

Lethia Jones Henderson, “Beauty-maker” African American entrepreneur and philanthropist in early 20th century Charlotte

Draft by Tom Hanchett, community historian
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Lethia Jones Henderson – entrepreneur, business owner, real estate investor, philanthropist – may have been the best-known woman in Charlotte during the first decades of the twentieth century. She sought out training in new aspects of what came to be called “beauty culture” and in about 1906 opened Charlotte’s earliest beauty salon, located in the first block of North Tryon Street in the heart of the business district. She won an enthusiastic following among the city’s leading white women – remarkable since she was an African American and the South was in its deepest nadir of segregation.¹ When she died in 1955, the Civil Rights journalist Trezzvant Anderson was an active pallbearer and Charlotte Mayor Victor Shaw was among her honorary pallbearers. John Myers Dwell, a white real estate man whose family had led in the creation of the Mint Museum of Art, served as executor of her will, which dedicated her savings to a trust fund “for promotion of charitable work among the members of the colored race.” It remains active today, managed by The Foundation for the Carolinas.

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“Lethia Jones, Pioneer in Charlotte Beauty Shops,” headlined a lengthy profile published in a 1934 edition of the *Charlotte Observer*.² “Lethia came to Charlotte from Asheville in 1906, and started by serving Miss Lucy Oates and Miss Mae Oates in their homes,” wrote Rosalie Hook.³ The Oates sisters were the daughters of wealthy R.M. Oates, who had founded the city’s

¹ For overviews of the history of race relations in Charlotte, see Pamela Grundy, *Legacy: Three Centuries of Black History in Charlotte, North Carolina* (Charlotte: Nerve Media Productions, 2022). Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class and Urban Development in Charlotte 1875 – 1975*, second edition (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2020). Fannie Flono, *Thriving in the Shadows: The Black Experience in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County* (Charlotte: Novello Press, 2006). Similarly elsewhere in North Carolina: Elizabeth A. Herbin-Triant, *Threatening Property: Race Class and Campaigns to Legislate Jim Crow Neighborhoods* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

² “Lethia Jones, Pioneer in Charlotte Beauty Shops,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 8, 1934.

³ “Lethia Jones, Pioneer in Charlotte Beauty Shops,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 8, 1934.

first cotton mill in the 1880s which kicked off an era of great industrial growth.⁴ “Two years later she rented a room on 5th Street [just off North Tryon Street] for \$17.00 a month and hired an assistant Bessie Springs,” Hook continued. “A year later she moved to 12 ½ North Tryon Street over the Ottaway Theater, employing three operators at the beginning. Twelve years later, when she sold out ..., she was using the whole floor and employing 16 assistants.”⁵

During her fourteen or so years as “Charlotte’s ‘beauty maker,’” to use Rosalie Hook’s term, Leitha Jones served the cream of Charlotte’s white female society. Among them were Mrs. John Carson, whose husband controlled key Charlotte gold mining sites (Carson Street is named for him), Mrs. R.M. Miller, whose grain merchant spouse built the silos still mark the uptown skyline in Fourth Ward, members of the Davidson family that founded Davidson College and of the Victor family that launched Union National Bank (Wells Fargo is its current successor).

It was a remarkable story, made even more remarkable by where and when the profile appeared and by who its author was. Newspapers in the South seldom devoted space to long articles about African Americans. The piece ran in the city’s leading paper, the *Charlotte Observer*, in a series provided by Charlotte’s Junior League, an elite white women’s organization. By 1934, Jones had been out of the beauty business for fourteen years, yet her story still resonated with readers. Writer Rosalie Hook, a young white woman then twenty-six years old, listened carefully as Jones recalled her beauty career. Hook was awakening to racial perspectives outside of her privileged background – a rarity in that day. As Rosalie Gwathmey, married in 1935 to New York City artist Robert Gwathmey, she would win considerable attention as a photographer known for images of Black life.⁶

⁴ Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class and Urban Development in Charlotte 1875 – 1975*, second edition (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2020), pp. 49 – 51. “Charlotte Cotton Mills,” survey and research report, Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1984. On-line at <http://landmarkscommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Charlotte-Cotton-Mills-SR.pdf> “Mrs. Lucy Oates Moriarity Dies in Hospital Here,” *Charlotte News*, August 22, 1929. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/616599510/>

⁵ “Lethia Jones, Pioneer in Charlotte Beauty Shops,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 8, 1934.

⁶ “Rosalie Gwathmey, 92, a Photographer of Southern Black Life,” *New York Times*, February 16, 2001. <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/02/16/arts/rosalie-gwathmey-92-a-photographer-of-southern-black-life.html>

Lili Corbus, “Picturing Charlotte: An Introduction to Rosalie Gwathmey’s Photographs of African Americans in the 1940s,” *Studies in Popular Culture*, volume 29 #2 (October 2006), pp. 39 – 67. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41970409> “*Rosalie Gwathmey: Photographs from the Forties* (East Hampton, New York: Glen Horowitz Bookseller, 1996).

Rosalie Hook’s life intertwined with arts at several levels. Her father, Charles Christian Hook, was one of Charlotte’s earliest professional architects, known for designing City Hall and industrialist J.B. Duke’s grand mansion in Myers Park. Husband Robert Gwathmey ranked among the top American painters in what was known as “social realism.” The couple’s son, Charles Gwathmey, became an architect who pioneered the



Jones purchased expensive display advertisements in Charlotte city directories during the early 1910s, an indication of the financial health of her business. *Charlotte city directory, 1912.*

It is exciting to re-discover Lethia Jones Henderson's story. Only a handful of strong Black women leaders active in early 20th century North Carolina have been well documented in the historical record that we know today. **Charlotte Hawkins Brown** is renowned for her leadership, starting in 1901, of the Palmer Memorial Institute near Greensboro, a boarding academy for African American young women.⁷ **Annie Wealthy Holland** took charge of the state's Jeanes Fund in 1911, coordinating its work in training and mentoring teachers in Black schools.⁸ **Mary Jackson McCrorey**, spotlighted in Yale scholar Glenda Gilmore's influential book *Gender and Jim Crow*, was the spouse of Johnson C. Smith University's president and led the creation of Charlotte's Black YWCA in 1916. (She and Henderson almost certainly knew each other, both living on Charlotte's Beatties Ford Road during the 1920s – 1940s and both active in community affairs).⁹ **Lula Spaulding Kelsey**, also profiled by Gilmore, became the local agent for North Carolina Mutual Insurance in Salisbury when her father who had previously held the job passed away. She went on to be one of the state's first licensed embalmers in the 1910s and

"post-modern" movement in American architecture. "Charles Christian Hook, 1870 – 1938," on the *North Carolina Architects and Builders* website, <https://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000211>

⁷ Margaret Supplee Smith and Emily Herring Wilson, *North Carolina Women: Making History* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press 1999), pp. 245- 249. <https://uncpress.org/book/9780807858202/north-carolina-women/>

⁸ Sarah R. Shaber, "Annie Wealthy Holland," on the *NCpedia* website, 1988. On-line at <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/holland-annie> James L. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 189 – 191.

⁹ Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, second edition. (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2020), especially pp. 192 – 202.

with her husband established a successful funeral home. She also led the Salisbury Colored Women's Civic League.¹⁰ Less well-known is **Josephine Napoleon Leary**, who developed and managed real estate in Edenton during the decades circa 1900; her papers are at Duke University and she is the subject of a recent novel.¹¹

Lethia Jones Henderson's life is inspiring in its own right, encompassing success in business and in community involvement. But it also may point to other stories, yet to be researched, of African American women who forged new institutions and found fresh ways to influence the life of their communities during the early twentieth century.¹²

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The beauty salon was a new thing in the United States in the years around 1900. Women had always sought ways to improve their appearance, of course. And in slavery times, upscale white women in the South had often relied on beauty help from African American women they enslaved, a reliance that continued after the Civil War. But relationships began to change in the late nineteenth century. For one thing, Black women now had a small but significant opportunity to own and operate businesses. African American entrepreneur Madame C.J. Walker, based in St. Louis and later in Indianapolis, became famous for her line of hair-care products for African American customers, launched in 1905.¹³

At the same time, the nationwide Progressive Movement pushed to professionalize and credentialize many types of work that had previously been done in less formal ways. Would-be lawyers, for instance, had traditionally trained by apprenticing to older attorneys. As late as 1891, writes one historian, "eighty percent of all lawyers had no law school training prior to

¹⁰ Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, second edition. (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2020), pp. 165 – 173.

¹¹ "Josephine Napoleon Leary Papers, 1873 – 1988," David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University. Finding-guide on-line at <https://repository.duke.edu/dc/learyjosephine> Kianna Alexander, *Carolina Built: A Novel* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2022).

¹² For a survey of women leaders in Charlotte, consult Mary Norton Kratt, *New South Women: Twentieth Century Women of Charlotte, North Carolina* (Charlotte: Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, 2001). For a memoir by a young Black newly-wed woman who lived in Charlotte briefly during the 1900s, see Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp and Other Places: A Carolina Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 1985).

¹³ Like Lethia Jones Henderson, Walker devoted a significant part of her wealth to philanthropy. Tyrone McKinley Freeman, *Madam C.J. Walker's Gospel of Giving: Black Women's Philanthropy During Jim Crow* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2020).

