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Part 7: Physical Description

The Mordecai Place Historic District is located just northeast of downtown Raleigh. It is bordered on the west and north by the CSX railroad track, on the east by Old Wake Forest Road, on the south by the locally designated North Blount Street Historic District, and on southeast by the Oakwood Historic District (NR).

Mordecai Place Historic District includes approximately fifteen blocks of frame and brick buildings, principally single-family residences, constructed between c. 1916-1947. The district's buildings include the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Mordecai House, a few houses constructed on a 1916 subdivision of a small portion of the Mordecai plantation, and those built after a major subdivision of the plantation lands in 1922. There are 181 contributing buildings and one contributing object, and sixty one non-contributing buildings and one non-contributing object. Seventy-five per cent of resources are contributing, and twenty-five per cent are non-contributing.

The few non-residential resources in the district include a former school (#1 on the inventory list, a church (#2), a small motor lodge (#201) and the Mordecai Historic Park (#231). This park includes the Mordecai House (NR), a preserved late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century plantation house operated as a house museum, and other small historic buildings, including the Andrew Johnson Birthplace (NR) and the locally designated Badger-Iredell Law Office. Most of the buildings in the park were moved from elsewhere in Raleigh and piedmont North Carolina, preserved here and used for various educational purposes.

The historic district contains a broad range of house types located on small lots. This mix of types includes bungalows, Foursquares, I-houses, Cape Cods, and various period revival styles popular in the early twentieth century, including Georgian and Colonial Revival, Tudor, Dutch Colonial Revival, Spanish Mission, and Italian Renaissance Revival. There are also some modest post-Depression and War II-era houses with Minimal Traditional elements. Some of the lots contain small modern sheds located at the rear, but these structures, generally not visible from the street, do not detract from the overall character of the historic district.

The Mordecai neighborhood, with its rich variety of house types and forms is an excellent example of the housing developments that existed before modern suburban tract house

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developments. The typical house in the Mordecai neighborhood occupies more of its small lot than is usually found in post-World War II suburban development, giving it a pedestrian-scaled environment. The district has a dense tree cover with its picturesque streets shaded by many large trees, with oaks predominating. The streets are laid out in a hybrid-grid pattern with the major arteries running in a northeast to southwest axis. Major defining elements include the railroad corridor which runs along the northwest edge of the district, and Wake Forest Road (U.S. 1) east of the neighborhood. Many of the yards are carefully landscaped with old, well-tended gardens. The landscape, the tight development pattern, and the varied houses combine to create an ambience evocative of the 1920s, the district's major growth period.

The earliest development in the area was the Pilot Mill and mill village erected between 1895 and the early 1900s on the the western edge of the former Mordecai plantation. The mill housing was all razed in 1981. Nothing remains of that community except for the former Pilot School (#1) and the c. 1917 Pilot Baptist Church (#2). The previously developed church lot property appears on the 1922 subdivision map, labeled as "church." The church continues in operation today. The little altered one-story brick school building, constructed in 1924, probably was utilized by students from the mill village as well as the new adjoining Mordecai neighborhood, developed by Dan and Frank Allen in the 1920s. Today, it has been adapted for use as the Together Neighborhood Center, serving as a center for various after-school programs. Although these survivors of the mill village are not directly related to the architectural development of the adjoining early twentieth-century neighborhood, they are visually linked and historically connected to the district's development.

The largest and grandest of the district's houses are found within a one-block radius of the elegant plantation house, on Mordecai Street, and Old Wake Forest Road (known as Louisburg Road until the early 1920s) on lots exempted from the 1922 sales contract. Large Georgian and Colonial Revival-style houses were popular design choices here. The 800 block of Old Wake Forest Road contains two good, little altered examples of brick Georgian Revival style houses (#s 214 and 215). Both c. 1920 houses, set on unusually large lots, are thought to have been designed by architect James S. Salter and both display variations on features typical of the style. This includes their symmetrical five-bay wide, double-pile form, ornate paneled front doors with sidelights and fanlights, classical columns, wide cornices

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ornamented with dentil courses and, on #215, three gabled dormers with round arched heads.

