

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

N/A

Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A

**State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government**

Strayhorn House
Name of Property

Orange County, NC
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

- Private: ☒
- Public – Local ☐
- Public – State ☐
- Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

- Building(s) ☒
- District ☐
- Site ☐
- Structure ☐
- Object ☐

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

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Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use
Historic Functions

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

Current Functions

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

LATE VICTORIAN

Materials:

Foundation: STONE, CONCRETE

Walls: ASBESTOS

Roof: METAL

Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

Located on the outskirts of downtown Carrboro, the Toney and Nellie Strayhorn House, along with a well and a shed, occupy a .43-acre parcel, once part of a larger farm. The evolved house grew from a one-room log building to a two-story I-house with a one-story rear ell. Brick exterior end chimneys flank the façade and a third interior chimney in the ell has a corbelled cap. A one-story, hipped roof porch with cast metal supports and modest jigsawn trim spans the façade. Centered on the facade is a cross gable clad in wooden diamond shingles and a flat, round wooden panel. Portions of the house sit on a stone foundation and others on concrete block. Roofing is metal shingle cladding on the main roof block with standing seam metal elsewhere.

Narrative Description

The Strayhorn House is located on a roughly rectangular .43-acre parcel on the south side of Jones Ferry Road that is within the town limits of Carrboro and on the western outskirts of the downtown area. The nominated parcel includes a house, a well, and a shed. A gravel drive extends south from Jones Ferry Road on the western side of the lot and extends to a gravel parking area west of the southern end of the house. There is one mature tree in the front yard and a second at the northwest corner of the house. Flower beds are located on the property. Given its proximity to downtown Carrboro and mill village housing from the early twentieth century, the house has been in a quasi-suburban environment for most of its history. However, in the last twenty years the density of development, particularly to the south and east of the house has increased notably.

Strayhorn House, ca.1887

Contributing Building

Exterior

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The house is an evolved, log and frame, two-story, side-gabled three-bay I-house with a one-story rear ell. The façade has a central cross gable, clad in wooden diamond shingles with a central round wooden panel. Spanning the first-floor façade is a nearly full-width, hipped roof porch, upheld by cast metal supports with a foliate pattern. The porch shelters a central, single-leaf, six-panel door with a metal exterior storm door. Flanking the entrance on the first floor are one-over-one sash windows. Aligned above the door and windows are three one-over-one sash windows on the second floor. The porch deck is concrete. The porch roof gutter obscures modest jigsawn pendant trim at the eaves.

The two-story gable ends each have a brick chimney with a single set of shoulders, centered on the gable. The east gable end has windows flanking the chimney on both the first and second floors. The west gable end has windows flanking the chimney on the second floor and a single window south of the chimney on the first.

The south elevation has a one-story, gable-roofed ell with an exterior-end, concrete block flue, and a central interior brick chimney that has a corbelled cap. The ell had a shed-roofed porch along its east elevation that has since been enclosed. The enclosed porch abuts a one-story, shed-roofed wing that houses a bathroom, on the east side of the house's south elevation. A partial width-hipped roof porch extends along most of the ell's west elevation. This porch is supported by square posts and shelters two single-leaf doors that flank a sash window.

Interior

The northern section of the interior has two rooms that flank a central stair hall on both the first and second floor. The first floor has a bedroom to the east and a parlor at the west. On the second floor, these flanking rooms are currently used as bedrooms. The rear ell has two rooms sharing its interior chimney: the room to the south is a kitchen, and the room to the north is a den. The enclosed porch at the east is a utility room of sorts with a washer and dryer. The porch also provides access to the bathroom in the shed-roofed addition at its east and connects with the central hall in the northern section of the house.

