

City of Raleigh  
P.O. Box 590  
Raleigh, NC 27602

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ORDINANCE NO. (1993) 303

PRESENTED  
FOR  
REGISTRATION  
93 DEC 22 PM 2:47

KENNETH C. WILKINS  
REGISTER OF DEEDS  
WAKE COUNTY

AN ORDINANCE DESIGNATING the Willis Graves House, 802 Oberlin Road IN THE PLANNING JURISDICTION OF THE CITY OF RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA, A HISTORIC LANDMARK.

WHEREAS, the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina authorized the creation of a countywide Historic Preservation Commission for Wake County and otherwise provided for the preservation of certain historic sites and buildings by the passage of Part 3C, Chapter 160A, Article 19 of the North Carolina General Statutes; and

WHEREAS, the City of Raleigh agreed to participate in the countywide Historic Preservation Commission through an interlocal agreement with Wake County; and

WHEREAS, the Wake County Historic Preservation Commission has made an investigation and recommended the following property be designated a historic landmark; and

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources has made an analysis that the following property is eligible to be designated a historic landmark; and

WHEREAS, on the 7th day of December 1993, a public hearing was held in the Council Chamber of the Municipal Building, Raleigh, by the City Council of the City of Raleigh to determine whether the hereinafter described property should be designated a historic landmark; and

WHEREAS, all requirements of Part 3C, Chapter 160A, Article 19 of the North Carolina General Statutes, preceding the adoption of this ordinance, have been met.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA THAT:

Section 1. The property designated as the Willis Graves House, in the planning jurisdiction of the City of Raleigh, North Carolina, be and is declared a Raleigh Historic Landmark. Said property being more particularly described as follows:

The Willis Graves House, 802 Oberlin Road (Wake County PIN # 1704.13 04 4293), approximately thirty-nine hundredths (.39) acre, including the entire parcel on which the building stands.

Section 2. Those elements that are integral to its historical, architectural, archaeological significance, or any combination thereof are as follows:

Exterior of the two-story Queen Anne residence, the only such residence in the historically African-American Oberlin community, built between 1884 and 1891 for Willis M. Graves, one of Oberlin's early settlers, being all of the parcel described in Section 1.

Section 3. No building, site, structure, or object that is designated in this ordinance located on the hereinbefore described site may be altered, restored, moved, remodeled, or reconstructed so that a change in design, material, or outer appearance occurs unless and until a certificate of

appropriateness is obtained from the Wake County Historic Preservation Commission of its successors.

Section 4. No building, site, structure, or object that is designated in this ordinance located on the hereinbefore described site may be demolished unless and until either approval of demolition is obtained from the Wake County Historic Preservation Commission or a period of three hundred sixty-five (365) days has elapsed following final review by the Commission of a request for demolition (or any longer period required by N.C.G.S. 160A-400.14 as it may be amended hereafter).

Section 5. All owners of the property hereinabove described, whose identity and addresses can be ascertained by the exercise of due diligence, shall be sent by certified mail a copy of this ordinance.

Section 6. This ordinance shall be indexed after the property owner's name in the grantor and grantee indexes in the Office of the Register of Deeds of Wake County.

Section 7. City administration and the Wake County Historic Preservation Commission are hereby authorized to have erected an appropriate sign on the site herein described setting forth the fact that said site has been designated a historic landmark by action of the Wake County Historic Preservation Commission and the Raleigh City Council provided, should the owners of the hereinabove described property not consent to the erection of said sign on the described premises, City administration and the Wake County Historic Preservation Commission are hereby authorized and directed to have said sign located on the public right-of-way adjacent to said property.

Section 8. In the event any building, site, structure, or object is demolished in accordance with the ordinances of the City of Raleigh, this ordinance shall automatically be null and void.

Section 9. Any violation of this ordinance shall be unlawful as by law provided.

Adopted: December 7, 1993

Effective: December 7, 1993

Distribution: City Council  
City Manager  
Planning Department (2)  
Inspections Department (3)  
Raleigh Historic Districts Commission  
Wake County Historic Preservation Commission  
Wake County Planning Department  
Wake County Tax Supervisor  
Wake County Registrar of Deeds  
Property Owner

BK5937PG0063



*City Of Raleigh*  
North Carolina

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA )  
COUNTY OF WAKE )

\*\*\*\*\*

CERTIFICATION

I, Gail G. Smith, City Clerk & Treasurer of the City of Raleigh, North Carolina, do hereby certify that the attached is a true and exact copy of Ordinance (1993) 303 adopted by the Raleigh City Council on 12/07/93.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and have caused the Seal of the City of Raleigh to be affixed this 8nd day of December, 1993.



*Gail G. Smith*  
Gail G. Smith  
City Clerk & Treasurer

**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 <sup>minor</sup> 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.

