Simpson Kepley and wife Grace K Kepley.
Co-administrators: Jack S. Kepley, Jr. & William K. Kepley
5. 7255 Bringle Ferry Road, Salisbury, NC 28146
6. Appraised (tax) value: House: \$152,001 Land: \$53,000 Total Value: \$205,001

II. Abstract

1. Summary - This property is one of the few remaining wood-frame farmhouses from the nineteenth century in rural eastern Rowan County. Originally, a two-story Federal style house with a central hall built in 1844¹ (Floor Plan 1), the home has undergone two major expansions/renovations during its 178-year history. From the Civil War era to present day, the house has been the home of four generations of the Kesler/Newsom family and more recently three generations of the Kepley family. Although the property is an excellent example of nineteenth century craftsmanship, the significance of the property is primarily due to the fact that two of these inhabitants were well-known and distinguished Rowan County citizens and both men had a major impact on citizens of the county. The house is located within a very scenic section of Bringle Ferry Road (near the community known as Craven, NC) adjoining park land and forest land. This proposal for designation as a landmark will help preserve and protect it.
2. Proposed Designation - In its current state, the house is an outstanding example of a Queen Anne Victorian wood frame farmhouse. The designation will include the exterior of the house and 1.57 acres of land, which is a small portion of the original 100-acre farm.

III. Historical Background

1. Property's History - Tobias Kesler (1814-1897), a successful farmer and businessman, acquired his property during the 1860's. According to an oral history, Tobias acquired this property by repossession when the owner failed to repay his loan². The original home on the property was a four-room two-story Federal style house. Both the first and second floors contained two rooms divided by a central hall. Brick chimneys were located on both the east and west elevations and a porch extended the full length of the front facade. The home was expanded and renovated in 1883 and remained in the family until 1973.

Tobias Kesler's daughter, Augusta, married Allen Howell Newsom on March 13, 1877. According to oral accounts, Tobias gave the house to Augusta and Allen as a wedding gift³, but there is no record of a transaction within the Register of Deeds that would substantiate this fact. Allen and his wife raised

¹ Kepley, Jack S., Sr. "The Newsom-Kepley House"

² Kepley, Jack, "Tobias Kesler House"

³ Kepley, Jack S., Sr. "The Newsom-Kepley House"

seven children in the home. It is believed that Allen and Augusta Newsom lived here until 1912 when they moved to Salisbury.

Tobias Newsom, the oldest son of Allen and Augusta Newsom, was probably born in the house on June 21, 1881. He married Zeffie Ingram in 1905 and she subsequently moved in the house with his family. Tobias Newsom, and his family lived in the house until 1923⁴. About five of 14 children of Tobias and Zeffie may have been born here. His occupation was listed as a butcher in the 1900 US Census. Clara Newsom, the youngest daughter (who also may have been born in this home) married Oda Lee Baity. Clara and Oda Lee raised two children during the 43 years that they occupied this home. His occupation was listed as a bookkeeper in the 1920 US Census. Their son, Oren Lee Baity married Sally Edith Shoaf. They inherited the property upon the death of Oda Lee Baity and Clara Newsom Baity and rented the home to tenants until 1973.

Jack Simpson Kepley and wife Grace Kimball Kepley purchased the property in 1973 from Oren and Sally Edith Shoaf Baity⁵, who at that time, did not have a deed to the property. It was still listed as the “Estate of Tobias Kesler”. As the property was passed down four generations, no one had prepared or recorded a deed. The surveyor for the Kepleys had to check with each adjoining property owner to generate a legal description and plat.