In the two-story main block of the house, the western room and the central hall on the first floor, and the two upstairs rooms and hall all have pine flooring that is historic, if not original. Other flooring is laminate or vinyl designed to appear like wood flooring. Interior walls are largely drywall, but the upstairs bedrooms, parlor, and den have hardboard paneling, painted in the parlor and bedrooms. The bathroom's north wall is the former exterior wall with weatherboard. A mirror and a vanity are set into a cased opening that once housed a window. Ceilings throughout are a variety of materials including drywall and acoustical tile. Center beadboard ceilings are found in the parlor, the upstairs hall, and the second-floor west bedroom.

First Floor

The first-floor hall has a set of stairs at the west and a door on the east wall to a first-floor bedroom. It has no current access to the parlor. The hall has a baseboard with molded cap and door trim is simple, flat boards with molded trim. The five-panel bedroom door is historic

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although its hardware is recent. The first-floor bedroom has cased-in closets flanking the door. Opposite its door is a fireplace that has been enclosed. The fireplace has turned pilasters supporting a molded shelf, above which is a low panel topped by a course of molded trim. The bedroom has a low baseboard with quarter round trim at the floor level and a narrow, molded cornice. Window trim throughout is simple but inconsistent, as most windows have a stool and apron and others have only a stool.

The former entrance to the parlor from the hall is blocked by a closet, built under the stair. The five-panel door to the parlor remains within the closet. The parlor is accessed from the south through the den. The parlor has a broad baseboard with a molded cap and quarter-round trim at the floor level, and crown molding. The fireplace remains, but the surround and the mantle are all late 20th or early 21st century. The fireplace surround is narrow reeded trim with miter cuts at the corners. A molded, unpainted mantle shelf is affixed directly to the wall above the firebox. Window and door surrounds in this rooms are flat boards. The two doors are raised five-panel doors. The door to the den has no hardware, but the door to the closet hall has a Victorian-era rimlock.

The den has a clamshell baseboard and a substantial crown molding. It has an exterior door to the west porch but the door is currently not used. A five-panel door that leads to the kitchen on its south wall, is east of the fireplace. A cased opening on the east wall that once held a window has been fitted with shelves and is open to the enclosed porch/utility room. The fireplace has been enclosed, and a panel with molded trim appears to have been set over a slightly taller firebox. A crossetted surround of wide boards supports a simple shelf mantel.

The kitchen has a five-panel exterior door on its west wall that leads to the porch. Paired sash windows with simulated divided lights line its south wall, with a cased opening on its east wall to the long utility room. The fireplace on its north wall has a flat board surround and a simple shelf supported by a course of molding and two slender brackets. West of the fireplace, balancing the den door at the east, is a built-in cabinetry that has solid doors on the lower level and glass doors on the upper level. Most of the kitchen has been renovated with modern appliances, flooring, and cabinets.

The utility room has paired one-over-one sash windows on its south wall. Its east wall has a single one-over-one sash window towards the south, a six-panel exterior door, and three one-over-one sash windows north of the door. Its north wall has a cased opening to the bathroom addition. The bathroom addition has a full bath to the east. On the west side of its north wall is a cased opening to the front hall.

The hall staircase is an open-string stair with bull-nosed, unpainted pine treads. It has a square newel post with a simple cap and a wooden railing with single pickets, square in profile, centered on each tread. The stairs ascend to the south along the west wall of the hallway. It is nearly a straight run stair but has a winder near the top. A railing similar to the star rail encloses the stairwell on the second floor.

Second Floor

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On the second floor, the east bedroom has a five-panel door centered on its west wall. There is a cased-in closet in the northwest corner of the room. The room has a clamshell baseboard and a crown molding. Window surrounds are flat boards with a stool and apron. There is no fireplace in this room, but a patch centered on the east wall suggests there may have been a stove that vented through the exterior chimney. The second-floor west bedroom has an entrance door on the north side of its east wall. Trim is similar to that in the east room. The bedroom has a cased-in closet in its southeast corner. Centered on its west wall is a fireplace that is enclosed, but above the firebox is a simple shelf mantle supported by quarter-round wooden brackets.