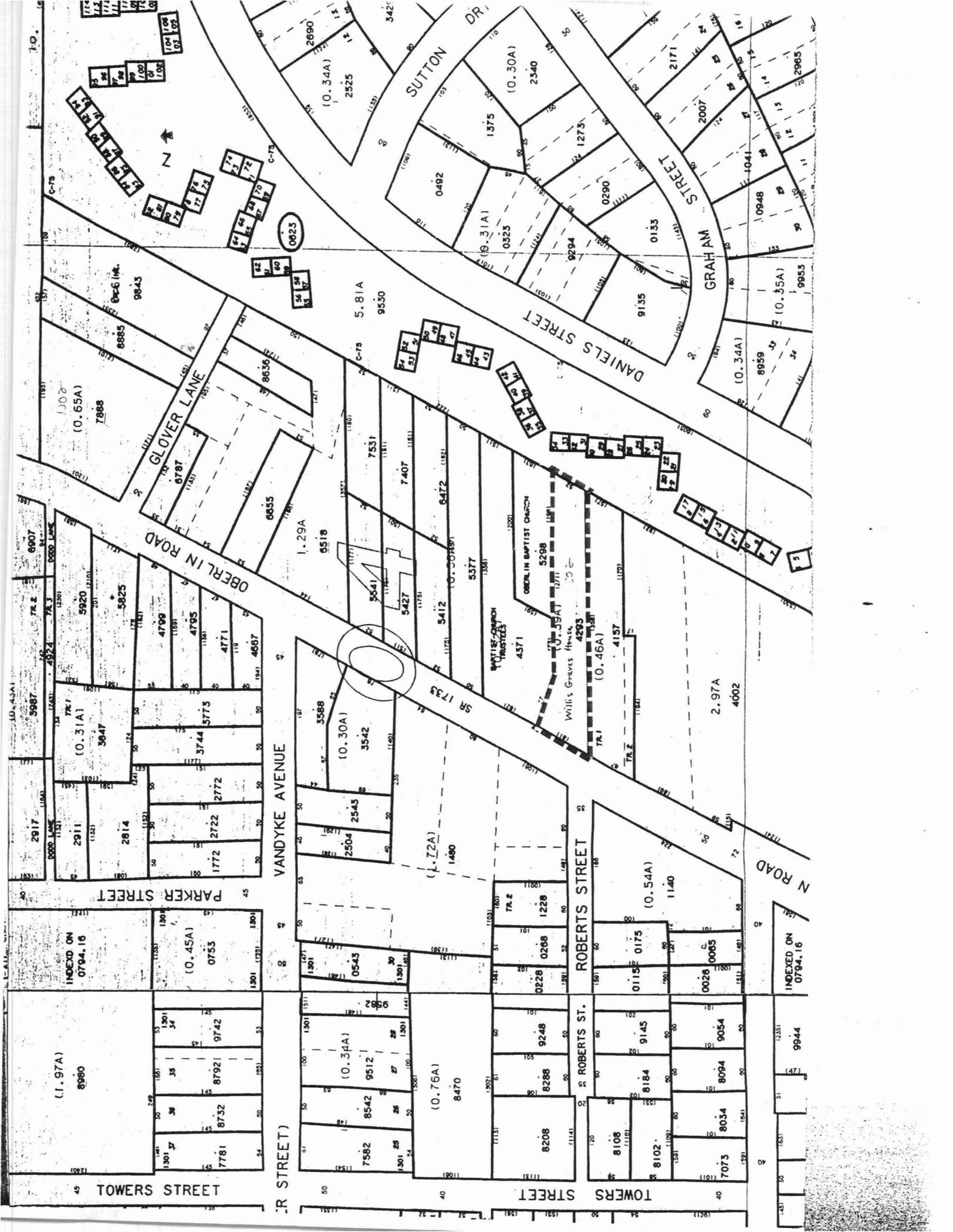
Elizabeth Reid Murray. Wake: Capital County of North Carolina, Vol.1. Raleigh, North Carolina: 1983.

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.