Another handsome, intact Georgian Revival-style house is the Boushall House (#213) located nearby and designed in 1912 by Rose and Linthicam Architects for banker, John Boushall. This imposing brick house, now in use as a residence and antiques shop, is dominated by a monumental two-story front portico carried by fluted columns with Corinthian capitals.

A group of good examples of brick Colonial Revival-style houses, all constructed c. 1920, is found in the 800 block of Mordecai Drive (#s 129, 130, and 131). Each is a substantial two-story brick house with six-over-six windows. The Landon Hill House (#129) is particularly well detailed with a molded wood cornice with returns and main entrance with pedimented gable, fluted columns and a paneled main entrance with transom and sidelights. It is used as a residence and an interior design shop, Robert Black Interiors.

Other brick Classical Revival houses include the J.A. Jones House (#120) and the house at 1107 Old Wake Forest Road (#212). The J.A. Jones House has a particularly graceful entry porch with a lattice-work demi-lune, and an open side porch, both carried by slender Doric columns. Although it is somewhat deteriorated, #212 retains some suggestion of its early elegance represented by the marble cherub fountain in the front yard.

Frame Classical Revival houses are also found in the district. For example, the two-story house at 1216 Mordecai Drive (#167) is ornamented by full-height pilasters on the main elevation, pedimented gable, and demi-lunes over the six-over-six windows. The Pou-Massengill-Lundy House (#191) is a dignified two-story frame Georgian Revival house on Old Wake Forest Road. It was carefully restored in 1996. The restoration followed years of neglect and inappropriate alterations. Among other changes, aluminum siding was removed and the original wide clapboards, repaired and painted. The results of its interior restoration was equally dramatic with, among many other changes, the original pocket doors taken out of attic storage and replaced in their original parlor and living room locations.

In the district there are several good, intact examples of the Dutch Colonial Revival style executed in brick with trademark gambrel roof, such as the McKinney House (#204) on Old Wake Forest Road. Another brick example is the house at 1108 Mordecai Drive (#126). Frame examples include the Neil Hester House (#134) also on Mordecai Drive. It has shed-roof dormers and a full-facade front porch carried by square posts.

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Tudor Revival is another popular style in the district. There are good examples of this romantic style rendered in brick (#s 79, 98, 103 and 147), stone (#s 111 and 177) and in frame (#172). The stone Tudor Revival-style house at 1309 Mordecai (#111) is nicely detailed with a characteristic steeply pitched gable roof, and heavy plank door with decorative metal straps. The Gables Motor Lodge (#201) is a prominent example of the style located on Old Wake Forest Road. The stone building was built in the late 1920s by William and Ella Johnson to take advantage of the increasing tourist automobile traffic on what was then known as U.S. 1. After her husband's death, Mrs. Johnson continued to operate the motel into the 1940s. The building now has a two-story rear addition and continues in operation as a motor lodge today.

There is a lone example of the Spanish Mission Revival style represented by the c. 1920 Adams House (#176) at 1419 Old Wake Forest Road. It is set back on a steep ridge on the road and hidden from view by overgrown landscaping and its location. It is intact with an arched entrance and engaged porch. There is a matching stone garage in the rear yard.

There is also one example of the Italian Renaissance Revival style in the Thompson House (#186). This c. 1920 blond brick house occupies a prominent corner on Old Wake Forest Road. The two-story center block is flanked by one-story wings. The intact house retains the Doric columns, nine-over-nine and six-over-six windows, and carved wooden brackets in the wide overhanging eaves.

More commonly found in rural settings, there are two neighboring frame I-houses on busy Old Wake Forest Road (#s 184 and 185). Each intact gable-roofed three-bay wide house has an attached, hip-roofed full-width porch carried by Doric columns.