2. Original Construction – As previously stated, the original home on the property was a two-story Federal style house with a central hall and two rooms on both the first and second floors. Brick chimneys were located on both the east and west elevations and a porch extended the full length of the front façade (Floor Plan #1). It is believed that the original house (approximately 1,440 square feet or 49.61% of the current home) was constructed in 1844 by an unknown builder.⁶
3. Dates of Alterations- In 1883 the structure underwent a major transformation. This date is based on a 1976 discovery of ink markings from a rubber postal stamp on a wall behind the wallpaper. Clearly visible were the words “Craven, N.C. – Jan 23, 1883”. (attached image: Craven Stamp.jpg) Further research confirmed that Allen Howell Newsom was appointed as the first Postmaster for the Craven, NC Post Office on Oct. 30, 1882. The Craven Post Office was across the road about 100 yards east of this house on property that is now Dan Nicholas Park. The post office was later moved to File’s Store located one half mile east. During the 1883 renovation, the west wall of the house and the chimney on the west wall were removed. The rooms on both floors were extended approximately 8 feet. A two-story ell was added to the right side of the front elevation with an interior chimney built between the two rooms. A one-story ell was added to the left side of the rear elevation that contained a dining room and a kitchen separated by an interior chimney. Upon completion, the house was a total of 2,399 square feet (Floor Plan #2). The 1883 addition is 32.29% of the current home. All the windows were replaced by the current two over two double hung units and Italianate brackets were added to the porch and eaves. Louvered closable shutters at each window and ornamental ventilators were also added as well as a wraparound porch with a polygonal gazebo on the corner. An L-shaped porch was added to the back. The finished renovation changed the appearance of the house from Federal style to Queen Anne.

Two subsequent renovations were completed during the first half of the twentieth century: (1) Electricity and indoor plumbing were added. The east end of the back porch was enclosed for a bathroom. (2) The polygonal gazebo on the corner of the front porch was removed. The bottoms of the turned posts were cut-off at the railing and square brick craftsman styled three-foot pillars were added along with a concrete floor.

⁴ Hood, Davyd Foard, The Architecture of Rowan County

⁵ Kepley, Jack S., Sr. “The Newsom-Kepley House”

⁶ Kepley, Jack S., Sr. “The Newsom-Kepley House”

In 1975 a major NCDOT project, “The Widening of Bringle Ferry Road,” was announced. Since the land on the north side of Bringle Ferry Road was park land (Dan Nicholas Park), NCDOT’s plans showed acquisition of most of the home’s front yard. The new right-of-way was approximately 5 feet from the front of the house. Therefore, Jack and Grace Kepley decided to move the house approximately 150 feet south and fully renovate it for their primary residence. Their goal of the renovation was to return the appearance of the house to the Queen Anne style of the 1883 renovations (except for the rear elevation). The 1883 back porch was removed and a family room, new bathroom and a basement were added in 1976-1977 (adding 518 square feet, 17.76% of the current home, making the total square footage of the house at 2,917 square feet- Floor Plan #3. (note: the square footage excludes the basement level). These additions were representative of the growing needs of the existing family of the home and built in a style that matched architecturally with the existing façade. The new family room contained three large picture windows on the rear elevation. However, the east elevation was constructed to match the Queen Anne style. Turned porch posts from the back porch that was removed were used on the front porch with turned balustrade railing and Italianate brackets that matched the 1883 porch. The paint colors were researched by scraping clapboards from the 1883 addition. It was determined that the house was yellow with white windows and trim. White aluminum storm windows were added over the restored double hung 2 over 2 sashes. Likewise, the shutters were scraped to determine that their original color was green. The original wood shingles were removed, and a composition architectural grade roofing was selected to closely match the look of wood shingles. The new shingles were installed over plywood sheeting. The copper valleys from the original roof were duplicated to further match the look of the original roof. New chimneys were built on the east side of the house using Old Carolina handmade brick that matched the color of the original brick. The detail of the original chimney crown was duplicated. The interior chimneys were not rebuilt after the house was moved. The weathervane with ruby red glass insert was reinstalled along with new lighting rod system. The Kephleys moved into the house in 1978.