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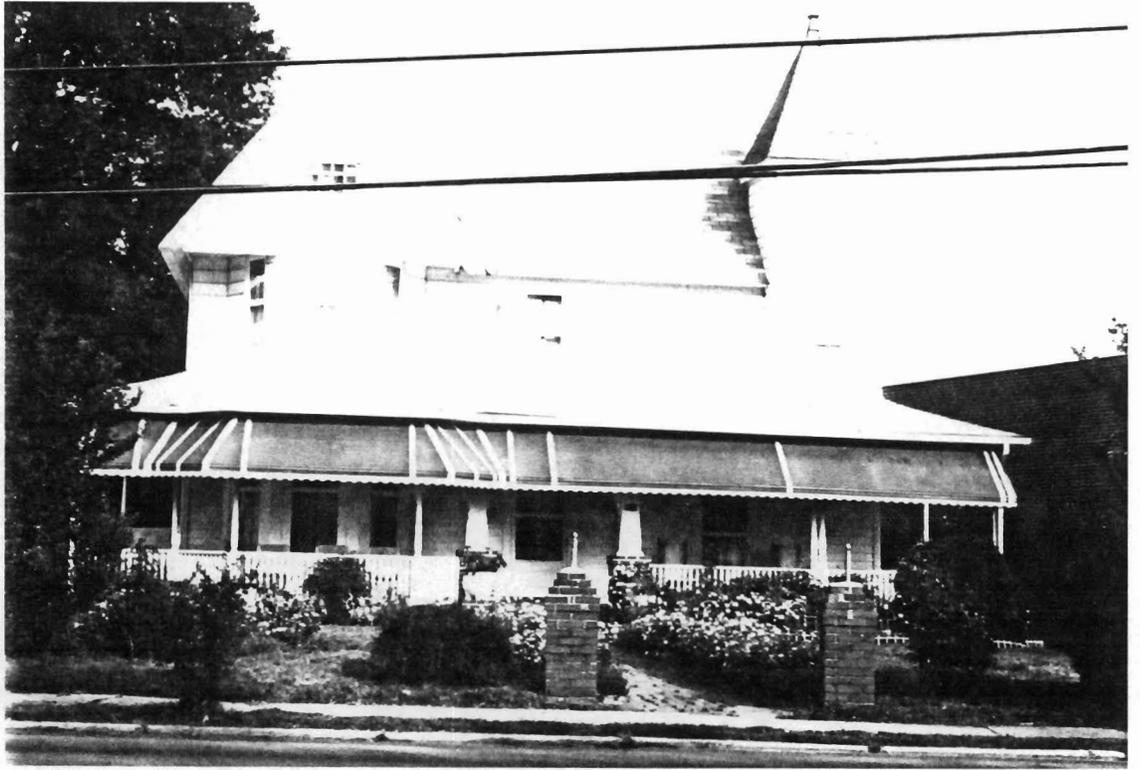
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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form



OK  
500

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Graves, Willis M., House

other names/site number Graves-Fields House ; Oakcrest

2. Location

street & number 802 Oberlin Road N/A  not for publication

city or town Raleigh N/A  vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Wake code 183 zip code 27605

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Jeffrey Crow SAPO 3/5/02  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources  
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Elson H. Beall 5/16/02  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Graves, Willis. M., House  
Name of Property

Wake, NC  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

Historic and Architectural Resources  
of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina 1865-1952

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN/Queen Anne

foundation BRICK

walls ALUMINUM

WOOD SHINGLE

roof ASPHALT SHINGLE

other

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ETHNIC HERITAGE/Black  
SOCIAL HISTORY

**Period of Significance**

c. 1884-1935

**Significant Dates**

N/A

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

\_\_\_\_\_

Graves, Willis M., House  
Name of Property

Wake, NC  
County and State

### 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .39 acres

#### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 

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Zone	Easting				Northing									

3 

Zone	Easting				Northing									

See continuation sheet

#### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

#### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sherry Joines Wyatt, Historic Preservation Specialist

organization David E. Gall, AIA, Architect date November 7, 2001

street & number 938 West Fifth Street telephone 336-773-1213

city or town Winston-Salem state NC zip code 27101

#### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

#### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Fields, Jeanette Heirs c/o Mary F. Haywood, executrix

street & number 3201 Hayden Court telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Raleigh state NC zip code 27612

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1  
Graves, Willis M., House, Wake County, North Carolina

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**7. Narrative Description**

The Willis M. Graves House is located at 802 Oberlin Road, in Raleigh, North Carolina. At the time the property was built this area, now in the northwestern part of Raleigh, was a freedmen's village known as Oberlin. The Graves House is situated facing west on a long, narrow lot measuring a little more than one-third of an acre. The pedestrian approach to the house from Oberlin Road is via a brick walk marked at the sidewalk by a pair of brick piers.

The Graves House is a two-story, frame Queen Anne style dwelling. The main block of the house is a single pile block that is three bays wide with a projecting, two-story polygonal bay capped by a very large gable on the north end of the front facade. On the south end of the facade is a projecting, two-story square tower with a pyramidal roof topped by a finial. The tower rises out of the second story and does not project from the wall underneath the porch on the first floor. The main block of the house has a gable end on the south. On the north, the roof is a hip that is integrated into the front gable. On the rear of the main block is a one-story, hip roof which extends the full width of house. It is unclear if it is original or an addition. Attached at right angles to this are a one-story, gabled ell and a small, one-story, hip-roofed ell. Between these two additions is an enclosed, L-shaped porch.

A one-story, wraparound porch encircles the sides and front of the main block of the house following the contours of the polygonal bay. The porch supports on either side of the central entry are Craftsman style battered posts on brick piers. The other porch posts are original, turned, paired posts with small brackets. The porch also has a spindlework frieze. The balustrade consists of molded rails and square balusters that were originally interspersed with large, diamond-shaped, sawnwork balusters (now removed). The full width of the porch on the front facade is further shaded by a c.1955 metal awning added beneath the porch eave.

Windows on the first floor have two-light lower sash and upper sash with single panes of glass framed by small, square, stained glass panes. Additional ornamentation at the windows of the polygonal bay is given by the diagonal beadboard panels below the windows. On the second floor, most windows are two-over-two. One-over-one windows on the second floor and on the rear additions are modern replacements. Above the entrance, the transom has stained glass squares framing a clear pane of glass on which the word "Oakcrest," the family's name for the house, has been painted. In the gable above the polygonal bay, is a stained glass attic light.