House Evolution and Changes

While there is no known early photographic documentation, the house began as a one-story, single-room log cabin, which corresponds to the current parlor. Rehabilitation efforts documented in 2014 noted that the log construction was exposed when a chimney collapsed.¹ By 1910 the house was a full two stories with a rear ell.² The utility room was created when a former single-story porch was enclosed in the 1940s.³ An undated photo in the family's collection shows some aspects of change. Windows flanking the entrance were six-over-six wooden sash. The porch was supported by turned posts with scrolled brackets. The porch deck was wooden and raised with steps to grade at the central bay. And the porch had a wooden picket railing with top and bottom horizontal rails.

In the 2010s the house was rehabilitated with funding from the community and the town of Carrboro.⁴ The roof was replaced, sagging floors were shored up, windows replaced, foundations repaired, gutters added, and an HVAC system introduced. With the collapse of one stone chimney, it was determined that both chimneys should be replaced with brick.⁵

Well, ca. 1887

Contributing Structure

West of the house is a well that dates to the historic period of the house. Above ground, the well is framed by a brick enclosure, square in footprint. Surrounding the brick enclosure is a concrete pad on which four wooden posts with diagonal upbracing support a hipped metal roof with a central finial.

Shed, ca.2007

Noncontributing building

¹ Tammy Grubb, "Town, residents rally to save freed slaves' home," *The News and Observer*, February 15, 2014. Subsequently while this nomination was under review, minor wall repairs exposed log construction, see figure 2

² Grubb, "Town, residents rally."

³ Anonymous, "Supporting Documentation" typescript in possession of the family, nd.

⁴ Donors included Preservation Chapel Hill, Hope Renovations, Rebuilding the Triangle, Town of Carrboro, Preserving Home of the Triangle, Habitat for Humanity and the Marion S. Covington Foundation.

⁵ Grubb, "Town, residents rally."

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South of the house is a side-gabled, prefabricated shed with a double-leaf door, clad in T-111 siding, set on masonry piers. Built ca. 2007, it is not old enough to be a contributing building.

Statement of Integrity

The Strayhorn House remains at its original location and thus has integrity of location. It is an evolved house, but much of the design in terms of form and plan are unchanged from the period of significance; thus it retains integrity of design. The house sits on a .43-acre parcel that is slightly larger than parcels in the vicinity, which gives it some sense of setting, as does the prominent well at the west side of the house. Surrounding residential development is generally at a greater density and in some proximity, so there is a moderate effect on the integrity of setting. Even by 1950, however, the area west of downtown Carrboro was beginning to become more suburban than rural. There have been changes to materials with the replacement of wooden windows with vinyl and interior changes noted above. Chimneys have been rebuilt. The kitchen and bath have been renovated. Nevertheless, the house retains metal roofing, significant porch and cross gable trim, an interior chimney with corbelled cap, interior door and windows trim, fireplaces, stair, and some beadboard ceilings, providing a moderate integrity of materials. Despite the loss of the chimneys due to structural issues, the workmanship of the interior chimney, porch and cross gable trim, fireplaces, and stair show an integrity of workmanship in key areas. And although not visible, the extant log construction also contributes to the integrity of workmanship as an earlier method of construction using log or heavy timber framing. The Strayhorn House expresses the historic sense and aesthetic of its period of significance, thus has integrity of feeling. The Strayhorn House has strong integrity of association as the only home both owned and occupied by the African-America Strayhorn family in their lifetime.

