



I. General Information

1. Griffith-Sowers House
2. 5050 Statesville Blvd., Salisbury, NC 28147
3. Tax Parcel ID No. 315 003
- 4./5. Owners:
 - John Luther Sowers
5050 Statesville Blvd.
Salisbury, NC 28147

 - Charles Lewis Sowers
414 Bethel Dr.
Salisbury, NC 28144
6. Market Value of Property: \$1,217,295 Assessed Value \$515,018

II. Abstract

1. The Griffith-Sowers House occupies an important and unique place in the architectural history of Rowan County, North Carolina, holds local significance in the area of architecture, and meets National Register Criterion C. The Griffith-Sowers House is an important example of twentieth-century interwar period building in Rowan County, reflecting both the Colonial and Classical Revival styles popular in the period and country house architecture of which it is one of two significant surviving examples in the county. The house, located about seven miles west of Salisbury, was designed for James Francis Griffith and his wife in 1930 by the English-born Salisbury engineer Percy Bloxam. Alfred Ross Lazenby, the prominent Salisbury contractor of the early-twentieth century, began its construction in either late 1930 or early 1931. By 1932 he had completed the flush-sheathed

exterior of the house, covered it with a slate roof, and brought the partitioned, sub-floored interior to the point it was ready for plaster when the Griffiths suffered financial reverses and defaulted on a mortgage. At that time, it was the largest house in rural Rowan County and one whose size and ambition was equaled or exceeded only by the Hambley-Wallace House (NR, 1997) and the Walter Franklin McCanless House, both in Salisbury.

The exterior of the house was finished in 1933. There have been no significant changes to the exterior of the house. The interior of the house was completed in stages from 1934 through 1940.

Additional interior changes were made in 1962. (See NHR application section 7 page 1)

2. The main house and the adjacent 30 acres are to be designated to match the National Historic Register designation

III. Historical Background

1. James Francis Griffith (1887-1960), for whom Percy Bloxam (1888-1943) prepared the plans of this house and for whom the renowned Salisbury contractor Alfred Ross Lazenby (1867-1943) undertook its construction, was a native of Salisbury and resided near the center of the city, at a block's remove from the crossing of Innes and Main streets, from his birth until 1928. He was the only surviving child of Dr. James Francis Griffith (1851-1908) and his wife, Mary Elizabeth Kluttz (1853-1928). Dr. Griffith, a native of North Carolina, came to Salisbury in about 1872 and engaged in the practice of dentistry with Dr. William F. Bason (1814-1889) who had established himself and his own dental practice here in the antebellum period. In 1878 Dr. Griffith married Mary Elizabeth Kluttz, a daughter of Caleb Kluttz (1812-1857), who served as sheriff of Rowan County from 1849 until his death, and the younger sister of Theodore Franklin Kluttz (1848-1918), a wealthy Salisbury merchant, industrialist, and member of the United States Congress (1899-1905).¹ In 1881 Dr. Griffith purchased the former residence and office quarters of Dr. Bason, located in the east corner of West Innes and North Church streets (Rowan Deeds, 59/338-40). Soon thereafter he erected a stylish late-Italianate house that is believed to have also housed his dental practice. The lot on which the Griffith House stood, opposite that of Reuben J. Holmes in the south corner of Innes and Church streets, was a desirable one in the Rowan County seat. On 16 May 1907 Dr. and Mrs. Griffith sold the front, greater portion of their property to the United States of America (Rowan Deeds, 111/410-412). The rectangular lot, measuring fifty-two feet on Innes Street and 140 feet on North Church Street, became the site of the handsome, Classical Revival-style United States Post Office and Court House. Apparently prior to the sale of the property to the United States, Dr. Griffith had his house moved to the back part of the lot, facing northwest onto Church Street. Dr. James

Francis Griffith and his family occupied the house, then standing at 117 North Church Street, until his death on 16 July 1908. He left his widow and their son who remained her near constant companion until her death on 1 May 1928. Early in this period, from 1909 until its completion in 1911, the scene of the elegant marble-clad post office, being constructed on the site of his childhood home, was a daily experience for the young Francis Griffith. Twenty years later the two-story Corinthian columns supporting the building's loggia overlooking West Innes Street would have a rural echo in the two-story Tuscan portico on the rear elevation of the Griffith-Sowers House.