The roof of the house, additions, and porch are asphalt shingles. Two stuccoed, interior

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 2

Graves, Willis M., House, Wake County, North Carolina

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chimneys are located at the back of the main block and the northernmost has been shortened. An off-center exterior chimney is located on the east wall of the gabled rear addition. The house is covered in aluminum siding on the second floor and rear sections, while the first floor and the southern gable end are still sheathed in weatherboards. The gable over the bay is clad in decorative shingles with alternating bands of scallop and straight-edged shingles.

The interior of the Willis M. Graves House is a central hall plan with the stairs dominating the front hall and a small doorway leading to the rear section of the hall. On either side of the hall is a parlor with a fireplace on the east wall. The parlor on the south side of the house has a fireplace surround with molded consoles supporting the mantel and turned colonettes below. Between the consoles, below the mantel, are rows of bead and reel molding and dogtooth molding. The parlor on the north side of the hall has an arched alcove in which the bay window is located. The fireplace in this room features an overmantel with a mirror with fluted colonettes supporting the shelf above the mirror. A similar mantel is located in the dining room, directly behind the north parlor. The fireplace surround in the room behind the south room is very simple. Other finishes include plaster walls (papered over), four panel doors (two long over two short), and simple door surrounds. The front two parlors and the dining room also have simple crown moldings. Upstairs, the ceilings are considerably lower, the walls are beadboard, and the fireplace surrounds are less ornate.

The yard of the house has a few mature trees and brick piers at the head of the brick entry walk. The current owner is not aware of any outbuildings that were once situated on the property.

The integrity of the house is negatively impacted by the addition of aluminum siding to the upper level and rear of the house. Yet, the very good integrity of the interior and the presence of original exterior decorative details such as the turned porch posts, spindle frieze, and original decorative shingles combine with the still-present original house form to give a very good sense of the original character and appearance of the house. Thus, the overall integrity of the Willis M. Graves House is good.

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#### **Summary Paragraph**

Located in the freedmen's village of Oberlin, now part of the City of Raleigh, the Willis M. Graves House is locally significant as a symbol of the financial and social success that was possible for residents of Oberlin in spite of the challenges of racism and poverty in the wake of the Civil War and Reconstruction. The house was constructed about 1884 by Willis M. Graves, an African American brick mason. Graves's financial success as a tradesman as well as his civic position as Justice of the Peace and an officer of Wilson Temple United Methodist Church illustrate the life of one of the most prominent early residents of Oberlin. The development of Oberlin from a tiny freedmen's village beginning in the late 1860s to a community of substantial stature by the turn of the twentieth century was defined by the success of men like Graves. The stable, middle class reputation that Oberlin garnered during its early development was a point of pride throughout much of its history and was a defining feature of the village.

The Willis M. Graves House is one of the largest and most stylistically exuberant Queen Anne style dwellings in Oberlin. In an era when modest tri-gable cottages with restrained Queen Anne motifs were the norm, the Graves House set its owner apart and marked his position as a prominent citizen. Despite having been partially sheathed in replacement siding, the distinctive form of the building, along with the presence of original decorative details such as shingles in the front gable, stained glass, turned porch posts and spindle frieze, still evoke its historic character and stylistic qualities. Furthermore, the interior, which features original fire surrounds with double mantel shelves, mirrors, molded consoles, and turned colonettes, is noteworthy.

The Willis M. Graves House's significance relates to the Multiple Property Documentation Form "Historic and Architectural Resources of Oberlin, Wake County, North Carolina, 1865 - 1952" under the following contexts: "The Cultural and Social Life of Oberlin" (pages E 10 - 22) and "The Jim Crow Years: Modest Prosperity and Sense of Community, 1880 - 1950" (pages E 22 - 28) and under the following property type: "Residential Buildings" (pages F 31 - 36). The Willis M. Graves House satisfies the registration requirements for its type as set forth in the MPDF (pages F 35 - 36) in that it possesses the required level of integrity of location, setting and feeling to be an important representation of the historical development of Oberlin. The period of significance of the property extends from c.1884, the construction date of the house, to 1935, the year of Willis M. Graves's death. The Willis M. Graves House is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for African American Ethnic Heritage and Social History.