Statement of Archaeological Significance Potential

The NC Historic Preservation Office solicited feedback from the NC Office State Archaeology (OSA) regarding the property's potential for archaeological significance. The OSA offered the following remarks:

Located at 109 Jones Ferry Road, Carrboro, Orange County, the Strayhorn House is closely related to the surrounding environment and landscape. Archaeological deposits and remnant landscape features such as planting beds and filled-in privies, including the extant contributing ca. 1887 well, trash middens, and structural remains, which may be present, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the property. Information related to both the typical and atypical lived experiences of members of the Strayhorn Family in the post-Reconstruction Era in Orange County, North Carolina, may be available through archaeological excavation. Therefore, archaeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the property. These potential remains should be considered in any future development of the property.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

- ☒ 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

- ☐ 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

ETHNIC HERITAGE: BLACK
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1887-1950

Significant Dates

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Significant Person

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Strayhorn, Toney

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The Strayhorn house is a rare surviving example of a nineteenth-century farmhouse that has remained in the same African American family since its construction. It is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: Black. The house reflects Toney and Nellie Strayhorn's experience, which was both typical and atypical of African Americans in Orange County, North Carolina in the post-Reconstruction Era. Although Toney had been a sharecropper, he and Nellie amassed their own farm holdings and built a home that expanded as needs demanded and means provided. The house embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type or method of construction making the residence locally significant and eligible for the National Register under Criterion C. The Strayhorns' hard work and determination allowed them to keep the farm and a measure of independence. Their purchase and their continued ownership came despite significant obstacles to Black land ownership. The period of significance begins in 1887, the estimated date of construction of the house, and runs to 1950 through Nellie Strayhorn's life estate, after which point the property was no longer classified as a farm and the process of subdividing the land among heirs began.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Toney H. Strayhorn (1850-1934) was born enslaved to the Strayhorn family, white farmers living in University Station in Orange County.⁶ Toney is thought to have learned masonry skills while enslaved or soon thereafter. At the end of the Civil War, he lived and worked for a time on the farm of Laban Andrews.⁷ Nellie Strowd Strayhorn (1850-1950) was born enslaved to Wesley Atwater, who had a farm on Hillsborough Road about six miles from Chapel Hill.⁸ Her father, Robert Strowd (sometimes spelled Stroud), was enslaved by Bryant Strowd. After the Civil War, Nellie's parents were reunited and she and her siblings are listed in the 1870 census as living with their parents, Robert and Mary Strowd. Nellie's family was likely living on or near the

⁶ Sometimes spelled "Tony."

⁷ U.S. Census of Population, 1870.

⁸ Dolores Clark, Untitled typescript of family history.

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Bryant Strowd farm, as their census listings are adjacent to each other's and Nellie's father's occupation is listed as "working on farm."⁹

Toney and Nellie were married in 1876. The 1880 U. S. Census lists Toney as a farmer with his own household, wife and two children. It notes that he can read and write. The 1880 agricultural census indicates that Toney "rents for shares of products," meaning he was a sharecropper.

On December 31, 1886, James and Latitia Mason sold approximately four acres to Toney Strayhorn, which includes the nominated parcel.¹⁰ Mason was an attorney and may have been the lawyer for whom Nellie worked for a period.¹¹ The community where the Strayhorns lived was settled around 1882 with the introduction of a railroad spur, incorporated in 1911 as Venable, and renamed Carrboro in 1913 for mill owner Julian S. Carr.¹²

Family lore, substantiated by inspection during chimney repairs in 2010, holds that the home began as a one-room log house.¹³ Though the date of construction is estimated to be 1887 given the date of the purchase of land, some family members believe that it may have been built as early as 1879 with the permission of the Masons.¹⁴ The 1900 census notes that Toney was a farmer who could read and write and that he owned his farm with a mortgage. In 1900 Toney purchased an additional 25 acres from the Masons, and in 1903 he sold off four acres. Absent some adjustments, this 25-acre farm remained the core of the family holdings until the land was subdivided in 1960 and divided among heirs. While documentation about the Strayhorn's farming operation is limited, a chattel mortgage executed with Thomas F. Lloyd in 1902 notes the Strayhorns growing corn, cotton, and oats.¹⁵ Over a period of time, the Strayhorns also raised cows and hogs.¹⁶

By 1910 the mortgage on the property had been paid off and Toney and Nellie were employers on the farm.¹⁷ Family tradition holds that by 1910 the house had largely assumed its current form: a two-story, side-gabled house with a one-story rear ell.