Scholarship on African American women as beauty entrepreneurs has focused on those who served Black clients. Was Lethia Jones Henderson a rarity in her work with white customers? Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

practice.” That changed by the late 1910s as U.S. law schools arose, inspired by German models.¹⁴ Similar transformations took place in a wide variety of fields, from medicine to city planning to social work. So why not do the same with beauty services?

It is not known how young Lethia found her way from North Carolina to New York City to study with a “German fellow who taught her to do hair,” as her longtime assistant Bessie Springs Johnson later recalled.¹⁵ Lethia had been born and raised in Asheville, daughter of Barney Heardz, a laborer, and his wife Harriet.¹⁶ The mountain city possessed unusually strong educational facilities for African Americans, including the privately run Allen School started by a

¹⁴ “Between 1870 and 1920, legal training gradually shifted from apprenticeship to newly reformed law schools.” Laura Appleman, “The Rise of the Modern American Law School: How Professionalization, German Scholarship, and Legal Reform Shaped Our System of Legal Education” *Journal Name?* (2005). https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=672523

¹⁵ “Bessie Johnson Reminisces about Our First Beauty Shop,” *Charlotte News*, January 30, 1973. ““Early in her life she went to New York to study beauty culture,” corroborated JCSU professor Hubert Webster Norris in a 1951 profile. “After marrying a Charlotte man, she came to Charlotte to make her home.” “Negro Success Story: Charlottean Builds on Solid Foundation,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 11, 1951.

¹⁶ “Mrs. Henderson,” obituary in the *Charlotte Observer*, December 24, 1955.

Lethia’s birth in the early 1880s and her family’s residence in Asheville seem certain, but sources disagree on the birth date and her father’s name.

Her *Observer* obituary and her death certificate listed her birth date as March 1, 1885. But the age given on her two marriage certificates, as well as the 1900 manuscript census, indicate that she was born in 1880.

Her father’s first name was likely Barney, though the *Observer* obituary identified him as William Heardz. Librarian Meghan Bowden, a genealogical specialist at the Carolina Room of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, helped me research the family. She wrote in an email on June 17, 2022: “I have had a tough time finding more information about Lethia's parents, Barney Heardz (sometimes written Barnett, Bonny, etc., and Heardz sometimes spelled Heards, Heard, Hurd, etc.) and Harriet Huff. Although they both died in Asheville, the family may have originated from South Carolina. The variant name spelling certainly isn't helping. I do know that Barney was in Buncombe County as early as 1890 and died there around 1899. His heirs were as follows: Calvin, Ed, John Waverly, Mattie, Leitha/Lethia, Leila, Barney, and Sue Emma.”

Subsequently I located the family in the 1896 Asheville city directory. It showed “Barney Heard,” laborer, living at the rear of 285 S. Main Street. Also at that address were Heard family members Edward (laborer), Lelia (laundress), and Letta (cook). I surmise that “Letta” was Lethia.

I found two additional bits of information in Asheville newspapers. A notice of “Sale for Taxes,” published May 14, 1897, in the *Asheville Daily Citizen* included “Barney Heard, one lot 65 x 100 feet adjoining South Main Street on east and lands of J.H. Stewart on north and F.M. Johnson on south. Tax \$4.80.” An estate notice in the *Asheville Register*, January 19, 1900, listed Jesse P. Starnes as “administrator of the estate of Barney Heards, deceased, late of Buncombe County, NC.”

Methodist missionary after the Civil War.¹⁷ Allen was a boarding academy that offered both academic subjects and also hands-on courses ranging from domestic service to running a business. Lethia Jones seems to have absorbed little from Allen's academic offerings, but she had a drive for practical education. "She couldn't even read or write, but she had the brains," Bessie Johnson remembered. Somehow Lethia ventured "to New York and met this German fellow."

That was Joseph Rorher, a pioneer in beauty education.¹⁸ Rorher operated what he modestly named the "World Famous Institute of Beauty Culture" in New York City. It was one of the earliest such educational enterprises in the U.S.¹⁹ By the 1920s he would become the prolific author of volumes setting forth professional techniques, with titles such as *Rorher's Illustrated Book on Scientific Modern Beauty Culture: Hair-dyeing, Bleaching-Henna Care of the Hair and Scalp, Facial Massage, Beautifying, Electrolysis, Manicuring, etc.* (1924).²⁰

¹⁷ Jamie Butcher, "Gender and Education: The Allen School, Asheville, North Carolina," *Appalachian Journal*, volume 33, number 1 (Fall 2005), pp. 78- 109. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40934774>

¹⁸ "Lethia Jones Moves Manicure Parlors," *Charlotte News*, January 7, 1912.

¹⁹ Julie A. Willett, *Permanent Waves: The Making of the American Beauty Shop* (New York: NYU Press, 2000). Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998).

Two beauty schools for Black women that came into being in this period were Poro College begun in St. Louis in 1902 and also Lelia College, which was founded by Madame C.J. Walker in Pittsburgh in 1908 and expanded to New York City in 1913. Tyrone McKinley Freeman, *Madam C.J. Walker's Gospel of Giving: Black Women's Philanthropy During Jim Crow* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2020), pp. 91 – 96.

²⁰ Among Rorher's other books:

Prof. Rorher's Artistic Marcel, Water, Permanent Waving and Hair Bobbing (New York: Prof. Rorher's Institute of Beauty Culture, 1924). The entire book is viewable on-line at: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3a/Prof_Rorher%27s_artistic_marcel%2C_water%2C_permanent_waving_and_hair_bobbing.%28IA_profrohrsartis00rohr%29.pdf

Prof. Rorher's Celebrated Handbook of Scientific Majestic Beauty Formulas, Including Important Directions for Shampooing, Hair Coloring, Chiropody, etc. (New York: Prof. Rorher's Institute of Beauty Culture, 1925).

Welcoming Black women was smart strategy for a beauty school. African Americans made up well over one-third of the nation’s beauty professionals according to a study that Rorher quoted in one of his books.²² In 1920 the United States had “33,246 female barbers, hairdressers and manicurists ... as follows:

Native white, native parentage	10,647
Native white, foreign or mixed parentage ...	6,268
Foreign-born white	3,545
Negro	12,660
Indian	12
Chinese	2
Japanese	112

Training accomplished, Lethia moved to Charlotte – hometown of her husband Charles Jones, a shoemaker. The two settled into a small house at 711 E. Eighth Street in the First Ward neighborhood.²³ Lethia set forth to convince women to try the services of a beauty professional. To convince *white* women, that is, to entrust their appearance to a *Black female* professional.

There was already something of precedent, over on the male side of society. African American barbers dominated the grooming profession for men – operating separate shops for white customers and black customers. This came as part of the important tradition of African American artisans. Dating back to slavery times in the South, highly skilled Black specialists had handled such work as brick-making, building construction, blacksmithing, care and training of horses, cooking, midwifery, and other essential professions – including hair care. In Charlotte, the city’s top barber was Thad Tate, whose downtown shop served the town’s white male elite.²⁴

That provided the context for Lethia Jones’ innovative salon. “Just as your father, husband or brother went to Thad Tate’s barbershop where he had his name in big, gold letters

²² Prof. Rohrer's *Artistic Marcel, Water, Permanent Waving and Hair Bobbing* (New York: Prof. Rohrer's Institute of Beauty Culture, 1924).
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3a/Prof_Rohrer%27s_artistic_marcel%2C_water%2C_permanent_waving_and_hair_bobbing.%28IA_profrohrsartis00rohr%29.pdf

²³ Charlotte city directory, 1907.

²⁴ On Tate, see Janette Thomas Greenwood, *Bittersweet Legacy: The Black and White Better Classes in Charlotte, 1850 – 1910* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1994), p. 240 -243. On the importance of African American artisans in the South, consult Catherine W. Bishir, *Crafting Lives: African American Artisans in New Bern North Carolina, 1770 – 1900* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2015).

on gleaming white shaving mugs,” reminisced a woman in a 1945 *Charlotte Observer* article, “Yes, in those days you went to Lethia’s and saw everybody and heard everything.”²⁵

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Negro Success Story:
Charlottean Builds On Solid Foundation



LETHIA JONES HENDERSON

This is another of a series of articles by Hubert Norris, member of the faculty of Johnson C. Smith University, about the success of Negroes in this general area.

BY HUBERT W. NORRIS

A certain young man, in order to pass the time constructed a 12-inch castle of matches, which consumed about three hours in the painstaking work of laying each match carefully upon the other. Just as he finished the last or final match which completed the castle a friend passed along to the table and subsequently sat down at the table. The gust of air following her body whiffed the castle from the table and scattered the matches all over the floor and table. The young man who had been occupied at building the castle simply shrugged his shoulders and said, "That is the way they build things these days—no foundation." How accurate these words were, the young man may not have realized when he uttered them. In order to withstand the forces of destruction and the elements, buildings must be found on solid bases. If this is true of

City Now Has 77
Lethia Jones Had First Charlotte Beauty Parlor

WHETHER you take your style or French (this is the kind you'll be intrigued to learn that some 77 establishments in our fair city dedicated to making you saucer, if your hair's straight a blonde and would; if you

and saw everybody and heard everything; just as your father, Thad Tate's barber-shop, where he had his name in big, gleaming mugs.

Or—

Bessie Johnson Reminisces About Our First Beauty Shop



BESSIE JOHNSON OPERATED CHARLOTTE'S FIRST BEAUTY SHOP

lifestyles

ALL-THINGS CHARLOTTE NEWS—Sun., Oct. 26, 1973

Lethia Jones Pioneer In Charlotte Beauty Shops

BY ROSALIE HOOK.

