

VLR-10/20/81 NRHP- 8/10/83

Architectural And Historic
Survey



Identification

STREET ADDRESS: 327 Sixth Street, SW
MAP & PARCEL: 29-188
CENSUS TRACT AND BLOCK:
PRESENT ZONING: R-2
ORIGINAL OWNER: Benjamin E. Tonsler
ORIGINAL USE: Residence
PRESENT USE: Residence
PRESENT OWNER: Mabel T. Sampson
ADDRESS: 327 Sixth Street, SW
Charlottesville, Virginia

HISTORIC NAME: Benjamin Tonsler House
DATE / PERIOD: 1879
STYLE: No identifiable Style
HEIGHT (to cornice) OR STORIES: 2 Storeys
DIMENSIONS AND LAND AREA: 65' x 93' (6045 sq. ft.)
CONDITION: Poor
SURVEYOR: Bibb
DATE OF SURVEY: Fall 1980
SOURCES: City/County Records
Mrs. Harry E. Byers (Fannie Sampson Byers)
Moore, Albemarle: Jefferson's County

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

This is an interesting adaptation of elements of the Italianate and Second Empire styles to a very modest house. The asymmetrical massing and corner tower are in the style of the Italian villa, while the tower's Mansard roof is Second Empire, and the steep gable roof of the main block suggests the Gothic Revival style. Basically, it is a two-storey house with a rear wing and a tower projecting from one corner of the facade. It is set on a low foundation. The walls are stuccoed, but probably were originally covered with some kind of wooden siding. The central block is two storeys tall, three bays wide, and single pile. It has a high-pitched gable roof covered with standing-seam metal with boxed cornice and intricate scroll brackets at the peaks of the gables. Gable-roofed wall dormers, with the same brackets in the gables, are located just south of center on the front and rear elevations. A small one-storey veranda covers the center bay of the facade. It has a steep bellcast truncated hip roof covered with standing-seam metal with boxed cornice, a plain frieze, and turned posts. The balustrade has been lost. The four-paneled entrance door in the center bay has a two-light rectangular transom. Windows in the main block and rear wing are double-sash with plain surrounds, slightly shorter at the second level. They are 6-over-2 light on the facade, 6-over-9 light on the south end, and 6-over-6 light on the north end and in the rear wing. There is a pair of full-sized double-sash 4-over-4 light windows in the dormer on the facade; the rear dormer is narrower and contains only one window. There is a central chimney corbelled out over the roof and smaller chimneys in the wing and at the rear of the tower. All three are covered with stucco or concrete. The rear wing is one bay wide and located somewhat north of center. It is shorter than the central block, but it has lower ceilings so that the cornice is above the second storey windows. A one-storey back porch along the south side of the wing has been enclosed and stuccoed. The tower projects from the northeast front corner of the central block. It is a full two storeys tall, with its cornice about the height of the ridge of the main roof. Its Mansard roof is covered with metal plates. Windows are narrow paired 1-over-1 light at both levels of the tower.

HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION

Benjamin E. Tonsler was Principal of Jefferson School, the first black public school in Charlottesville, from its opening in 1895 until his death in 1917. Tonsler Park at Cherry Avenue and Fifth Street, SW was named in his honor. Tonsler purchased this lot in 1876 (ACDB 73-293) and, according to tax records, built this house in 1879. His daughter, Mabel T. Sampson, bought the house from the other heirs in 1940 (City DB 107-382). Mrs. Sampson still owns the house and lived there until a few years ago.

SIGNIFICANCE

This house is an interesting vernacular combination of elements of the Italianate and Second Empire styles. It was the home of Benjamin Tonsler, a prominent local black educator.

UTM: 17/720230/4211700

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

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Charlottesville, Virginia**

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7. Architectural Description (additional information):

This ca. 1879 dwelling combines the Italianate, Second Empire, and Gothic Revival architectural styles, all of which were popular during the mid-to-late-nineteenth-century. The asymmetrical house is comprised of a one-and-one-half-story, two-bay, single-pile side-passage-plan, gable-roofed main block with an off-center gable-roofed front wall dormer that breaks through the overhanging eaves and gives the house its Gothic Revival aspect. This section contains the front entrance door which is topped by a two-light transom. The walls are stuccoed, and the standing-seam metal roof contains a central brick chimney. A three-bay hip-roofed front porch is supported by turned posts. The windows on this section are varied; the dormer contains paired four-over-four double-hung sashes, the front window is a one-over-one double-hung sash, and the side elevation has six-over-nine double-hung sashes. A two-story, two-bay, gable-roofed wing with six-over-six double-hung sash windows, and an enclosed one-story, shed-roofed, porch along the south side extends to the rear. A visually prominent two-story, one-bay tower with a Mansard roof projects forward along the northeast side of the main block, lending Second Empire and Italianate elements to the dwelling. A full two stories tall, the stuccoed tower features narrow paired one-over-one sash windows, overhanging eaves, a plain frieze and a steeply pitched Mansard roof clad with metal plates. The house was constructed between 1875 and 1879 and was in this basic configuration when it appeared on the 1907 Sanborn Map. It is a very interesting vernacular adaptation of popular Romantic architectural styles of the period and unlike any other in the proposed Fifeville-Castle Hill Historic District.

8. Significance Statement (additional information):

Originally listed as part of the Charlottesville Multiple Resource Area nomination, the Benjamin Tonsler House was placed in the Virginia Landmarks Register on October 20, 1981 and in the National Register of Historic Places on August 10, 1983.

The ca. 1879 house at 327 6th Street SW was owned by Benjamin Tonsler, a very prominent local black citizen, who had acquired the lot in 1876. Tonsler, a graduate of Hampton University and friend of Booker T. Washington, went on to become principal of Jefferson School and is remembered as one of Charlottesville's leading educators. The Tonsler House is one of the proposed Fifeville-Castle Hill Historic District's best examples of the additive quality of an early African-American dwelling.