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### Historical Background

The Willis M. Graves House was constructed circa 1884 in the freedmen's village known as Oberlin. The first owner, and probably the builder, was Willis M. Graves, an African American brick mason. Graves purchased the parcel from Jacob. S. Allen, a white contractor, on January 22, 1884.<sup>1</sup>

The property came to Jacob Allen through a series of at least four other white owners between 1869 and 1881. The most interesting aspect of this lengthy chain of title was that the parcel of land eventually purchased by Graves had been part of a court-ordered partition of the lands of John Boylan in 1869.<sup>2</sup> Other sections of the Boylan lands were purchased by Wake County Sheriff, Timothy F. Lee, who later subdivided the parcel and sold lots to African Americans and a small tract was acquired by the Raleigh Coöperative Land and Building Association, an organization that helped freedmen to acquire land and build homes.<sup>3</sup>

While it is unknown how much Jacob Allen paid for the land when he purchased it in 1881, the same parcel had been conveyed in 1876 for \$460.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Allen had sold at least four lots off of the original parcel, yet still set a purchase price of \$750 for the land sold to Graves.<sup>5</sup> It is not clear whether the price suggests a substantial increase in land between 1876 and 1884, if it indicates the often higher-than-average selling prices to African Americans, or if it perhaps points to a dwelling having been built on the property. Tempering Allen's motives, however, is the evidence that he personally financed Graves' purchase, a generous transaction between two men of different races at this time. Allen agreed to have the \$750 paid in \$150 installments over the next five years,

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<sup>1</sup>Wake County Deed Book 78, page 146.

<sup>2</sup>Wake County Deed Book 63, page 235; book 43, page 110; and book 28, page 391.

<sup>3</sup>Briggs.

<sup>4</sup>Wake County Deed Book 43, page 110.

<sup>5</sup>Wake County Deed Book 78, page 146.

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beginning in 1885 and ending in 1889.<sup>6</sup> One can hypothesize that Graves was personally known to Allen via their common association with the building profession and that this might explain Allen's willingness to finance the purchase. It is also important to note that John F. Flagg's name was also listed on the deed with Graves. It seems likely that Flagg, a resident of Oberlin and officer of Wilson Temple United Methodist Church, served as a cosigner to the finance arrangement between Graves and Allen because he is not mentioned in any of the succeeding deeds to the property. The relationship between Flagg and Graves is not known, but Flagg also served as a witness to Graves' marriage and was likely a relative or close friend.<sup>7</sup>

Willis M. Graves was born in Mississippi in 1866.<sup>8</sup> It is not known when or why he came to the fledgling community of Oberlin, but he had arrived here at least by the early 1880s. Graves married Eleanor E. Hinton in Oberlin on September 26, 1883. Witnesses to the marriage were J.F. Flagg and Christopher C. Graves perhaps indicating that other members of the Graves family had migrated to the Raleigh area as well.<sup>9</sup> Eleanor (who is referred to as Elina in some sources) was born in North Carolina around 1868.<sup>10</sup>

Working as a tradesman, Willis M. Graves, would have greater economic opportunities than many African Americans of his day who worked as day laborers. Graves seems to have utilized his capacity early in his life - he was only eighteen when he purchased his house lot in 1884. Furthermore, in the following year, Willis Graves, along with John Flagg and L.B. Hinton (presumably a relation of Eleanor), were listed in a group of about fifteen men who were serving as

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid and Wake County Marriage Index.

<sup>8</sup>Soundex for North Carolina, 1900.

<sup>9</sup>Wake County Marriage Index.

<sup>10</sup>Soundex for North Carolina, 1900.

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officers of Wilson Temple United Methodist Church.<sup>11</sup> His involvement in the management of church affairs was a precursor to his civic role as Justice of the Peace. Graves seems to have been a well-known man throughout his life, leading local historian and newspaperman Willis Briggs to describe Graves as a “highly respected leader of his race,” in Briggs’ 1948 article on Oberlin’s history.<sup>12</sup>

Graves’ house also represents his relative wealth and status. The style of the house and the historical record indicate that Graves built his house soon after he purchased the land in 1884. The *Raleigh City Directory* records Graves living in Oberlin by at least 1901. The house is the largest, and one of the most exuberant, Queen Anne style dwellings in Oberlin. At a time when relatively modest single-pile, tri-gable cottages with subdued Queen Anne references such as turned porch supports or sawn brackets were prevalent in Oberlin, the Graves house, with its corner tower and polygonal bay capped by a decorative gable goes well beyond the typical level of detail. Although its references to the popular style of its day are unmistakable, the Graves house is distinctly of its place. The way that the corner tower is actually set in from the corner of the house, merely attached to the facade of the house, and the unusually large gable and hip roof that extends to the rear of the front gable are features that mark the house as not being professionally designed or even taken from a pattern book. Instead, it may be that Graves himself applied what he knew about current architectural fashion to his house in a way that pleased him rather than a strict adherence to popular stylistic rules.

Quantifying Willis Graves’ economic success are the tax rolls for 1900. In this year, Graves owned six lots in Oberlin: two valued at \$125, one at \$50, one at \$250, another at \$300, and finally a lot worth \$800 (presumably his house lot). Graves also owned a “town lot” on East Cabarrus Street worth \$150. Thus, the total value of his real estate was \$1650. Of personal property, Graves owned about \$150. To put these figures in perspective, they can be compared with those of some of the most well-to-do and respected men in Oberlin. John T. Turner, who resided in a large, two-story

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<sup>11</sup>Wilson Temple Historical Committee, “Historical Notes, 1971,” unpublished notes in the Architectural Survey file for Wilson Temple United Methodist Church, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office.

<sup>12</sup>Willis G. Briggs, “Oberlin Village Emerged During Reconstruction,” *Raleigh News and Observer* 8 August 1948, IV.