LETHIA JONES



Women who have a hard time deciding which beauty parlor to patronize would not have had this trouble had they lived in Charlotte many years ago when Lethia Jones operated the city's one and only beauty shop.

Lethia came to Charlotte from Asheville in 1906 and started her business by serving Miss Lucy Oates and Miss May Oates in their homes. Two years later, she rented a room on Fifth street for \$17.00 a month and hired an assistant, Bessie Springs. A year after, she moved to 121-2 North Tryon street over the Ottaway theater, employing three operators at the beginning. Twelve years later when she sold out to Mrs. Martha McGehee, she was using the whole floor and employing 16 assistants.

Lethia knows lots of interesting sidelights on Charlotte women who visited her shop in the years she held the job of the city's "beauty maker." Miss Sallie Davidson went to see her once to have her hair dressed in the latest style—changed from curls to puffs.

Once Mrs. John Sprinkle was getting ready to have her picture made, Lethia curled and puffed her hair until it was beyond recognition. When Mrs. Hunter Marshall's son was getting married, Lethia went to the house to do the hairdressing for a number of ladies. Lethia handled beauty preparations for all the fashionable weddings she always tried to cater to.

By combining brief newspaper mentions from the 1900s – 1920s with a remarkable string of profiles published later in Lethia Jones Henderson’s life, we can get a sense of the Charlotte institution that she created. We can learn what services she offered and how those changed over time, glimpse the relationships that she and her staff cultivated with customers, see some milestones in Lethia’s own life, and also track the shop’s transition out of her ownership. Rosalie Hook’s 1934 profile, mentioned above, was the first of four articles to look back at Lethia’s accomplishments. The next appeared in the *Charlotte Observer* in 1945. Its author, not named, pointed out that Charlotte now boasted 77 beauty salons: were women now “77 percent more beautiful as the result?” she joked.²⁶ Six years later, in 1951, Johnson C. Smith University professor Hubert Norris spotlighted the former salon owner as part of a series of columns on noteworthy African Americans which he contributed to the *Observer*.²⁷ Finally in 1973 *Charlotte News* feature writer Mary Estes sat down with Lethia’s sidekick Bessie Springs

²⁵ “City Now Has 77: Lethia Jones Had First Charlotte Beauty Parlor,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 15, 1945.

²⁶ “City Now Has 77: Lethia Jones Had First Charlotte Beauty Parlor,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 15, 1945.

²⁷ “Negro Success Story: Charlottean Builds on Solid Foundation,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 11, 1951. On Norris, a longtime professor of economics and political science at JCSU, see “1904 Patton Avenue” on the *McCrorey Heights* website, on-line at <https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/1904-patton-avenue/>

Johnson, then ninety years old, to reminisce about her early days in the beauty business.²⁸ Together the four essays attest to Lethia Jones Henderson's considerable impact as a history-maker.

"Folks would be shocked that two colored ladies ran the first beauty shop here. They'd think I was making a joke," Bessie Springs Johnson told Mary Estes. "It was unusual for women to have a business back then, especially being colored like we were."²⁹ Cash was scarce at the start. "She borrowed money to open up and asked me to come help her. Then she sent me to New York and to Philadelphia for special summer training."³⁰

Bessie Johnson "laughed aloud about the equipment they improvised," wrote Estes. "Dressing tables were wood crates encircled with pink and blue crinolines. Hair dryers were made with a hot plate and an elbow stove pipe to direct the heat." On sunny days, Johnson confided, "sometimes we would take the ladies up on the roof ... in the sunshine and fluff it dry."³¹

As the notion of visiting a professional beauty salon caught on with customers, Jones upgraded her shop. In 1912 she moved from a side-street location on Fifth Street around the corner onto the first block North Tryon Street, Charlotte's main retail avenue. "Her new parlors are beautiful, clean and sanitary and the equipment thoroughly modern," the *Charlotte News* reported that January. "She carries at her parlors a nice line of barretts, side combs, and evening ornaments, and has recently developed a shoe line department for ladies."³²

The "shoe line" indicated a fresh aspect of the salon's business. Lethia Jones had recently returned to Rorher's academy for advanced study. "While in New York last summer," the *News* noted, "she completed a course in chiropody under Prof. Joseph Rorher and is now prepared to do work in this line in a skillful manner."³³

The emerging medical specialty of podiatry, then called "chiropody," was getting a Progressive Movement upgrade in those years. Patients with foot ailments traditionally had sought relief from self-taught practitioners, including "barbers..., manicurists ... [and some who]

²⁸ "Bessie Johnson Reminisces about Our First Beauty Shop," *Charlotte News*, January 30, 1973.

²⁹ "Bessie Johnson Reminisces about Our First Beauty Shop," *Charlotte News*, January 30, 1973.

³⁰ "Bessie Johnson Reminisces about Our First Beauty Shop," *Charlotte News*, January 30, 1973.

³¹ "Bessie Johnson Reminisces about Our First Beauty Shop," *Charlotte News*, January 30, 1973.

³² "Lethia Jones Moves Manicure Parlors," *Charlotte News*, January 7, 1912.

³³ "Lethia Jones Moves Manicure Parlors," *Charlotte News*, January 7, 1912.

had simply acquired scalpels and set up business.”³⁴ New York City became the hub of efforts to develop education and professional licensing. In 1907 chiropodists there launched a medical journal and in 1912 a national medical society got underway.³⁵ Lethia Henderson’s New York training put her in the vanguard of an emerging profession.

³⁴“History of the College,” *New York College of Podiatric Medicine* website, on-line at <https://nycpm.edu/history.asp>

“NYCPM Celebrates 100 Years,” *Podiatric Management*, June/July 2011.
<https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/51570145/nycpm-celebrates-one-hundred-years-new-york-college-of->

³⁵ David Zych, “The *Journal of the American Podiatric Medical Association*: One Hundred Years of Passion and Progress,” *Journal of the American Podiatric Medical Association*, volume 97, number 4 (July/August 1997), pp. 260 – 265, on-line at <https://japmaonline.org/view/journals/apms/97/4/0970260.xml>

Early mentions of Jones' beauty salon:

Hair Dressing.
Lethia Jones is prepared to do every art in beauty culture, facial and scalp massage a specialty. Manicuring, shampooing and hair dressing, braids redyed to match hair, hair goods made to order.
No. 5 W. 5th St.
Phone 1718-J.

Jones began placing advertisements in Charlotte newspapers in November of 1910. *Charlotte Evening Chronicle*, November 19, 1910.

—Lethia Jones, who has been in New York for the past month studying chiropody, will return to the city Monday. Lethia has a hairdressing and manicuring establishment at No. 3 West Fifth street, which during her absence has been in charge of Bessie Springs. Lethia's many patrons will be interested to know that she will return with a certificate of proficiency in chiropody.

Charlotte Evening Chronicle, August 12, 1911.

**Lethia Jones Moves
Manicure Parlors**

Lethia Jones has moved her manicuring parlor from No. 3 West Fifth street to 12 North Tryon street. Her new parlors are beautiful, clean and sanitary and the equipment thoroughly modern, while in New York last summer she completed a course in chiropody under Prof. Joseph Roher and is now prepared to do work in this line in a skilful manner. She carries at her parlors a nice line of barretts, side combs and evening ornaments and has recently established a shoe line department for ladies, an innovation that has met with instant favor. Her old customers will find her well equipped to give them careful scientific and pleasing service.

Charlotte News, January 7, 1912.

Along with manicuring and chiropody, hair care remained the mainstay of Lethia Jones Henderson's salon. Techniques then popular included Marcelling, in which hot iron curling tongs were used to coax hair into waves. Later, the new "permanent wave" came in, with elaborate machinery (invented in England in 1906) which combined heat and chemicals to create what is still called a "perm." Toward the end of Johnson's time at the salon, chemical bleaching of hair was introduced. Applying hydrogen peroxide could be quite tricky. "We wouldn't bleach hair unless the moon was right," Johnson said. "Oh, Lord, we couldn't do that. It might fall out."³⁶

"When business was slow the girls ('there were eight of us') would weave switches from the customers hair they had cut," Estes's article continued. "A hair wash was 50 cents but we went up to a dollar when hair was thick. A manicure was quarter."³⁷

It took considerable patience and interpersonal skills to deal with wealthy clients who were used to getting their way. "Lethia always tried to cater to her customers and, in that time, it was a hard job for they had their peculiarities," Rosalie Hook wrote dryly. Hook interviewed both Henderson and also some of her former customers for the 1934 profile. The article didn't divulge exactly which sources gave which recollections, but finicky customers were definitely a theme. "Miss Louise Jones and Miss Sarah Jones had their hair shampooed and always wanted their full 50 cents worth."³⁸ Lethia named a particular woman who "had the air of Queen Victoria" and "always had to be painted and polished 'just so.'" The wife of the proprietor of Jordan's Drug Store at the corner of Tryon and Trade streets, one of Charlotte's most prominent businesses, was another such patron. "Lethia spent a half-day with Mrs. Bob Jordan when she went to have herself beautified. She also fixed Mr. Jordan's nails and he'd say they looked much too pretty to be used to fill prescriptions."³⁹

"If the occasion was very, very special, you summoned Lethia or Bessie to come to your house, and one or the other arrived with a little black bag holding old-time curling irons," recalled the 1945 *Charlotte Observer* writer. "When Mrs. Hunter Marshall's son was getting married, Lethia went to the house to do the hair dressing for a number of the ladies," Rosalie Hook wrote: "Lethia handled beauty preparations for all the fashionable weddings."⁴⁰

³⁶ "Bessie Johnson Reminisces about Our First Beauty Shop," *Charlotte News*, January 30, 1973.