A garage and connecting breezeway was added to the east side of the house in 1985 that was in keeping with the Queen Anne style. The garage being both in the same style as the house and only being attached by the breezeway, keeps the character of the home intact while providing additional storage for the family. After the Kephleys completed the renovation, a member of the Newsom family visited with a photo of the house showing the polygonal gazebo on the northeast corner of the porch⁷. The Kephleys decided not to change the completed porch; therefore, the polygonal gazebo was never reconstructed.

IV. Assessment

1. The property is significant culturally due to it being the home of two well-known and distinguished Rowan County citizens. This property is also significant architecturally for being one of the few remaining wood-frame farmhouses from the nineteenth century in rural eastern Rowan County and for being a well-preserved example of Queen Anne Victorian style in a rural setting. The additions to the home from its original 1844 footprint along with the relocation of the home approximately 150 feet from its original location have not detracted from the significance of the property as these changes are representative of the growing needs of the families that occupied the home. These changes have stayed in character with the style and setting of the house as originally constructed.

Historically Significant individual #1 - Tobias Kesler is an important individual to the local community because he was part of a movement to provide employment and affordable housing in Salisbury during a period of great economic depression⁸.

⁷ Hood, Davyd Foard, The Architecture of Rowan County

⁸ Whitten, David O., “The Depression of 1893” published on EH.net by the Economic History Association

Tobias was considered a prosperous and successful farmer⁹ and businessman. He often loaned money to other farmers and held their mortgages. Starting around 1887, there was a big civic push to provide employment in the city. Salisbury Cotton Mill was founded as the result of a revival meeting that took place in Salisbury in November of 1887. Evangelist R. G. Pearson reminded those gathered that “the great many poor and indigent people we have here ought to and must be helped not by gifts and alms but by a chance to make an honest living.” The solution was to build a cotton mill to employ the people. A group of influential people in Salisbury heeded this plea and shortly after that a committee (headed by Rev. Francis Murdoch) was organized to construct the first cotton mill in Salisbury in 1888¹⁰. Tobias Kesler is best known as one of the founders of the Kesler Cotton Mill, organized in 1895. Tobias Kesler, along with Rev. Francis Murdoch and other investors, purchased land on what is now Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. in Salisbury and built a large brick facility. At the same time, Kesler and his partners operating as the Central Land Company, built twenty-two frame mill houses and a frame store along the northeast side of Park Avenue just west of the mill¹¹. This neighborhood today is known as “Kesler Manufacturing Co. Historic District” and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Tobias Kesler was born on September 20, 1814 and married Nancy Roseman on September 13, 1841. At the age of 49, he left Nancy and 5 children at home and enlisted in the Confederate army on June 23, 1864. He served as a private in Company B, 73rd Infantry. His father, Christian Kesler, was born on June 30, 1783 in Frederick, MD and migrated down the Great Wagon Road to Rowan County, where he met his wife, Elizabeth Eller. They likely settled in eastern Rowan County where Elizabeth’s parents were well established as founding members of Union Lutheran Church on Bringle Ferry Road. Tobias Kesler was considered as part of the who’s who of Salisbury in the late 1800s¹². His name appears in a number of newspaper clippings of the era. The Greensboro Record called him “One of Salisbury’s best known and wealthiest citizens”¹³. The Weekly News of Lenoir, NC referred to him as “a well-to-do man”¹⁴. A Concord, NC newspaper said that he “was one of the wealthiest men in the county. His fortune is variously estimated but a reasonable figure at which it is placed is \$50,000. He was a stockholder in the Vance and Kesler cotton mills, the latter being named in his honor... In fact there are but few manufacturing enterprises in the town in which Mr. Kesler hasn’t held stock.”¹⁵

Historically Significant individual #2 – Jack Simpson Kepley Sr. is an important individual to the local community because of his impact on the youth of Salisbury and Central North Carolina as a volunteer in the Boy Scouts of America.