While census data provides less information about Nellie than Toney, a 1942 profile in *The Herald Sun* gives some additional context to understand her contributions to the farm and household. In the post-Civil War era, it notes, "she helped with the milking and even plowed the field . . . (she) was strong and thrifty. She helped Toney, helped him save enough to build the six-room, two-story house in which she lives today."¹⁸

⁹ U.S. Census of Population, 1870.

¹⁰ *Orange County Deed Book* 55, 398.

¹¹ Anonymous, "Trying to save a part of Carrboro History," *The Carrboro Citizen*, July 1, 2010.

¹² Anonymous, "Carrboro Walking Tour," <https://www.townofcarrboro.org/2491/Walking-Tour>.

¹³ Lola Oliviero, "'Living generations of their leadership': Carrboro to honor first Black family with truth plaque," *Daily Tarheel*, August 27, 2023.

¹⁴ Dolores Clark, personal conversation with author, October 22, 2024.

¹⁵ Toney Strayhorn to Thomas F. Lloyd, chattel mortgage note, copy in possession of the family, 1902.

¹⁶ Boyd Switzer, "Boyd Switzer's Historical Notes," typescript in possession of the family, nd.

¹⁷ U.S. Census of Population, 1910.

¹⁸ Bill Rhodes Weaver, "Aunt Nellie Strayhorn Says That This War Is Different," *The Herald-Sun*, March 8, 1942.

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In 1920 their home was still labelled as a farm and Toney was described as both a farmer and a brick mason.¹⁹ In 1930, Toney and Nellie were living at the home with three of their grandchildren.²⁰ Toney had no occupation listed in 1930, likely retired at an advanced age. The house and farm were valued at \$1,000.

By the 1940 census, Nellie was widowed and listed as the head of household.²¹ The property was listed as a farm, worth \$1,500. Toney Strayhorn bequeathed his wife Nellie a life estate, after which his property would be divided among their heirs.²² In 1942 Nellie had only two cows left from a herd of indeterminate size, though she still produced butter for the local market—"her home-churned butter, printed with a neat floral design, equals, if not exceeds, in quality and flavor that of any other in the county. The excellence of the butter has stood with Carrboro grocers over 17 years and there are customers who swear by the 'honey gold' as the best in the world."²³ That report characterized her home as "standing within the white residential section of Carrboro."²⁴

The 1950 Census is the first census that does not characterize the Strayhorn holdings as a farm.²⁵ The property does not appear in Orange County deed books again until 1960, when Ruth B. Allen (granddaughter of Toney and Nellie Strayhorn) and her husband secured lots 3 and 5 in a subdivision of Toney Strayhorn lands, from Willis and Gladys Barbee, Margie and James Atkins, Mary Green, Fred Barbee, Ethel and John Rivers, Alfred and Velsie Barbee, Elizabeth and Thomas Blackman, and Joseph and Noselle Barbee.²⁶ In 1994 the house parcel passed from Ruth to her daughter, Dolores Hogan Clark, Toney and Nellie's great-granddaughter.²⁷

Toney and Nellie were prominent citizens who were well respected in the community. Toney was one of the founders of the Colored Church, later known as Rock Hill Baptist Church and First Baptist Church.²⁸ He became a pastor there and Nellie ran the youth group.²⁹ He was a well-known brick mason who built Carrboro Baptist Church and the rock dam on Morgan Creek at University Lake, among other structures.³⁰

Context

¹⁹ U.S. Census of Population, 1920.

²⁰ U.S. Census of Population, 1930.

²¹ U.S. Census of Population, 1940.

²² Last Will and Testament of Toney Strayhorn, executed November 22, 1934, copy in possession of the family.