³⁷ "Bessie Johnson Reminisces about Our First Beauty Shop," *Charlotte News*, January 30, 1973.

³⁸ "Judge Shaw Holding Another Week of Civil Court Here," *Charlotte News*, November 23, 1914.

³⁹ "Lethia Jones Pioneer in Charlotte Beauty Shops," *Charlotte Observer*, November 8, 1934.

⁴⁰ "Lethia Jones Pioneer in Charlotte Beauty Shops," *Charlotte Observer*, November 8, 1934.

Hair styles shifted radically during the beauty salon's existence, from the long and wavy tresses favored in the late nineteenth century to the pert "bob" popular during the Roaring Twenties. One customer's ultra-long hair "formed a problem," a Hook interviewee recalled: "Lethia had to put a sheet down for Miss Lillie Benson's hair to trail on the floor while it was being fixed." Hook continued, "Miss Julia Robertson first wore her hair parted in the middle, then parted at the side, and then went to Europe and came back with bobbed hair, Lethia said." That may have been the first time that Charlotteans saw the new short style.

Such care won the hearts of customers, young and old. Rosalie Hook offered a charming example: "Miss Allen Victor and Miss Cammie Robinson, when they were little girls, asked Lethia if she knew where they could find a sweetheart who would be just crazy about them."⁴¹ Mary Estes tracked down Mrs. Frank Graham, mother of evangelist Billy Graham, who vividly remembered – more than fifty years later – taking trips into town from the family's dairy farm (located near today's Park Road Shopping Center) to visit Lethia Jones' salon. "Everyone was thrilled to have something like that in Charlotte," said Mrs. Graham. "I only went once a month. The luxury of a beauty salon visit was something that few could afford."⁴²

While hair fashions and beauty technology changed, socializing remained at the heart of the salon experience. There was always "a lot of gossip going on," Johnson said. "We learned more about white people than we knew about our own. But they knew we wouldn't tell."⁴³

During her years of listening patiently and "catering to" customers, Lethia was going through life changes of her own. In 1914 she sued her husband Charlie Jones, the shoemaker who had brought her to Charlotte as a newly-wed, for divorce. Such an action was a rarity in that era, but the judge granted her request.⁴⁴ She married again in 1928 to Z.T. Henderson. Zachary Taylor "Zach" Henderson shared Lethia's affinity for business and also for helping people look their best. He ran a "pressing club" – a type of business then popular that provided males with both laundry services and a place to hang out and socialize.⁴⁵ Sadly, that marriage lasted barely two years. On the night of November 23, 1930, a pair of men approached Henderson at the end of the Beatties Ford Road streetcar line, robbed him of five dollars and

⁴¹ "Lethia Jones Pioneer in Charlotte Beauty Shops," *Charlotte Observer*, November 8, 1934.

⁴² "Bessie Johnson Reminisces about Our First Beauty Shop," *Charlotte News*, January 30, 1973.

⁴³ "Bessie Johnson Reminisces about Our First Beauty Shop," *Charlotte News*, January 30, 1973.

⁴⁴ "Lethia Jones Pioneer in Charlotte Beauty Shops," *Charlotte Observer*, November 8, 1934.

⁴⁵ "Seize Negroes on Charge of Shooting Man: Two Charged with Shooting Zach Henderson," *Charlotte News*, November 24, 1930.

shot him in the neck. He died in Good Samaritan Hospital three weeks later. Lethia offered a \$100 reward, which led to the arrest and conviction of the killers.⁴⁶

By the time of her marriage to Zach Henderson, Lethia Jones had gotten out of the beauty business. Newspaper records show that Mrs. D.H. Simpson, a white competitor, purchased the shop from Lethia Jones in 1920. Simpson moved into Jones' space and renamed it the Marinello Shop. Subsequently, another white woman, Martha McGee, took charge. In 1924 she moved the Marinello Shop again, becoming the in-store beauty salon at Ivey's when the big department store opened on North Tryon. An advertisement boasted: "It will be under the supervision of Mrs. Martha McGee and will employ only white help."⁴⁷

An era of Black entrepreneurship had ended.

REMOVAL NOTICE

Owing to the continual growth of my business and the need of larger quarters, I have purchased the business of Lethia Jones at No. 12 North Tryon street, and will occupy the parlors at this location on and after February 1st.

Extensive remodelling is now being done and the most modern equipment being installed.

My new location—which will be known as **"THE MARINELLO SHOP"**—will be one of the most modern Beauty Parlors in this section.

Until February 1st, customers will be served at my present parlors—No. 515 Realty Building.

MRS. D. H. SIMPSON
HAIRDRESSING PARLORS

515 Realty Bldg. Phone 3351
 After February 1st, No. 12. N. Tryon.

Charlotte News, January 15, 1920.

IVEYS

Announcing
The Marinello
Beauty Shop

Social and Scalp Treatments

Marcel Waving

OPENING Thursday morning on the Mezzanine Floor of The New Ivey's under the management of Mrs. Martha McGee. Another instance of the greatly increased service that we are prepared to render to feminine Charlotte. You will like the well appointed booths, the courteous efficiency of the operators—none but white operators employed.

Vit-O-Net Beauty Baths
 Scalp Work Facial Work
 Hair Dressing Manicuring
 Marcel Waving
 The New Shingle Bob
 Children's Hair Cutting

Please consider this as a cordial and personal invitation to visit our new Marinello Beauty Shop on the Opening Day—Thursday, May 13th.

Mezzanine Floor
 New Store

Charlotte Observer, May 13, 1924.

⁴⁶ "Seize Negroes on Charge of Shooting Man: Two Charged with Shooting Zach Henderson," *Charlotte News*, November 24, 1930. "Holdup at Top of Crime List," *Charlotte Observer*, November 24, 1930. "Man Succumbs to His Wounds: Zack Henderson, Recently Held Up and Robbed, Dies in Hospital," *Charlotte Observer*, December 17, 1930. I am indebted to researcher J. Michael Moore for locating the information about Henderson's death.

⁴⁷ "Old Ivey Store Will Give Way to Modern One," *Charlotte Observer*, May 24, 1924.

* * *

As Lethia Jones grew her beauty business, she began putting money into real estate. JCSU professor Hubert Norris, who interviewed her near the end of her life, reported: "Lethia Jones attributes her material success to investment in building-and-loan shares and investment in real estate."⁴⁸

Building-and-loan institutions were banks that were owned co-operatively by shareholders, which specialized in offering home loans. In Charlotte, the most highly regarded was Mutual Savings and Loan run by the Keesler family.

Lethia's purchases of land seem to have started in 1907 when she bought the home that she and husband Charles Jones lived in on Eighth Street.⁴⁹ In May of 1913 she acquired a lot in Cherry, a Black neighborhood on Charlotte's east side that had been developed by J.S. Myers.⁵⁰

When an African American "streetcar suburb" called Washington Heights opened across town later that year, she became an eager buyer. A group of white investors determined that Charlotte had enough prosperous African Americans to warrant the creation of suburban neighborhood located at the end of the electric street railway line. It would be a Black counterpart to the elite new suburbs of Elizabeth, Myers Park and others -- all of which had deed restrictions barring Black residents.

In June of 1913, local newspapers carried news of "a modern suburban development for colored citizens who wish to own their own homes in a well-located and attractive location." Washington Heights's name honored Booker T. Washington, nationally known educator and proponent of Black business empowerment. The new neighborhood lay "just west of Biddle University [now JCSU] on a high elevation and in a most attractive suburban spot."⁵¹ It would be "an ideal home for the higher class of colored people," much as "Myers Park, Dilworth and

⁴⁸ "Negro Success Story: Charlottean Builds on Solid Foundation," *Charlotte Observer*, March 11, 1951.

⁴⁹ "J.H. Wearn and Annie T. Wearn to Lethia Jones, October 25, 1907, Deed Book 228, page 4. I have not looked at the actual deed to confirm the address on 8th Street. I am grateful to historian J. Michael Moore for his research in the county's Grantee-Grantor records.

⁵⁰ Robert S. Jackson and Annabella Jackson to Lethia Jones, May 28, 1913, Deed Book 316, page 108. I am grateful to historian J. Michael Moore for his research in the county's Grantee-Grantor records.

This Cherry property may be the one referred to in a "Trustees Sale" advertisement in the *Charlotte News*, June 20, 1917.

⁵¹ "A Modern Suburb for Colored Men," *Charlotte Evening Chronicle*, June 12, 1913.

Chatham Estates [now Plaza Midwood] are developing into exclusively residential districts for white people.”⁵²

“If any other suburban development has been made elsewhere for colored people, we do not recall it,” asserted the *Charlotte Evening Chronicle*. Indeed, historians believe that Washington Heights was the only streetcar-era African American suburb ever developed in the United States.⁵³

Charlotte News (Charlotte, North Carolina) • 17 Jun 1913, Tue • Page 7

1 of 2 matches

Find text on this page.