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house and was a grocer and later the proprietor of the Raleigh Shoe Company, owned \$2175 in real estate, but only \$75 worth of personal property in 1900. Reverend M.L. Latta, who had amassed a large tract of land for his Latta University, owned \$1100 worth of real estate and a great deal of personal property including furnishings, livestock, jewelry, and a library that together valued \$155. In contrast, Reverend Plummer T. Hall, a highly respected man who had helped found Oberlin Baptist Church owned only \$175 of real estate and his library worth \$20.<sup>13</sup>

Willis Graves worked as a bricklayer throughout his life, except for a brief period around 1917 when he operated a grocery and post office in his home. Apparently successful in his trade, Graves was reported in the 1920 census as owning his home free of mortgage.<sup>14</sup>

Eleanor and Willis Graves had at least six children born between about 1885 and 1894: Lemuel, Christine, Mildred, Willis Jr., Leroy, and George.<sup>15</sup> Three of these children, Christine, Mildred, and George, became teachers. At this time, becoming a teacher was noteworthy, as it indicated that the person most likely came from a family able to afford education beyond the high school level. Willis, Jr. was a bricklayer and Leroy worked variously as a bricklayer, teacher, tailor, and laborer.<sup>16</sup> In 1920, three of the Graves children still resided at home: Christine, age 30; Mildred, age 28; and Leroy, age 26.<sup>17</sup> By 1928, Willis M. Graves, Jr. was living in Wayne County, Michigan, and his brother George was residing in New York, New York.<sup>18</sup> The brothers were among the many young African Americans to migrate north during the early twentieth century. Looking for better

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<sup>13</sup>Wake County Tax Records, North Carolina Department of Archives and History.

<sup>14</sup>Raleigh City Directory and 1920 Census in Raleigh Historic Districts Commission "Raleigh Historic Landmark Designation Application and Report for the Willis Graves House, 1993."

<sup>15</sup>Briggs.

<sup>16</sup>Raleigh Historic Districts Commission, and Soundex for 1900 and 1920.

<sup>17</sup>Soundex for North Carolina, 1920.

<sup>18</sup>Wake County Deed book 541, page 430.

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opportunities away from the Jim Crow-era South, industry such as the Ford Motor Company plant in Dearborn, Wayne County, Michigan, and the exciting opportunities of New York during the Harlem Renaissance may have influenced the Graves brothers new locations.

On May 10, 1922, Christine and Mildred Graves acquired the house and lot from their father for \$10.<sup>19</sup> According to the *Raleigh City Directory*, Willis M. Graves continued to live in the house until 1935, which is believed to have been the year of his death.<sup>20</sup> Christine and Mildred Graves followed their father's example and were involved in the activities of Wilson Temple United Methodist Church. The church history records that they both served as organists.<sup>21</sup> Mildred Graves died around 1928 leaving Christine, who had by then married J.M. Harris and moved to Buncombe County, North Carolina, as the owner of the property.<sup>22</sup>

The circumstances that brought about the next phase in the history of the Graves House is unknown, but in 1934, Christine and her husband turned the property over to the Home Owners' Loan Corporation, a federal institution created under the Home Owners' Loan Act of 1933.<sup>23</sup> The Home Owners' Loan Act was part of the New Deal program to provide funds for repair and refinancing of home mortgages for those who were suffering the effects of the Great Depression.<sup>24</sup> Since the 1920 census reported that Willis Graves was not carrying a mortgage on the property, it can only be surmised that the mortgage was brought about by the financial situation caused by Willis

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<sup>19</sup>Wake County Deed Book 437, page 203.

<sup>20</sup>*Raleigh City Directory*, 1901 - 1935.

<sup>21</sup>Wilson Temple United Methodist Church. *Wilson Temple United Methodist Church Centennial, 1872 - 1972: Facing the Challenges of the Next Century* (Raleigh: Wilson Temple United Methodist Church, c.1972).

<sup>22</sup>Wake County Deed Book 541, page 430.

<sup>23</sup>Wake County Deed Book 743, page 265 and Book 795, page 6.

<sup>24</sup>Page Smith, *Redeeming the Time: A People's History of the 1920s and the New Deal* (NY: Penguin Books, 1991), 445 and 601.

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Graves' death or that of his daughter Mildred or, perhaps, by financial difficulties of Christine herself as she appears to have married a second time between about 1928 and 1934.<sup>25</sup> Despite the reasonable wealth amassed by Willis Graves, it is true that the Depression hit African Americans quite hard and proved to be the demise of other ambitious men in Oberlin such as Reverend M.L. Latta.