Jack Simpson Kepley Sr. was born on February 15, 1924 at 1123 South Main Street in Salisbury, NC and died on Saturday, June 25, 2022 at the age of 98. He was the son of the late Walter Robert Kepley, Sr. (employed by Southern Railway) and Mazie Simpson Kepley (employed by Cone Mills). Following graduation from Boyden High School in 1943, he joined the Army, serving as a Staff Sergeant and Platoon Leader during World War II with the 34th Infantry, 24th Division until 1946. Jack was a charter member of Harold B. Jarrett American Legion Post #342. In 1949, he graduated from Catawba College with a degree in Business Administration. He served as President of Kepley-Crowell Insurance, Inc. until his retirement. He joined Boy Scout Troop 448 on his 13th birthday and was continuously registered as a member for 85 years. He served as Scoutmaster from 1952 until 1993, when he was

⁹ Brawley, James S., The Rowan Story 1753-1953: A Narrative History of Rowan County North Carolina

¹⁰ Brawley, James S., The Rowan Story 1753-1953: A Narrative History of Rowan County North Carolina

¹¹ Manieri, Ray, “The National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form for the Kesler Manufacturing Co. Historic District”,

¹² Karen Lilly-Bowyer, Karen C. “A Man and His House”

¹³ The Evening World Newspaper, (Salisbury, NC), July 11, 1896

¹⁴ The Weekly News, (Lenoir, North Carolina), December 4, 1903

¹⁵ The Standard (Concord, North Carolina) June 18, 1896

named Scoutmaster Emeritus. For two years, Jack served as Camp Director of Camp John J. Barnhardt (a Boy Scout summer camp near Salisbury with an annual participation of 1,000+ boys and girls). He served as a staff member and director of several Wood Badge courses (a leadership training program of BSA adults) and held many positions at the council level of the Central NC Council. Jack received numerous scouting awards over the years including the Silver Beaver Award, which is the highest award a Boy Scout Council can bestow. Jack was an active member of the Salisbury Lions Club for many years, serving as the Club President and being selected as the Lion of the Year in 1963 and the Man of the Year in 1994. In 2001, he was recognized by Lions Club International as a Melvin Jones Fellow. He served two terms on the Board of the Rowan County Parks and Recreation Commission and was awarded the Order of the Long Leaf Pine in 2018, given by Governor Roy Cooper to persons who have performed exemplary service to the state of North Carolina¹⁶. Congressman Ted Budd called him an American hero and a fixture within Rowan County. “Jack will be remembered by many for his honorable service during World War II and his longstanding involvement in the Salisbury community.”¹⁷ Jack often said that he was most proud of the fact that 147 boys worked to achieve the Eagle Scout rank during his tenure in Scouting and more than 1,000 boys and girls have participated in Troop 448 activities. Many of these young people have stayed in the Salisbury area and grown to be doctors, dentists, engineers, builders, teachers, preachers, and community leaders.

2. *Architectural Description*- The home, as previously stated, is a two-story asymmetrical Queen Anne Victorian style wood frame house with a two-story ell projecting on the right side of the front elevation. The exterior of the entire house is clad with pine clapboards painted yellow with a white-water table trim board and drip cap. The outside and inside corner posts are also white and simple in design. The cornice and soffit are also painted white with Italianate brackets. The roof has a 9/12 pitch covered with brown architectural composite shingles with copper valleys. The ridge is adorned with a lightning rod system that includes an antique weathervane. The windows are 2 over 2 double hung sash, all single units except for the front first floor ell, which contains a pair of the same window units. Most of the windows are paired with green movable louvered shutters mounted with antique hardware. A decorative louver vent adorns the gable end of the front ell. A one-story wood porch that wraps around the left side of the house is constructed with white turned posts and a turned balustrade railing with white Italianate brackets. The foundation is constructed with Old Carolina handmade brick that matched the color of the original brick.

The west (side) elevation reveals the one-story ell to the rear of the main part of the house. The ceiling height in this part of the house is 24 inches higher than the front part of the house. A detached two-car garage is visible from the west elevation. The garage, although not built until 1985, resembles the materials and color scheme of the house. The garage is connected to the house by a breezeway that was constructed to match the front porch.