²³ Weaver, "Aunt Nellie Strayhorn."

²⁴ Weaver, "Aunt Nellie Strayhorn."

²⁵ U.S. Census of Population, 1950.

²⁶ *Orange County Deed Book 179*, 193

²⁷ *Orange County Deed Book 1303*, 374.

²⁸ Anonymous, "Supporting Documentation" typescript in possession of the family, nd.

²⁹ Dolores Clark, personal conversation with author, October 22, 2024.

³⁰ Switzer, "Boyd Switzer's Historical Notes;" Dan Leigh, "Masters of Mortar," *The Chapel Hill News*, August 22, 1985. Ongoing research at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is anticipated to document the work of African American builders who may include Toney.

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In many ways the Strayhorn house and the Strayhorns' experience are both typical and atypical of emancipated people in Orange County. A 1993 Multiple Property Document (MPD) noted that surveyed houses dating from 1865 to 1943 "illustrate the persistent agrarian nature of Orange County with most of these being the modest farmsteads of yeoman farmers."³¹ It continued to note that the preponderance of these were of log construction. The MPD also observed that it was very common for these yeoman farmers to add to these small log houses based on capacity and necessity.³² Another signifier of their improved financial status was for the incorporation of a center gable to the I-house form that the house had expanded to become.³³ All of these building trends can be seen in the Strayhorn House.

The original building was likely a square, one-room or single-pen dwelling with an exterior end chimney. This corresponds to the limited photographic evidence gathered during early rehabilitation/restoration efforts. While framed openings weren't documented, the square footprint of this oldest, log construction portion of the house was captured. In his essay, "North Carolina Folk Housing," Doug Swaim categorizes these dwellings as pioneer types, generally 16 feet square.³⁴ Swaim notes that there are three general patterns of evolution for these houses. They are either demolished and replaced with a new house; they are adapted for use as an outbuilding such as a detached kitchen; or, as with the Strayhorn house they are expanded and incorporated into a larger dwelling.

The form that was adopted for the expanded house was an I-house with a rear kitchen ell. Architectural historian Michael Southern notes that this form, first identified by Fred Kniffen, was a type that "originated in the English folk culture. It has been identified as the dominant folk house type throughout the Upland South from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, and as the symbol of economic achievement with social respectability and a democratic agrarian society."³⁵ He also notes that "it's good ventilation properties make it especially suitable for a hot, humid southern climate."³⁶

As such, the house embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type or method of construction. The log construction of a small house for a yeoman farmer, expanded over time to meet the needs of the occupants and reflect stylistic alterations expressing not only fashion but the enhanced socio-economic status of the owners, is a documented pattern in Orange County.

The experience of sharecropping was also not uncommon in Orange County after the Civil War, for both Blacks and whites. Landowners provided (or sold on credit) physical resources to workers, including the land itself, and workers typically repaid the landowner with a share of the

³¹ M. Ruth Little et al., Orange County Multiple Property Documentation Form: "Historic Resources of Orange County," 1993, 3.

³² Little, Orange County Multiple Property Documentation Form, 64.

³³ Little, Orange County Multiple Property Documentation Form, 67.

³⁴ Doug Swaim, "North Carolina Folk Housing" in *Carolina Dwelling* North Carolina State University, School of Design, 1978, 30.

³⁵ Michael Southern, "The I-House as a Carrier of Style in Three Counties of the Northeastern Piedmont" in *Carolina Dwelling* North Carolina State University, School of Design, 1978, 71.

³⁶ Ibid.

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harvest. This system was beneficial in some ways to both parties, as landowners did not have cash, and workers, often formerly enslaved African Americans, did not have land. However, abuses of the system in the form of unfair contracts and restrictions on the sale of produce benefited landowners and often caught the sharecroppers in a revolving cycle of poverty. While census data shows Toney as a sharecropper in 1880, one can reasonably assume he worked as one from the end of the war until his initial real estate purchase at the end of 1886.