There are a few little-altered, good examples of Foursquare style houses in the district on Mordecai Drive (#s 158 and 170). The Isley House displays the style's characteristic cubical form and hip roof. Both houses are covered with weatherboards and have multi-pane sash windows. An interesting example of the Foursquare is the intact brick duplex built in 1938 (#95). It retains the original paired six-over-six windows with stone sills.

The most common house type in the district is the Craftsman-style bungalow. There are numerous good, unaltered examples of this nationally popular style, rendered in brick, frame, and stucco. Several representative small brick examples are

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found on Courtland Drive including the house at 1403 (#21). It has a hip roof with hip-roofed dormers, original three-over-one windows and sawn shingles in the gable ends. The porch, carried by square wood posts set on brick plinths, is typical. A commonly seen variation is a porch that extends to encompass a porte-cochere (#39). The house at 1315 Courtland (#34) is one of several that have a distinctive bungalow porch with large, outsized stuccoed posts set on brick plinths. An unusual frame bungalow on Courtland (#78) displays a second level sleeping porch on the main elevation. An unaltered two-story stucco covered bungalow is located at 1219 Mordecai Drive (#117). The house at 1207 Old Wake Forest Road (#205) is a fine example of a classic, brick, gable-front bungalow. It has wide eaves and knee braces and a welcoming front porch framed by a wide arch and held by brick columns. Other intact representative examples include #s 69, 149, 202 and 221.

The Cape Cod style was popular built in brick as well as frame. One of the best examples is the house at 1315 Mordecai Drive (#107), a classic frame Cape Cod built about 1938, with steeply pitched gable-side roof, six-over-six windows and a side porch. Other relatively unaltered examples include #s 73, 94, 101, 136 and 153.

Construction largely ceased during the years of World War II, but commenced again in 1945-46 utilizing a style Virginia and Lee McAlester have termed "Minimal Traditional." These houses generally have smaller floor areas, a diminished scale, an absence of roof eaves, and facade chimneys and gables. Two good examples are found at 301 and 309 Poplar St. (#s 224 and 225). They, along with later ranch houses (including #s 100 and 163), fill out the districts housing stock. Modern apartments were built in the 1970s and 1980s on some of the remaining lots (#s 23-25, for instance.) The newest construction in the district is the house at 1427 Mordecai Dr. (#86) constructed in 1991. It is quite compatible in scale and materials with the surrounding historic buildings.

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- 231c. N Badger-Iredell Law Office c. 1810
231d. N St. Mark's Episcopal Church c. 1847
231e. N Kitchen kitchen 1842
231f. N Garden
231g. N Storehouse
231h. N frame double-door bldg. (possible plantation office)

Centerpiece of the neighborhood named for it, the Mordecai Historic Park consists of the plantation house, a two-story frame vernacular farm house expanded in 1824 by architect William Nichols in the fashionable Greek Revival style, and various other small buildings, both original and relocated to the park. The Mordecai House is adaptively used as a house museum and center for historical activities. The park contains a variety of historic buildings, moved to the site from various locations. Of particular interest is the Andrew Johnson birthplace, a gambrel-roofed former tavern kitchen building with massive double-shoulder chimney; the recreated kitchen garden; Badger-Iredell Law Office, a frame law office used by George E. Badger, Judge, US Senator and Secretary of the Navy. It was later used by James Iredell, also a Judge, Senator and NC Governor; and St. Mark's Chapel, a small frame church with steeple on the main elevation. The historic Mordecai House was once the seat of one of the largest plantations in Wake County. Today several Raleigh neighborhoods, including the Mordecai Historic District, Historic Oakwood and Hayes-Barton, are located on former Mordecai land.

(for further information, see NR nomination "Mordecai Historic Park" and extensive working files about the creation of the park, found at the Survey & Planning Office, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh).

232. VL
233. Landscaped traffic median