The east (side) elevation contains a two-story gable ell on the right and a one-story gable ell on the left. A one story flat-styled roof connects the two gabled ells. Orange-red brick chimneys are centered in each gable end, and both are capped with a dental style crown.

The north (rear) elevation contains three white picture windows topping three white awning windows on the right side of the upper level. The left side has two white 6 over 6 double hung windows above white panels, suggesting that longer windows were once adorned this façade. Above the two windows is a white decorative louvered ventilator. The lower basement level is constructed with the same orange-red

¹⁶ The Salisbury Post, “Obituaries” -June 28, 2022

¹⁷ Budd, Ted (Congressman) A note to the Family of Mr. Jack Kepley, Sr. –August 10, 2022

brick and contains two white 1 over 1 awning-type windows. To the left at the basement level is a green roll-up garage door. A green flush panel door is located in the center of the basement level wall.

No outbuildings are included in the designation.

3. Archaeological Significance – Artifacts could possibly be discovered below the surface of the existing grassy front yard. It is believed that remnants of the original foundation, the foundation of the 1883 addition (including the hand dug root cellar), and the original hand-dug well, if located could establish the original location of the house before it was moved. A very old Black Walnut tree and a large Flowering Magnolia tree are in the front yard.
4. Property's Integrity – Although the house was moved from its original site in 1976 (approximately 150 feet north), it remained on the original tract of land. The subsequent renovation was conducted in a manner as to preserve the six aspects of the site's integrity.
 - *Design:* The original wood-framed building structure was preserved. Many of the wood sills were damaged by termites and rot. These were replaced without altering the exterior appearance.
 - *Setting:* The house is located within a very scenic section of Bringle Ferry Road adjoining park land and forest land. Where possible, the existing trees and landscaping elements were protected from damage during the relocation. The original driveway/entrance was preserved. A new brick sidewalk was constructed that reflected the design of the original brick sidewalk. The rear elevation probably detracts from the integrity of the setting. Due to the elevation changes at the rear of the house in the current location, a partial basement was constructed under the rear portion of the house. Efforts were taken to obscure the visibility of this element from the front.
 - *Workmanship:* Craftsmen with experience in historic preservation were employed by the owners.
 - *Materials:* Where possible, all original materials were maintained. The 1883 double hung 2 over 2 windows were scraped, repainted, and rehung in their original locations. New windows were custom made by local craftsmen to match existing windows. The louvered movable exterior shutters were scraped, repainted (their original green color) and rehung with the original hardware. The front door with side and transom lights was scraped and repainted. Although the original sawn cedar shingle roof has been replaced, the brown architectural composite shingles with copper valleys were selected to match the look of the original.
 - *Feeling:* Although the interior of the house is not being designated, elements of the interior of the house reflect the history: One Federal style mantle and 5 Federal style doors remain in the house. Three Queen Anne style mantles and 10 doors remain. Period antique heart pine flooring was used in many of the rooms. Period wallpaper hangs in every room.
 - *Association:* This house is directly connected to both of the significant individuals listed above. Tobias Kesler acquired the property during the 1860's and it remained in his name until 1973. The Kepleys acquired the property in 1973 and lived here until their deaths in 2022.
5. Justification of the Boundaries – The site plan illustrates the extent of the area to be designated. The current community well that serves three families is excluded from the area to be designated.

V. Supporting Documentation

1. Digital Photographs

1. Front Elevation

2. East Elevation
3. West Elevation
4. Rear Elevation
5. Northeast Elevation (garage & breezeway detail)
6. Craven Stamp

2. Floor Plans

1. Floor plan circa 1844 - first and second floor
2. Floor plan circa 1883 - first and second floor
3. Floor plan circa 1978 - first and second floor

3. Site Plan

1. Site plan

4. Maps

1. Tax Map

VI. Bibliography/ Source Citations

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