The late nineteenth century was a time of notable movement locally and nationally for Black property ownership. In his historic context for Orange County, Richard Mattson notes of African American farmers, "Granted, the great majority of black farmers continued to be laborers or sharecroppers, but 1/4 had also purchased their own farms by 1910. County-wide, rural black communities expanded around new churches at the fringes of white Hamlets."³⁷ The Orange County experience was echoed nationally:

[E]mancipated blacks celebrated their new freedom by moving to new communities, by changing their names, by forming their own churches, by reconnecting with lost family members, by seeking an education, and by attempting to become landowners. African-American leaders after the Civil War understood that the key to their people's independence and self-reliance was land.³⁸

In an 1892 conference at Tuskegee, Booker T. Washington encouraged Blacks "to buy land and to cultivate it thoroughly; to raise more food supply; to build houses with more than one room."³⁹

The 1900 Census shows Toney Strayhorn as a farmer who owns his farm with a mortgage. Of the 226 farming operations the Census recorded in district 67 of Chapel Hill township, where Toney and Nellie lived, 117 were sharecroppers. Fewer than half the total farms were owner-operated. Of those 109 persons who owned their own farms, 83 were white and 26 were Black. Thus Black-owned and operated farms in this district were only 11.5 percent of all farming operations in 1900, a distinct minority that demonstrates one way in which the Strayhorns' experience was atypical. Only 30 of the 109 farms had mortgages and of those 30, only seven were Black.⁴⁰ The low percentage of Black mortgagees may have had more to do with lack of access to financing than any other factor.

The farm gave the Strayhorns an added measure of independence from their white neighbors that was not typical. In 1944 Charles Maddry Freeman, then a graduate student at nearby University of North Carolina, described the African American community of Chapel Hill and Carrboro as "almost wholly dependent upon the university and the white families of Chapel Hill for

³⁷ Richard L. Mattson, "History and Architecture of Orange County, North Carolina," typescript, September 1996, 42.

³⁸ Waymon R. Hinson, and Edward Robinson, "'We Didn't get Nothing:' The Plight of Black Farmers," *Journal of African American Studies* 12, no. 3 (September 2008): 286.

³⁹ Hinson and Robinson, "'We Didn't get Nothing,'" 288.

⁴⁰ United States Census 1900.

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employment.”⁴¹ He reported that “employment in Carrboro had only recently been spurred by the exigencies of World War II and that munitions plants now paid a competitive wage for some African Americans.”⁴²

African Americans faced obstacles to landownership beyond financial capacity. In 1866 the North Carolina General Assembly ratified the state’s “Black Code” entitled *Act Concerning Negroes and Persons of Color or of Mixed Blood*. While making some concessions to the newly emancipated, it also enacted limitations “such as the requirement that most contracts with Blacks be in writing, signed by all parties, and witnessed by a literate white person.”⁴³ John Thomas Warlock characterized the legislation:

Ostensibly adopted to protect unsophisticated black persons from unscrupulous business dealings, the Code’s statute applied to all livestock sales contracts and all other contracts for sales or payments valued at ten dollars or more whenever at least one contracting party was black. In other words, the statute governed the vast majority of commercial transactions likely to be pursued by any freedperson. Failure to satisfy each statutory requirement—the contract had to be in writing, signed by all parties, and witnessed by a literate white person—automatically voided the contract.⁴⁴

