

THE HISTORY OF 711 PARKER

The home at 711 Parker Street is a historical treasure, an embodiment of both its architectural period and Durham's history.

The construction -- and later relocation -- of 711 Parker can be traced back to one of two landowners whose farms and woods encompassed the entirety of Morehead Hill in the late 1800s, William Gaston Vickers. Vickers shaped the growth of the neighborhood by gradually selling off his land for residential development, beginning in the 1870s, when he sold a parcel to an influential banker named Eugene Morehead, until his death in 1924.

Around 1890, Vickers gave the entire block bounded by Vickers Avenue, Morehead Avenue, Shepherd Street, and Parker Street to his daughter, Melissa Vickers Berry, and her husband, W.H. "Bud" Berry. Bud Berry was a contractor who built their family home at 914 Vickers Avenue, on the northwest corner of Vickers and Morehead. Two additional homes located just to the north of the Berry house on Vickers Avenue were built shortly thereafter, likely by other Vickers family members. One of these two is the home that now sits at 711 Parker.

As was the fashion at the time, the home is a "vernacular Late Queen Anne" style. The architectural period of 711 Parker is evident in its dominant, front-facing gable with

overhanging eaves, its wrap around porch supported by tapered box posts, and its chimneys with corbelled stacks located in the middle of the cross-gabled roof. The original German lap siding covers the exterior.

Many turn-of-the-century homes in the blocks immediately surrounding 711 Parker have a similar style, but few are as grand. The majority are single-story structures that are only one or two rooms deep. This home's height, depth, and impressive gable stand out from its contemporaries.

The history of 711 Parker is not only apparent on the exterior, but inside as well. The home, originally heated with coal, has five fireplaces. Four are capped off and sealed, but the original interior brickwork remains visible in all of them. Two of the fireplaces are tiled with handmade green rectangular tile that is likely original to the home. The current owners have added a gas-powered stove to the living room fireplace, and the other two fireplaces on the first floor boast decorative cast iron fireplace covers, also believed to be original to the home. The crawl space still contains a bin for coal, and the exterior has a small door through which coal deliveries could be shoveled.

The first floor has hardwood oak flooring secured with hand hewn nails, plaster walls, and soaring 10-foot ceilings.

The owners have removed all the paint and stained the original woodwork in the kitchen, including the trim and wainscoting. Many of the original windows remain in the house, though a prior owner did replace a few with vinyl before Morehead Hill became a protected historical district in the 1980s.

The original banister wraps around the staircase leading to the second story. There, the floors are original, old growth heart pine, a strong and beautiful wood harvested to near extinction in this country by the early 1900s. The second-floor ceilings are an impressive nine feet, and additional fireplaces grace two of the three bedrooms upstairs.

This home's address on Parker Street, rather than Vickers Avenue, is tied up in the development of the Morehead Hill neighborhood. In the early twentieth century, as Morehead Hill became increasingly fashionable, wealthy business executives sought to buy its most appealing lots. Seeking to benefit from the influx of high society individuals, the Berry family moved their home from 914 Vickers Avenue to the opposite corner of their property, 709 Parker Street.

The move freed up the corner of Vickers and Morehead for sale to James S. Cobb, a powerful tobacco executive, whose mansion built in 1910 is now the Morehead Manor.

When the Berrys moved their home to Parker, the two houses built directly to the north by fellow Vickers family members or Berry grantees were also moved to Parker Street, landing at 711 Parker and 713 Parker. While moving or dismantling entire houses for redevelopment of property was not uncommon in Durham during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, its frequency in Morehead Hill became a unique feature of the neighborhood's development.

The transplanted homes on Parker Street stand out to this day. These three homes are noticeably larger and grander than the other homes on the surrounding streets. The neighborhood's 1984 nomination to the National Registry of Historic Places noted that these three properties "render this block the most distinctive of the more densely developed northern end of Morehead Hill."

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