AUCTION SALE!
100 Beautiful Residence Lots
THE IDEAL COLORED SECTION
Washington Heights SEVERSVILLE
CAR LINE

Washington Heights located a short distance west of Biddle University, has first-class car service, broad avenues, electric lights, high elevation and good approach. Washington Heights will be a college community of home owners. The environments will be of the best. Over \$30,000 Has Been Expended to Make it a Delightful Home Place for the Colored Race	June 18th 10:30 A. M. DON'T FAIL TO HEAR PENNY BROS. "The World's Original Twin Auctioneers"	This Will Be a Golden Opportunity For a Colored Man to Buy a Beautiful Home Site On Very Easy Terms. Don't Fail to Attend Fine Music and a Good Time Awaits You All Free Cars to and From Sale
---	---	---

Meet Us On Independence Square, June 18th, 10 A.M.
Sold By PENNY BROS. of Greensboro, N. C.


Lethia Jones built a home in Washington Heights for herself and, as her finances allowed, began acquiring nearby lots. Early purchases included a parcel along Beatties Ford

⁵² “Big Lot Sale in Washington Heights June 18,” *Charlotte News*, June 13, 1913.

⁵³ “The Race Problem,” *Charlotte Evening Chronicle*, November 22, 1912. Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class and Urban Development in Charlotte 1875 – 1975*, second edition (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2020), pp. 139 – 143. On Black suburbs generally, see Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Road in 1916 and two more lots in 1919.⁵⁴ Those investments were undoubtedly part of what gave her confidence to sell her beauty salon in 1920 and devote her life to religious and civic good works.

The Charlotte News (Charlotte, North Carolina) • 23 Apr 1919, Wed •



The Freehold Realty Company, to
Lethia Jones, for \$550, a lot 50 by 150
in Washington Heights.

Lethia intended that her rental buildings in Washington Heights would provide her a steady income -- but during the Great Depression that became a struggle. Mecklenburg County's annual list of taxpayers behind on their property tax payments often included Lethia Henderson's name. For the historian, that provides a glimpse of her holdings.

Henderson, Lethia Jones		
1009-15	Beatty's Ford Rd.	20.73
2215-17	Booker Ave.	13.01
1101-3	Beatty's Ford Rd.	38.25
1113-15	Beatty's Ford Rd.	6.43
1117-19	Beatty's Ford Rd.	6.43
1121-23	Beatty's Ford Rd.	33.60
Henderson	Mamie 415-17 E. Bre-	

Charlotte News, August 16, 1937.

The six properties listed in 1937 included five fronting on busy Beatties Ford Road, plus one just around the corner on Booker Avenue.⁵⁵ All structures seem to have been built for rental, with two or more units (as indicated by two or more street numbers). Only one still stands today, a simple and sturdy one-story structure made of concrete block which held two small commercial enterprises at 1009 and 1111 Beatties Ford.

⁵⁴ Freehold Realty to Lethia Jones, April 23, 1919, Deed Book 402, page 246. Biddle Realty to Lethia Jones, August 15, 1919, Deed Book 409, page 166. I am grateful to historian J. Michael Moore for his research in the county's Grantee-Grantor records.

⁵⁵ For another glimpse of property owners along Beatties Ford Road in the 1930s, see the assessment for paving the formerly-unpaved street: "Assessment Roll," Charlotte City Council Minutes, September 23, 1937, pages 10 - 11.

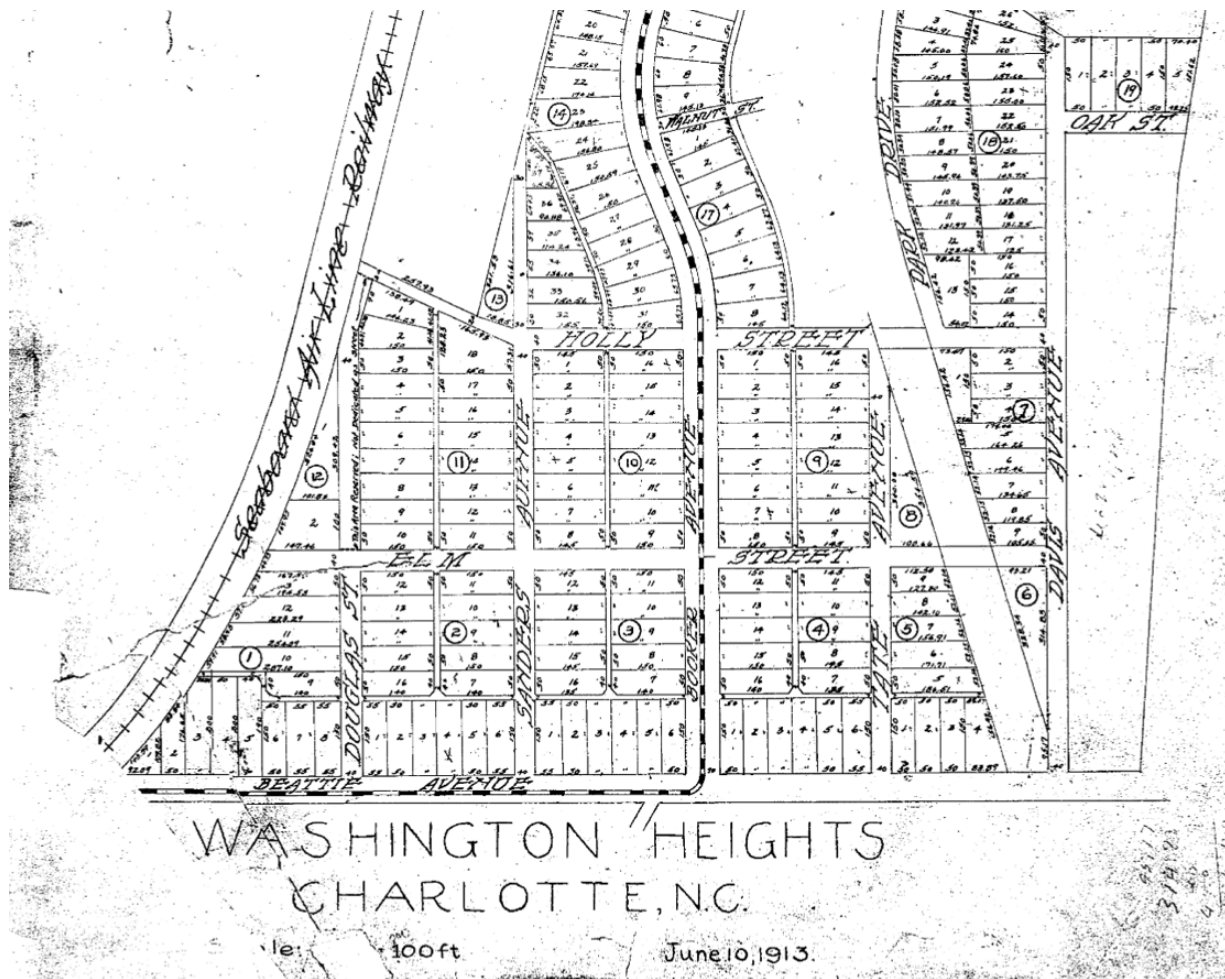


1109 - 1111 Beatties Ford Road appears to date from Lethia Henderson's lifetime.
Google street view.

ITEM VII.

For the information of my Executors and Trustees, my real estate at the present time consists of property located at and known as 1117-23 Beattys Ford Road, which is the site of my home; a store building located at and known as 1101-03 Beattys Ford Road; a three-family dwelling unit located at and known as 1009-15 Beattys Ford Road; a two-unit store building located at and known as 1113-15 Beattys Ford Road; and a lot upon which is located a duplex dwelling, located at and known as 2213-2215 Booker Avenue. All of said real estate lies within the City of Charlotte, North Carolina.

Lethia Jones Henderson filed her Last Will and Testament in 1953, providing a roster of her holdings.
Source needed



A portion of the original plat map that created Washington Heights, 1913. Jones came to own lots 3, 4 and 7 in block 3, plus lots 1, 4, 5 and 6 in block 4. Note the cross-streets honoring Black leaders including Booker T. Washington and Thad Tate.
 Map book 230, page 238, Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds.

It is a pity that Lethia's personal residence at 1117-1121 Beatties Ford Road is long gone and no photographs are known to exist. It was a prominent landmark on Charlotte's west side. "Her garden-lined home," reported JCSU's Professor Norris, was nestled amid "flowers and shrubbery which make it one of the showplaces of the city." Lethia's love of flowers was well-known throughout the community. In 1938 she won honorable mention in Charlotte's annual city-wide garden competition. In 1946 the *Charlotte News* noted that Jones would open her "woodland garden" to the public for an entire week that Spring.

**Lethia Jones' Garden
To Be On Display**
Lethia Jones of 1121 Beatty's
Ford Road will have her wood-
land garden open to her colored
and white friends tomorrow
through Sunday, May 5.

Like her other properties, her home had more than one street number. That was probably because the residence included a rear apartment for the caretaker of her holdings, William A. Richardson, who was mentioned in Henderson's will.

1 of 2 matches

**FINE FURNITURE
AT
AUCTION**
Tues. Jan. 31st at 2 p.m.
**Eastern Transit &
Storage Co.**
515 W. Palmer
(Plenty of Parking Space)
Furnishings from a 10 room house containing such
pieces as an old canopy bed (genuine tester), sev-
eral bedroom, dining room and living room suites,
glassware, china and bric a brac. Also a Ford Sta-
tion Wagon. For inspection, Tues. morning (Sale
day).
Must sell to settle an estate.
Theodore Smith — Auctioneer
Wm. McKinnell, Jr., and John M. Dwelle, Executors

This ad was placed shortly after Lethia Henderson's death by John Dwelle and William McKinnell, Jr., who were the executors of her estate. It is not certain that this was her home, but it seems likely.