Unlike many emancipated people including his wife, Toney was literate and was therefore less likely to be exploited in his land purchases. Furthermore, the bulk of his holdings were purchased from James Mason (1845-1900) and his wife, Latitia. An attorney, Mason not only practiced real estate law but as a Republican he was a self-professed advocate for the rights of Blacks.⁴⁵ His record in that regard may be mixed; however, he described himself in a letter to the local newspaper thus: “I spent 32 years of my best life in defense of the colored man’s rights.”⁴⁶ Given the nature of the seller, the Strayhorns had some protection from the worst abuses of the state’s Black Code, wherein African Americans could produce payment of labor to then have a contract nullified by a white witness. Warlick expounded on this phenomenon: “Contracts thereby voided became legal nullities, rendering contractual obligations as if they had never been agreed upon. A contract voided for statutory noncompliance left the black contracting party who had performed his obligations with little practical recourse for recovery, including partial payment or other equitable relief.”⁴⁷

While Black land ownership, particularly farmland, was encouraged within the African American community, through the twentieth century much of their gains were lost. Waymon Hinson and Edward Robinson summarized the literature concerning Black real estate losses in

⁴¹ Charles Maddy Freeman, “Growth and Plan for a Community: A Study of Negro Life in Chapel Hill and Carrboro, North Carolina” (Master’s Thesis, Department of Sociology, University of North Carolina, 1944), 20.

⁴² Freeman, “Growth and Plan for a Community,” 22.

⁴³ John Thomas Warlick, IV, “What’s Past is Prologue: North Carolina’s Forgotten Black Code” (Master’s Thesis, University of North Carolina-Charlotte, 2020), 26.

⁴⁴ Warlick, “What’s Past is Prologue,” 48.

⁴⁵ Anonymous advertisement, *Orange County Observer*, January 24, 1891.

⁴⁶ Anonymous, “Another Prominent Republican Will Support the Amendment,” *The Morning Post*, May 23, 1900, 4.

⁴⁷ Warlick, “What’s Past is Prologue,” 50.

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the twentieth century: “A variety of systemic factors including lack of access to credit, tax laws, intestate death of landowners, and other nefarious strategies were presented as prompting the enormous loss of land by black Americans.”⁴⁸ While the Strayhorn holdings ceased to be a farming operation in 1950, the continued family ownership is an anomaly.

The Strayhorn House, built by an emancipated couple, is stylistically typical of late nineteenth-century farmhouses in Orange County. However, the experience of the extended Strayhorn family in their capacity to purchase and retain the house for more than 130 years in the face of discriminatory practices and customs is not typical and represents a tenacity and determination to participate in the traditions and the generational wealth accorded to property owners from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first.

⁴⁸ Hinson and Robinson, “We Didn’t get Nothing,” 289.

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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

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 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository: Strayhorn family collections

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .43

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84:

1. Latitude: 35.909386°

Longitude: -79.076140°

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is all of that Orange County, NC parcel # 9778754952 as seen in the map entitled National Register boundary map.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes all of the property historically associated with the Strayhorn House that has not been subdivided and transferred.

11. Form Prepared By

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date: October 31, 2024

DRAFT

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Photo Log

Toney and Nellie Strayhorn House
Carrboro
Orange County, NC
Photographer-Mary Ruffin Hanbury
May 30, 2024

Facade, View to Southeast
1 of 16

Northeast corner, View to Southwest
2 of 16

Southeast corner, View to Northwest
3 of 16

Southwest corner, View to Northeast
4 of 16

Interior, first floor stair hall, View to
North
5 of 16

Interior, first floor Northwest room,
View to Northeast
6 of 16

Interior, first floor Northwest room,
View to Southeast
7 of 16

Interior, first floor Northeast room, View
to West
8 of 16

Interior, first floor den, View to South
9 of 16

Interior, first floor kitchen, view to
Northwest
10 of 16

Interior, first floor bathroom, view to
Northeast
11 of 16

Interior, stair, View to South
12 of 16

Interior, second floor Northwest room,
View to Southwest
13 of 16

Interior, second floor Northeast room,
View to East
14 of 16

Well, View to Northwest
15 of 16

Shed, View to Southwest
16 of 16

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Figure 1. Historic photo of the house, undated, in the collection of the family

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Figure 2. Log construction exposed, 2025.

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations 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.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

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- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.