Regardless of the circumstances, the property was sold at court auction in December of 1938 for \$2000. The new owners were John and Alice Graham. John Graham was a fireman for the Norfolk and Southern Railroad. Graham and his wife Alice resided here until 1945, then sold the house in May of that year to Spurgeon and Jeannetta Fields.<sup>26</sup>

Spurgeon Fields grew up on a farm working for a prominent white family in Oxford, Granville County, North Carolina. Spurgeon left Oxford when he was about sixteen years old to escape his father who collected and kept the children's paychecks. The family story tells us that one day, young Spurgeon acquired his check before his father could get it and caught a bus to Raleigh that afternoon. In Raleigh, he worked at Lassiter's Mill and later worked as a cook at St. Mary's Girls School. Finally, he went to work as a chauffeur for Josephus Daniels, the editor of the Raleigh News and Observer, whose house was in the prestigious Hayes Barton neighborhood. Spurgeon Fields worked as the general helper for Daniels personally and at the News and Observer. Family tradition indicates that Mr. Daniels helped Spurgeon purchase the house and there are several Daniels family antiques in the house marking the ties between the two families.<sup>27</sup>

Before acquiring 802 Oberlin, the Fields family resided on Bedford Avenue in Oberlin. Spurgeon and his wife had four children. The couple's son went into the military, but their daughters went to college. One of these daughters, Jeanette Fields-Harris recalls that her parents and many of her friends' parents were very intent on their children going to college, and she says most of her peers from the neighborhood received higher education. The Fields house served as a community gathering place, particularly on Sunday afternoons and Friday nights. Jeanette Fields-Harris moved back to the house, from Washington, D.C., in 1993 to care for her father who

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<sup>25</sup>Wake County Deed Book 795, page 6.

<sup>26</sup>Wake County Deed Book 743, page 265; *Raleigh City Directory*, 1945-1946; and Wake County Deed Book 922, page 172.

<sup>27</sup>Jeanette Fields-Harris, oral history interview with Sarah A. Woodard, July 2001.

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passed away last year. She is now the owner of the Willis M. Graves House.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid and Wake County Deed Book 1917, page E.

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

Fields-Harris, Jeanette. Oral history interview with Sarah A. Woodard, July 2001.

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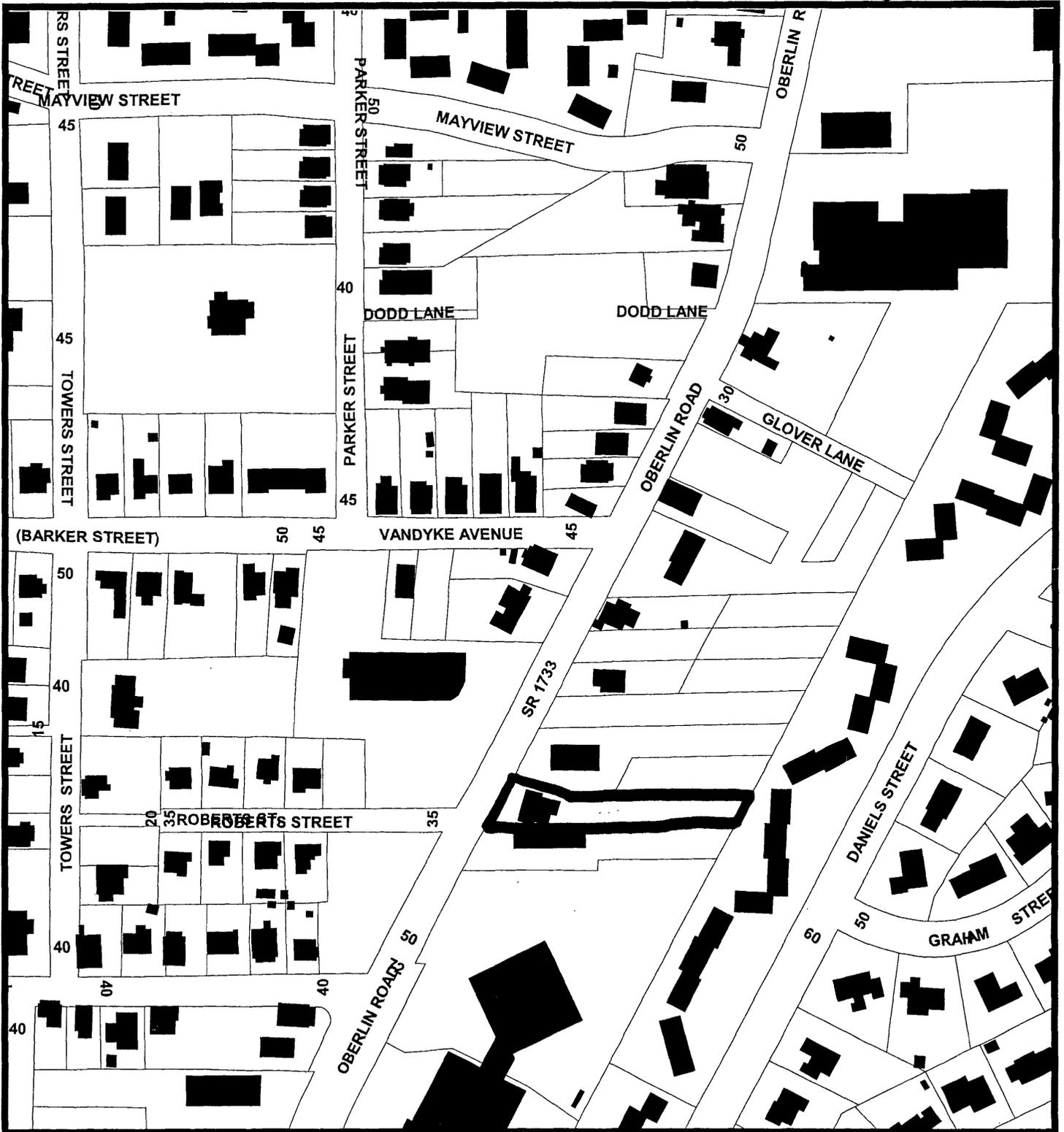
**Verbal Boundary Description**