This shopping center facing Beatties Ford Road at the corner of Tate Street was built on land previously owned by Lethia Jones Henderson: 1113-1115 Beatties Ford Road, and her own residence at 1117-1123 Beatties Ford Road.
Google street view.

* * *

During the decades after selling her beauty salon, Lethia Henderson evidently was able to live on her rental income and focus her considerable energy on religious and civic efforts. “She now devotes her time to raising flowers and the betterment of her race,” young Rosalie Hook wrote in 1934.⁵⁶

“She studied religious education at Gammon Theological Seminary and Clark University in Atlanta, devoting much of her time in this field until her retirement,” stated her obituary in the *Charlotte Observer*.⁵⁷ Gammon Seminary in Atlanta was renowned as the top training ground for African American ministers in the United Methodist denomination.⁵⁸

The profile of Henderson by JCSU professor Hubert Norris noted that she had also taken courses in English at his university. For a woman who had been functionally illiterate when she started out in business, that must have been a very proud milestone. Henderson did not stop there, marveled Rosalie Hook: “She recently qualified as a grammar school teacher and last winter taught a class in adult illiteracy.”⁵⁹

Young people found her to be a willing mentor. As an employer, she encouraged her salon staff to put aside funds to invest in build-and-loan shares and also urged them to attend a

⁵⁶ “Lethia Jones Pioneer in Charlotte Beauty Shops,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 8, 1934.

⁵⁷ “Mrs. Henderson,” obituary in the *Charlotte Observer*, December 24, 1955.

⁵⁸ https://digitalexhibits.auctr.edu/exhibits/show/itc_history/early/gammon

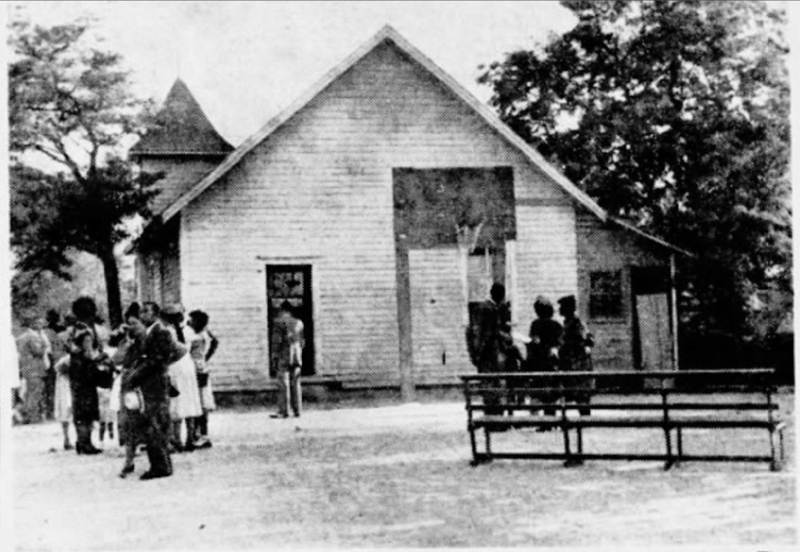
⁵⁹ “Lethia Jones Pioneer in Charlotte Beauty Shops,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 8, 1934.

Sunday school – in an era when such institutions taught literacy and life skills alongside Bible instruction. Later, wrote Professor Norris, she was known for “serving as an advisor and confidant of many a young man who has found the going hard.... [S]he encouraged frugality and sound investment on the part of all those whom she was privileged to influence..., an energetic advocate of home ownership for her people.”⁶⁰

Henderson herself was a member of Simpson Methodist Church (today Simpson-Gillespie Methodist), the city’s main Black-led Methodist congregation. She took an active interest in Boulware Mission Methodist Church, begun in 1924 at 2300 Sanders Avenue in her Washington Heights neighborhood. As a mission, it was partly supported by another more prosperous church, in this case Simpson Methodist. The “mission” designation could indicate that it was a small start-up, and/or that its attendees were mostly low-income.⁶¹ Boulware seems to have been both; newspaper stories mentioned its struggles to make ends meet over the years.

⁶⁰ “Negro Success Story: Charlottean Builds on Solid Foundation,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 11, 1951

⁶¹ Boulware Mission Methodist Church was begun in 1924 by pastor Wilson Cook. “Wilson Cook Funeral Held,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 25, 1948. For a photo and description of the church in 1948, see “His is the Working Kind of Religion,” *Charlotte News*, December 8, 1948.



This is the Boulware Methodist Church, currently conducting a drive for funds. The campaign is being sparkplugged by I. G. Simpson, a student in the seminary at Johnson C. Smith University.

But One Thing Bothers Him

His Is The Working Kind Of Religion

I. G. Simpson, a student in the seminary at Johnson C. Smith, is putting into practice a sort of working religion. He has taken over a run-down, forgotten church in one of the Negro sections of Charlotte and is attempting to make it grow with the Christian spirit of the neighborhood.

He had time to ponder his future for three and one-half years as a G. I. in the Pacific. He decided he

could help his people most through the church.

Coming to Charlotte, where he graduated from Johnson C. Smith in 1947, from Lumberton where he was born, the pastor took over the Boulware Methodist Church located at 2300 Sanders St. It had little to offer then in the way of extra-curricular religious work.

But in the past year, it has grown. A playground has developed where the neighbor children gather. The young minister believes that parents can be drawn into the church through their offspring.

He has expanded in numerous other ways, such as extension work through motion pictures and other means of visual education.

When he began his work at the church, it had no toilets, only a battered piano out of tune. Now it has two rest rooms and a playground, and an extensive following throughout the neighborhood. It also has an indebtedness of around \$2,000.

This item is the one which is troubling the young Smith seminary student. He has hopes of contributions from friends to aid in furthering his work.

The President Talked Gunman

Charlotte News, December 8, 1948.



2300 Sanders Avenue in 2022. Google Streetview.

Lethia Jones Henderson's passing in 1955 merited coverage in the *Charlotte Observer*. It focused on the heyday of her beauty salon thirty-five years earlier. But funeral details made clear that Charlotteans both Black and white continued to hold her in high regard.⁶² Her service took place at Simpson Methodist Church and referenced her involvement in the Boulware Mission.⁶³ Active pallbearers included William Heardz (likely a family member), William Jackson, Carl Hunt, Hawkins Chisholm, W.P. Williams and – quite notably – Trezzvant Anderson.

Born in Charlotte and educated at JCSU, Anderson was a busy journalist and author by the 1950s. His Civil Rights activism, including work as a writer for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a Black newspaper with subscribers throughout the eastern United States, made him an important figure in African American life in Charlotte and far beyond.⁶⁴ His willingness to be a pallbearer indicated that he and Henderson held each other in high esteem.

Whites paid respects to Henderson as well. Honorary pallbearers included T.E. McKinney, longtime Black dean of Arts & Sciences at JCSU -- along with a remarkable quartet of white Charlotte gentry.⁶⁵ Victor Shaw had won two terms as Charlotte's Mayor, 1949 to 1953.⁶⁶ Physician Dr. Colin Munroe had served with the 38th Evacuation Hospital; organized in Charlotte during World War II, it pioneered the practice of setting up hospitals near battle fronts throughout Europe and northern Africa.⁶⁷ William McKinnell, Jr., a building-materials merchant,

⁶² Henderson passed away at Duke University Hospital in Durham four days before Christmas in 1955. Charlotte's Alexander Funeral Home handled the funeral arrangements. She was buried in Pinewood Cemetery. "Mrs. Lethia Henderson," death notice in *Charlotte Observer*, December 23, 1955. "Mrs. Henderson," obituary in the *Charlotte Observer*, December 24, 1955.

⁶³ Boulware Mission Methodist Church was begun in 1924 by pastor Wilson Cook. "Wilson Cook Funeral Held," *Charlotte Observer*, November 25, 1948. For a photo and description of the church in 1948, see "His is the Working Kind of Religion," *Charlotte News*, December 8, 1948.

