



The William C. Coker House • Chapel Hill • ca. 1908





The William C. Coker House is distinguished by its unique history and extraordinary setting. The house and its notable gardens testify to the complimentary functions of architecture and gardening and to the vision of a rare individual who helped to shape the prestigious University of North Carolina, the nation's first state university, and its hometown of Chapel Hill. The residence was constructed in 1908 for botany professor William Coker who had arrived in Chapel Hill and his post as associate professor of botany in 1903. Coker, a South Carolinian by birth, had already enjoyed a successful career in banking, completed a Ph.D with high distinction from Johns Hopkins University and studied in Germany at the laboratory of Eduard Strasburger, founder of modern plant cell biology. One of Coker's first projects upon arriving in Chapel Hill was to begin the transformation of six boggy acres on what was then the eastern edge of the campus into a botanical garden. The Coker Arboretum, devoted largely to native plants and trees, is still one of the campus's most appealing settings.

So it is fortunate that the home that Coker built and the gardens he designed for it came to be owned in 1986 by physician Woodrow Burns and his late wife Mary Jane Burns, both lovers of old houses and gardening. The couple entered into a preservation agreement covering the 2.8 remaining acres of the property surrounding the house with the local preservation society, Preservation Chapel Hill, to protect the architectural, historical and botanical significance of the property. They then set to work to restore the gardens as they thought William Coker would have done, a demanding task as the gardens had deteriorated significantly in the years since Coker's death. The Burnses sought advice from Chip Callaway of Callaway and Associates in Greensboro. Callaway, a specialist in historic gardens, has numerous famous garden restorations to his credit, including that of Ayr Mount, in Hillsborough, North Carolina, considered one of the most significant Federal period homes in the Piedmont.

Coker, who was noted for his prolific scholarly plant research, was truly a Renaissance man. In addition to botany, his interests included architecture, landscape architecture, campus planning, and residential development. Coker's choice of architectural style for his home indicates his depth of knowledge of current design trends, including the Arts and





Crafts Movement prominent in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. The Prairie Style of architecture, influenced by Wright, was selected by Coker for his home's design. The structure's deep over-hanging eaves, prow-gabled slate roof, grouped casement windows, interior stone chimney and exterior stucco finish speak to an integration with nature and a love of natural materials. The interior Arts and Crafts woodwork is among the most intact and extensive found in Chapel Hill. The Coker House could as easily be located in Asheville, with its preponderance of Craftsmen Style residences, many of which were designed by William Sharp Smith, the architect who completed the singularly magnificent Biltmore House.

The Coker House is well sited above North Street in the oldest Chapel Hill National Register Historic District. A winding drive flanked by towering white oaks and Eastern hemlocks leads to the house and continues to a departure drive off the rear elevation. A terrace with a low stone wall wraps around the home's façade and welcomes the visitor. Double diamond-light French doors with flanking stuccoed pilasters shelter beneath a projecting one-story prow-gabled porch. The gabled entrance emphasizes the multiple gables of the two-story structure and its flanking hipped roof porches, some enclosed, some open.



The doors open to a sweeping transverse entry hall, floored in quarter-sawn oak, and a view of the richly turned balustrade that characterizes the home's two-story staircase that carries to a wide stair landing on the second level. To the right is the main parlor with a massive stone fireplace that rises to a ceiling that features white oak boxed beams. The room is lit by groups of diamond-paned casement windows, a design feature that appears throughout the house. All floors in the house are of quality hardwoods, including quarter-sawn oak and heart-pine. To the left, a snug library features another fireplace with a tall paneled Arts and Crafts surround. There is a powder room off the library. Two French doors open to the north porch that was enclosed after William Coker's death. A one-light French door with sidelights and a three-part transom opens to the terrace in the home's front elevation. Picture windows line the porch and offer a view of the garden's arbor walk, cutting border and rose beds.





There are additional porches on the home's southern elevation. French doors lead from the parlor to an open air sitting area. The parlor also gives access to a small interior sun porch. The dining room opening from the parlor equals the parlor's dramatic design, with beamed ceilings and the grouped diamond-paned casement windows. There is a large inset arch-topped china cabinet that fits into the handsomely paneled Arts and Crafts woodwork that decorates the room's walls.

A butler's pantry/bar with original bracketed shelving leads to the modernized kitchen. Designed by Mary Jane Burns and restoration contractor Todd Dickinson, the kitchen has stood the test of time. One exterior wall was expanded to give space and light to the room that opens to the semi-circular outdoor slate terrace. The terrace, which is connected by descending stone steps to parking court on the northern elevation, was laid by Chip Callaway's team with antique salvaged slate. The kitchen appliances are stainless, as is the work/seating island, and there is extensive cabinetry for dinnerware and cookware. A back staircase leads to the bedrooms above.



The second level of the Coker House is accessed by the main staircase that leads to the landing with a built-in window seat beneath casement windows overlooking the front lawn and driveway. The master bedroom features a fireplace, large closets and a period bathroom with original porcelain tiles and deep bathing tub. A bedroom/nursery adjoins the master and shares the master bath but also has hall access. The second level has two additional bedrooms, bringing the total number in the home to four, with three and one-half baths. The bedroom at the north end of the front elevation has its own fireplace and ensuite bath. It also features a charming balcony, providing an expansive view of the garden house, roses and cutting border. The home's utility basement is equipped as a laundry.

The Burns restored the Coker Estate and gardens with the cooperation of the North Carolina Botanical Garden, which maintains a small public park on the grounds. The Burns placed an easement in honor of Coker's wife, Louise Manning Venable Coker, to allow viewing of the large stone outcroppings that border North Street. These picturesque boulders gave rise to the property's local name, "The Rocks."