0.39 acre tract delineated by heavy solid line on 1 inch = 200 feet scale map labeled as Exhibit A.

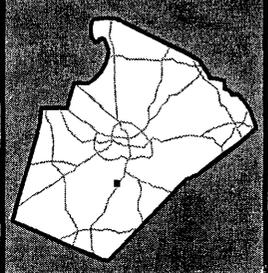
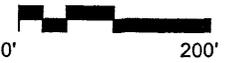
**Boundary Justification**

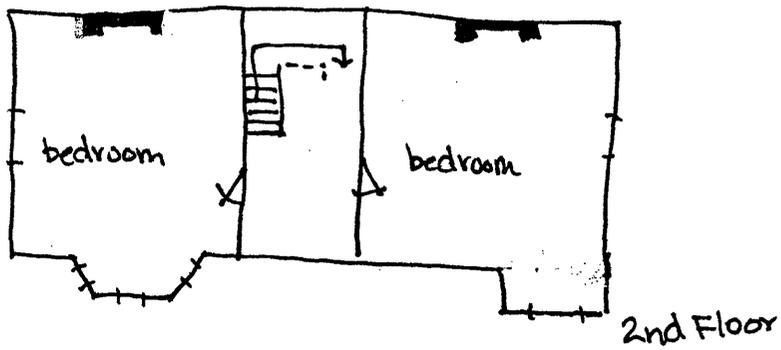
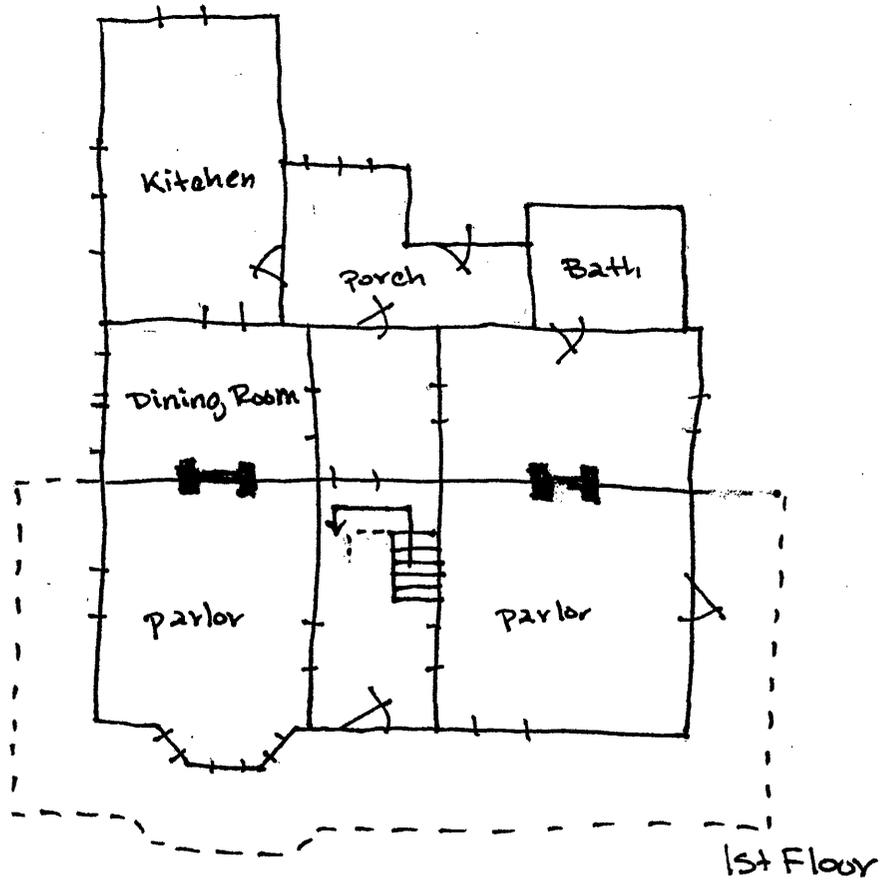
The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Willis M. Graves House.

Exhibit A  
Wake County Tax Map



**—** = property boundary  
 WILLIS M. GRAVES HOUSE  
 802 OBERLIN ROAD  
 RALEIGH, WAKE COUNTY, NC





Willis M. Graves House  
802 Oberlin Road  
Raleigh, Wake County, NC

not to scale

WA3521