⁶⁴ History professor Willie Griffin at University of North Carolina at Charlotte is completing a biography of Anderson. Emily Ethridge, "How a Local Historian Uncovered Trezzvant Anderson, the Civil Rights Hero You've Never Heard Of," *Charlotte Magazine*, August 11, 2020. On-line at <https://www.charlottemagazine.com/how-a-local-historian-uncovered-trezzvant-anderson-the-charlotte-civil-rights-hero-youve-never-heard-of/>

⁶⁵ "Negro Success Story: Dean T.E. McKinney Seeks Improvements," *Charlotte Observer*, March 25, 1951. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/618299019/>

⁶⁶ "Victor Shaw House," survey and research report, Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, December 20, 2016, on-line <http://landmarkscommission.org/2016/12/20/shaw-victor-house/>

⁶⁷ "Mrs. Henderson," obituary in the *Charlotte Observer*, December 24, 1955. "Death Notices: Dr. Colin A. Munroe," *Charlotte Observer*, July 21, 1982.

and John M. Dwelle, a dealer in real estate, rounded out the group. Lethia Henderson had tapped the pair to be executors of her Last Will and Testament.⁶⁸

John Myers Dwelle was particularly prestigious. He ranked among the city's most prominent real estate leaders, a president of the Charlotte Board of Realtors during the 1950s. He was the grandson of John Springs Myers, the landowner whose holdings became the elite Myers Park neighborhood during the 1910s. Dwelle's mother, Mary Myers Dwelle, had led the founding of Charlotte's Mint Museum of Art in 1934, the first municipal art museum in North Carolina.⁶⁹

The Last Will and Testament that Dwelle and McKinnell carried out demonstrated Lethia Jones Henderson's passion for her community. She named no children or other relatives as heirs. Except for a handful of small gifts to friends such as caretaker William Richardson, all of her property, she directed, should go into a trust fund. Dwelle and McKinnell would be the Trustees. She set three possible uses for the fund:

1. "It is my desire and fervent hope that within ten years from the date of my death, there be located upon the site of my home at 1117-23 Beatty Ford Road in the City of Charlotte, North Carolina, a hospital or clinic for the care and treatment of colored patients."
2. If that could not be accomplished, then the Trustees "may contribute the site of my home at 1117-23 Beattys Ford Road ... as a location for the Boulware Mission, which Mission is now located at corner of Sanders and Carmel streets." If that was done, "all the rest of my said property" shall be used "for the promotion and furtherance of the work of the Boulware Mission so located on the site of my home."
3. "If neither the hospital or clinic ... nor the Boulware Mission" possibilities came to fruition, then "it is my will and desire ... to devote my estate or the proceeds from the sale or sales thereof to ... promotion of charitable work among the members of the colored race."

Henderson's first two wishes did not become reality, but her third request, the trust fund, became a force for good in Charlotte and remains active today. After several decades of operation on its own, it was transferred in 1981 to the Greater Charlotte Foundation – today known as Foundation for the Carolinas, a large non-profit that manages many philanthropic

⁶⁸ McKinnell's career at Tucker-Kirby building materials culminated in a long stint as president. The firm remains a leader in Charlotte in the 2020s. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/112900364/william-mckinnell>

⁶⁹ Dwelle died in 2017 at age 102. "John Myers Dwelle, 1914 – 2017," on-line at <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/charlotte/name/john-dwelle-obituary?id=16185638> On Mary Myers Dwelle's key role in the Mint Museum, see Kratt, *New South Women*, pp, 39 – 41.

funds.⁷⁰ In 1993 FFTC merged it with another African American-focused endowment that had been created by Dr. Elizabeth “Libby” Randolph, a longtime Black leader in education. The resulting entity is the African American Community Foundation, an “unrestricted fund for the purpose of meeting needs in health and community services, with an emphasis on service to minority groups.”⁷¹ Since its inception in 1993, reported *Charlotte Magazine* recently, “AACF has awarded more than \$500,000 in grants to 85 local nonprofits.”

“This ‘for us, by us’ model is a rare treasure to have in Charlotte,” said Board Chair Keysha Walker Taylor in 2019: “[Not only was AACF] initially funded with African American dollars, it has always been led by an African American board and solely grants to programs that address disparities in the African American community.”⁷²

Awareness of Black philanthropy is on an upswing nationally. In Charlotte, a volume of photos and profiles by writer Valaida Fullwood and photographer Charles Thomas, entitled *Giving Back: A Tribute to Generations of African American Philanthropists*, documented the often low-key but ever-present philanthropy in the city’s Black communities circa 2011. It sparked an exhibit which travelled to over twenty-seven sites across fifteen states as well as the District of Columbia and continues to tour today.⁷³ Nationally, a 2020 biography of Madame C.J. Walker called attention to her “Gospel of Giving” as part of a wider tradition of “Black Women’s Philanthropy During Jim Crow.”⁷⁴ Asserted author Tyrone Freeman, “One cannot study the history of African Americans without encountering their philanthropy.”

A century ago in Charlotte, Lethia Jones Henderson’s life proved the truth of those words.

⁷⁰ In 1981 trustee McKinnell was deceased and Dwelle, the surviving trustee, made arrangements to transfer the trust to the Greater Charlotte Foundation. The listing of the trust’s real estate holdings appears to be identical to that in the will, though it identified properties by “block and lot” on the original Washington Heights plat map, rather than by street address: lots three, four and seven of block three; lots one, four, five and six of block four. Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office, Deed Book 4496, pages 832 – 838, November 6, 1981.

⁷¹ Angela Lindsay, “Promoting the Power of Philanthropy,” *Pride Magazine*, September 26, 2019. <https://www.pridemagazineonline.com/promoting-the-power-of-philanthropy/> Ken Garfield, “Building on a Legacy of Black Giving,” on the *Foundation for the Carolinas* website, August 18, 2021. <https://philanthropyfocus.org/building-on-a-legacy-of-black-giving/>

⁷² Angela Lindsay, “Promoting the Power of Philanthropy,” *Pride Magazine*, September 26, 2019. <https://www.pridemagazineonline.com/promoting-the-power-of-philanthropy/>

⁷³ Post on the Facebook page of Valaida Fullwood on June 22, 2022. Valaida Fullwood and Charles Thomas, *Giving Back: A Tribute to Generations of African American Philanthropists* (Winston Salem: John F. Blair, 2011).

⁷⁴ Tyrone McKinley Freeman, *Madam C.J. Walker’s Gospel of Giving: Black Women’s Philanthropy During Jim Crow* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2020).

Lethia Jones Henderson's Last Will and Testament, December 14, 1953

Henderson, Lethia Jones
1956

Original

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF MECKLENBURG

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT
OF
LETHIA JONES HENDERSON

I, Lethia Jones Henderson, of the City of Charlotte, County of Mecklenburg, and State of North Carolina, do hereby make, publish and declare this to be my Last Will and Testament.

ITEM I.

I hereby revoke all wills and codicils made by me at any time heretofore.

ITEM II.

My Executors, hereinafter named, shall give my body a decent burial, suitable to the wishes of my friends and relatives, and shall pay all my funeral expenses, together with all my just debts, out of the first moneys which may come into their hands belonging to my estate.

ITEM III.

I direct that all inheritance, estate, transfer, succession, death and other taxes or duties imposed upon or in relation to any property owned by me at the time of my death shall be paid out of my general estate as if an expense of the administration thereof, and shall not be charged against or recovered from the several beneficiaries hereunder, or the takers of any such property.

ITEM IV.

My Executors and/or Trustees may in their discretion and so long as they deem it advisable permit William A. Richardson, if he shall survive me, to continue to occupy the dwelling in which he now lives in the rear of 1117-23 Beattys Ford Road so that he may continue to act as a caretaker for the various properties of my estate. During the period which my Executors and/or Trustees permit the said William A. Richardson to occupy said dwelling, they may pay him out of my estate for his services as caretaker the sum of \$100.00 per month. However, this is not

(Page 1 - Will of Lethia Jones Henderson)

obligatory on the part of my Executors and/or Trustees, and their decision as to how long and on what terms the said William A. Richardson is to remain in said dwelling and to act as such caretaker is left by me to their own discretion and good judgment.

ITEM V.

So long as my Executors and/or Trustees in their sole discretion shall deem it advisable, my said Executors and/or Trustees may pay over to the Reverend John Firms, if he shall survive me, the sum of Ten (\$10.00) Dollars per month, said sum to be paid out of the income of my said estate. My said Executors and/or Trustees in their sole discretion may cease to make these payments at any time that they feel it is to the best interest of my estate that said payments shall terminate, and their decision in this matter shall not be questioned. In no event shall these payments or any of them be made by my said Executors and/or Trustees to the said Reverend John Firms if the income from my said estate is not adequate for such purpose.

ITEM VI.

All the rest, residue and remainder of my estate, both real and personal, of every nature and wherever situated, of which I may die seized or possessed, including, without limitation, all property acquired by me or to which I may become entitled after the execution of this my Last Will and Testament, I give, devise and bequeath to my Trustees hereinafter named, in trust, nevertheless, for the following uses and purposes:

(1) Items IV and V of this my Last Will and Testament are hereby incorporated in and made a part of this trust, so that both my Executors, while my estate is being administered by them, and my Trustees, after the property has been turned over to them, may carry out my wishes, if they deem it advisable, as set forth in Items IV and V of this my Last Will and Testament with reference to the said William A. Richardson, if he shall survive me, and with reference to the said Reverend John Firms, if shall survive me.

(2) It is my desire and fervent hope that within ten years from the date of my death, there shall be located upon the site of my home at 1117-23 Beatty Ford Road in the City of Charlotte, North Carolina, a hospital or clinic for the care and treatment of colored patients. Should my Trustees find within ten years from the date of my death that such a hospital or clinic is practicable, it is my will and desire and I do hereby direct that my Trustees in their sole discretion may contribute the site of my home at 1117-23 Beatty Ford Road, Charlotte, North Carolina, as a location for such hospital or clinic, said gift of said land to be made by my said trustees upon the express condition that such property shall be used as the site or location of such hospital or clinic for the care and treatment of colored patients. If such hospital or clinic is established or located upon the site of my home at 1117-23 Beatty Ford Road, Charlotte, North Carolina, within ten years from the date of my death, it is my further will and desire and I do hereby direct that my Trustees shall use all the rest of my said property, together with any accumulated income therefrom, which may be in their hands as Trustees in such manner as they deem advisable for the promotion and furtherance of the work of said hospital or clinic so established or located upon the site of my home at 1117-23 Beattys Ford Road, Charlotte, North Carolina.