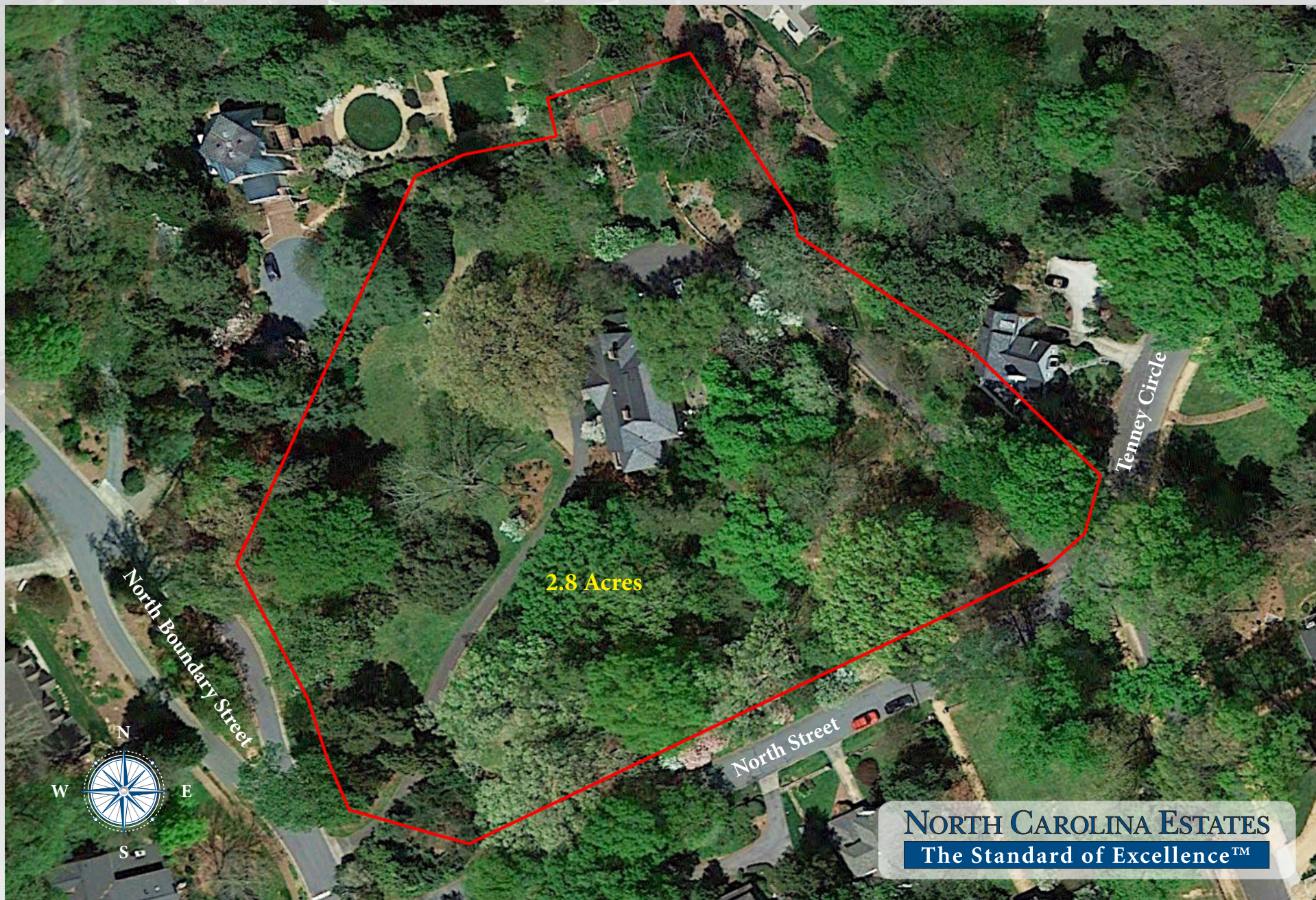








Price:	\$3,500,000	Entry Hall:	12' x 16' / Main	Square Feet:	4,172
Year Built:	1908	Parlor:	16' x 24' / Main	Acreage:	2.8 Acres
Rooms:	13	Dining:	16.6' x 18' / Main	AC:	3 Zones, Central Forced Air
Bedrooms:	4	Kitchen:	14' x 19.5' / Main	Heat:	3 Gas Furnaces, Forced Air
Baths:	3 Full, 1 Half	Master BR:	16' x 24' / Second	Water Heater:	Natural Gas
Fireplace:	Parlor, Master, Guest, Lib.	Bedroom 2:	13.5' x 16' / Second	Water/Sewer:	City Water / City Sewer
Floors:	Oak & Heart Pine	Bedroom 3:	12.5' x 14.75' / Second	Elementary:	Northside
Porch:	9' x 80' / Main	Bedroom 4:	14' x 15' / Second	Middle:	Guy Phillips
Patio:	14' x 53' / Main	2nd Level Sitting:	10.75' x 16' / Second	High:	East Chapel Hill High School
Library:	15.5' x 16' / Main	Roof:	Slate	Pin #:	9788691622
Sun Room:	10' x 23' / Main	Exterior:	Stucco	Taxes 2017:	\$27,242.22
Sun Porch:	13' x 16.5' / Main	Garden House:	19' x 20' (Detached)	Legal Description:	3 REV Burns Ammerer & Peacock
Interior Walls:	Plaster	Built-ins:	China Cabinet, etc.	Site Features:	Walking Trails & Gardens



Contact: Harry Branch • 919.418.6482 • HB1@mindspring.com • www.ncestates.com