(3) If a hospital or clinic for the care and treatment of colored patients is not located on the site of my home at 1117-23 Beattys Ford Road, Charlotte, North Carolina, within ten years from the date of my death, and such property has not been contributed or donated by my said Trustees for such purpose within said period of time, as set forth in paragraph (2) of Item VI of this my Last Will and Testament, then and in such event it is my will and desire and I do hereby direct that my said Trustees in their sole discretion may contribute the site of my home at 1117-23 Beattys Ford Road, Charlotte, North Carolina, as a location for the Boulware Mission, which Mission is now located at the

corner of Sanders and Carmel Streets in the City of Charlotte, North Carolina, and which Mission is operated under the auspices and control of Simpson Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church, said gift of said land to be made by my said Trustees upon the express condition that such property shall be used as the site or location of the said Boulware Mission. If the Boulware Mission is located upon the site of my home at 1117-23 Beattys Ford Road, Charlotte, North Carolina, as herein provided for, it is my further will and desire and I do hereby direct that my Trustees shall use all the rest of my said property, together with any accumulated income therefrom, which may be in their hands as Trustees in such manner as they deem advisable for the promotion and furtherance of the work of the Boulware Mission so located upon the site of my home at 1117-23 Beattys Ford Road, Charlotte, North Carolina.

(4) If neither the hospital or clinic as provided for in Paragraph (2) of Item VI of this my Last Will and Testament nor the Boulware Mission as provided for in paragraph (3) of Item VI of this my Last Will and Testament shall be located upon the site of my home at 1117-23 Beattys Ford Road, Charlotte, North Carolina, as therein provided, then it is my will and desire and I do hereby direct and empower my Trustees hereinafter named to use my estate as they deem best for the promotion of charitable work among the members of the colored race. In other words, my first choice is that my Trustees may use my estate for the promotion and advancement of the work of the hospital or clinic to be located as aforesaid, but if this is not possible or practicable within ten years of my death, my second choice is that my Trustees may use my estate for the promotion and advancement of the Boulware Mission to be located as aforesaid, but if this is not possible or practicable, then my said Trustees are empowered and directed to devote my estate or the proceeds of the sale or sales thereof to such charitable work or works among the members of the colored race at such time or times and in such manner and on such terms as they deem best and proper in their sole discretion.

ITEM VII.

For the information of my Executors and Trustees, my real estate at the present time consists of property located at and known as 1117-23 Beattys Ford Road, which is the site of my home; a store building located at and known as 1101-03 Beattys Ford Road; a three-family dwelling unit located at and known as 1009-15 Beattys Ford Road; a two-unit store building located at and known as 1113-15 Beattys Ford Road; and a lot upon which is located a duplex dwelling, located at and known as 2213-2215 Booker Avenue. All of said real estate lies within the City of Charlotte, North Carolina.

ITEM VIII.

I hereby give and grant to my Executors and Trustees, and the survivor and the successor or successors of them, the following power and authority, which may be exercised by them in either or both capacities, at any time and from time to time, as they may in their discretion deem advisable:

(1) To hold and retain all or any part of the property comprising my estate at the time of my decease, or received by my Trustees from my Executors, as long as they may deem advisable.

(2) To invest and reinvest any funds in my estate or any trust created hereby in any property, real or personal, of any kind or nature, including, without limitation, stocks, whether common, preferred or otherwise, bonds, secured or unsecured, obligations, mortgages, other securities, and interests in any of the foregoing, without being limited or restricted to investments prescribed or authorized for executors or trustees by the laws of North Carolina or any other state; it being my intention to give my Executors and Trustees the same power of investment and reinvestment which I myself possess with respect to my own funds.

(3) To make any loans, either secured or unsecured, in such amounts, upon such terms, and to such individuals, firms or corporations, as they may deem advisable.

(4) To sell, exchange, partition or otherwise dispose of any property, real or personal, of which I may die seized or possessed, or which may at any time form part of my estate or any trust created hereby, at public or private sale, for such purposes and upon such terms, including sales on credit, with or without security, in such manner and at such prices, as they may deem advisable, with the exception of the property which is located at and known as 1117-23 Beattys Ford Road and which is my present home site, which property shall not be disposed of within ten years from the date of my death unless it is donated for the purpose set forth in paragraph (2) or paragraph (3) of Item VI of this my Last Will and Testament.

(5) To mortgage any property, real or personal, of which I may die seized or possessed, or which may at any time form part of my estate or any trust created hereby, in such amount and on such terms as they may deem advisable; to lease any such property, for such term or terms, and upon such conditions and rentals, and in such manner, as they may deem advisable, irrespective of whether the term of any such lease shall exceed the period permitted by law or the probable period of any trust created hereby, and to renew or modify any such leases; to make repairs, replacements and improvements, structural or otherwise, of any such property, as they may deem advisable.

(6) To borrow money for any trust in connection with the administration of my estate or any trust created hereby; to execute promissory notes or other obligations for amounts so borrowed, and to secure the payment of any amounts so borrowed by mortgage or pledge of any real or personal property of which I may die seized or possessed or which may at any time form part of my estate or any trust created hereby.

(7) To renew or extend the time of payment of any obligation, secured or unsecured, payable to or by my estate or any trust created hereby, for as long a period or periods of time, and on such terms, as they may deem advisable.

(8) To adjust, settle, compromise and arbitrate claims or demands in favor of or against my estate or any trust created hereby, upon such terms as they may deem advisable.

(9) In respect of any securities forming part of my estate or any trust created hereby, to vote upon any proposition or election at any meeting, and to grant proxies, discretionary or otherwise, to vote at any such meeting; to join in or become a party to any reorganization, readjustment, merger, voting trust, consolidation or exchange, and to deposit any such securities with any committee, depository, trustee or otherwise, and to pay out of my estate or any trust created hereby any fees, expenses and assessments incurred in connection therewith; to exercise conversion, subscription or other right, or to sell or abandon such rights, and to receive and hold any new securities issued as a result of any such reorganization, readjustment, merger, voting trust, consolidation, exchange or exercise of conversion, subscription or other rights; and, generally to take all action in respect of any such securities as they might or could do as absolute owners thereof.

(10) Whenever they are required or permitted to divide or distribute my estate or any trust created hereby, to make such division or distribution in kind or in money, or in part kind and in part money.

(11) To employ attorneys, accountants, agents, custodians, clerks, investment counsel, and such other persons as they may deem advisable in the administration of my estate and any trust created hereby, and to make such payments therefor as they may deem reasonable, and to delegate any discretion which they may deem advisable.

(12) To exercise all power and authority, including any discretion, conferred in this will, with respect to all accumulations of income under this will.

ITEM IX.

I nominate, constitute and appoint my good friends, William A. McKinnell, Jr., and John M. Dwelle, Executors of and Trustees under this

my Last Will and Testament. I direct that my said Executors and Trustees shall serve in both of said capacities, whether in the State of North Carolina or elsewhere, without being required to give any bond or security for the faithful performance of their duties as such. Any power and authority, including any discretion, conferred upon my Executors and Trustees by this will, may be exercised by such of them as shall qualify and be acting hereunder as Executor or Trustee from time to time, and by the survivor and the successor of them.

ITEM X.

Insofar as permitted by law, none of my Executors or Trustees shall be liable for any act or omission in connection with the administration of my estate or any of the trusts or powers hereunder nor for any loss or injury to any property held in or under my estate or any of said trusts or powers, except only for such Executor's or Trustee's own actual fraud, and none of my Executors or Trustees shall be responsible for any act or omission of any other Executor or Trustee.

ITEM XI.

Although I have given in Item VIII, paragraph (4) of this my Last Will and Testament blanket authority to my Executors and Trustees to sell or dispose of my estate, nevertheless it is my hope that it will not be necessary for any of my real estate to be sold by my Executors, but that my Executors may be enabled to pay all my just debts out of the income and profits from my said estate so that upon the termination of their services as Executors, the corpus of my estate may be transmitted by them intact to my Trustees. As set forth in Paragraph (4) of Item VIII of this my Last Will and Testament, I do not wish the home site at 1117-23 Beattys Ford Road, Charlotte, North Carolina, to be sold or disposed of within ten years from the date of my death except as set forth in paragraphs (2) and (3) of Item VI of this my Last Will and Testament.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I, the said Lethia Jones Henderson, do sign, seal, publish and declare this as my Last Will and Testament, in the

Henderson, Lethia Jones 1956

presence of the persons witnessing it at my request, this 14 day of
December, 1953.

Lethia Jones Henderson (SEAL)
Lethia Jones Henderson

Signed, sealed, published and declared by Lethia Jones
Henderson, the testatrix above named, to be her Last Will and Testament
in the presence of us, who at her request and in her presence and in
the presence of each other have hereunto subscribed our names as
witnesses, this the 14 day of December, 1953.

Colin A. Munroe, M.D.	residing at Charlotte, N. C.
Jean C. Teal	residing at Charlotte, N. C.
Betty P. Bowles	residing at Charlotte, N. C.

Sworn and subscribed this 14 day December. - 1953

in county of Mecklenburg
state of North Carolina
Notary Republic

NOTARIAL SEAL

My Commission Expires October 10th,
1955

Harold E. Aldridge

(Page 9 and last page of Will of Lethia Jones Henderson)