James Francis Griffith was educated in the Salisbury public schools and at Horner Military Academy in Oxford, North Carolina.² He was enrolled for a year, that of 1906-1907, at the University of North Carolina. In the 1910 *Salisbury City Directory* he and his mother are listed at 117 North Church Street; he was then a clerk at the Salisbury office of the Wachovia Loan and Trust Company. He retained his association with the bank through the 1910s and in the 1919-1920 edition of the city directory he was listed as a bookkeeper. Apparently, it was also in the 1910s (and possibly early 1920s) that he was in New York for periods, where he is said to have studied music and voice at Columbia University, today's Julliard School, and with "Dr. Mario Marafioti, voice specialist of the Metropolitan Opera and personal physician and advisor to the famed tenor Enrico Caruso (1873-1921)" (*Asheville Citizen*, 28 May 1960). While he served as a private music teacher for most of his adult life, his single academic position in higher education was that of director of the vocal department at the University of Alabama School of Music for the year of 1920-1921. Mr. Griffith returned to Salisbury and in the 1922-1923 edition of the city directory he is listed as a "vocal teacher." In the next edition of the directory, for 1924-1925, he was again cited as a voice teacher, tenor soloist, and supervisor of music in the city schools. In the subsequent editions of the city directory, published for 1926 and 1928-1929, he was simply identified as a "music teacher." His music studio was listed at 117-1/2 North Church Street.

Mr. Griffith's marriage on 9 June 1925 to Grace C. Watson (1900-1969), the daughter of Albert W. and Mary (Poole) Watson, in Greenville, South Carolina, was the first of three events in the 1920s that led to the construction of this house. She does not appear in the Griffith household in the 1926 Salisbury directory, however in the 1928-1929 directory Mr. and Mrs. Griffith appear alone. Mary Elizabeth Kluttz Griffith had died on 29 April 1928 and was buried beside her husband in Salisbury's Chestnut Hill Cemetery. Grace Griffith was mistress of her new home for a short period. On 25 September 1928 Frances and Grace Griffith sold the Griffith residence to the United States of America for \$18,000 (Rowan Deeds, 204/8). The house, which appeared in published postal views of the Salisbury Post Office and Court House, was pulled down and its grounds became the site of an ell extension to the federal facility.

At this distance the matter of where the Griffiths resided after the sale of the Griffith family house in 1928 remains unconfirmed as do the circumstances that prompted the couple to undertake the construction of a large country house in rural Rowan County, some seven miles west of central Salisbury. They died childless, and any public

association with this house apparently ended when they lost the property in foreclosure. On 5 March 1930 the couple acquired a tract of 137.85 acres lying on the north side of “the new Statesville Road” (then North Carolina Highway 10 and today’s U.S. 70), in the northwest corner of the junction of Kepley Road (SR 1953) and the highway (Rowan Deeds, 211/126). As of 5 March, the sellers, Theodore Baker Brown (1863-1941), Harold Allen (1883-1942) and Mary Edna (McCubbins) Rouzer (1882-1952), and Harold Allen Rouzer, trustee, had owned the property for only two weeks. They had received title to it by deeds from Frank Reid Brown and his wife, and from John L. Rendleman, receiver of Frank Reid Brown, dated 21 February and 1 March 1930, respectively (Rowan Deeds, 211/109-110). The purchase price was effectively the assumption of the mortgage on the property, executed by Frank Reid Brown and his wife to the Greensboro Joint Stock Land Bank, of \$3,822 plus interest since 1 January 1930. The acreage included the late nineteenth century farmstead of Lawson Monroe Kepley (1857-1921), whose nineteenth-century one story frame house and its outbuildings stood at the eastern edge of the tract, on the west side of Kepley Road.³

Apparently, the Griffiths immediately engaged Percy Bloxam to prepare plans for the large two-story Colonial Revival-style house. Mr. Bloxam (1888-1943), an English-born engineer who enjoyed a brief partnership with Charlotte architect Willard G. Rogers, beginning in 1924, had a practice in architectural and civil engineering in Salisbury from about 1924 until the mid-1930s. The surviving plans for the house, comprising eight sheets, bear the name of the client, J. Francis Griffith of Salisbury, and that of the designer, Percy Bloxam and Company, architectural and consulting engineers. Only one of the eight sheets bears a date. A sheet of detail drawings, for the finish of important built-in features and decorative finishes including the trio of glazed “Corner Closets” in the proposed dining room (now the living room), probably the last of the group to be finished, is dated 15 April 1930.⁴ The typed specifications for the house, comprising eleven pages, identify Mr. Griffith as being of “Ridgecrest & Salisbury, North Carolina.” Whether the Griffiths had also established a (summer) residence in Ridgecrest, a small town in Buncombe County where the Southern Baptist assembly grounds are located, or he and Mrs. Griffith had established a professional association in a region, where they would work and reside during the final decades of their lives, is uncertain. In any event, the couple’s musical interests were well-expressed in their proposed suburban Salisbury residence. A “Music Room,” measuring seventeen by thirty feet, occupied the first story of the mansion’s east wing and was one of its three equal-sized reception rooms. Construction started either later in 1930 or in 1931.

On 31 December 1931 the Griffiths placed the property under a second mortgage as collateral for a part of an indebtedness of \$3,983.21 to Wachovia Bank and Trust Company (Rowan Mortgage Deeds, 118/156). Eight-hundred shares of North American Trust Company were also named in the deed as security for the loan. By the winter of 1932-1933 the Griffiths had defaulted on the loan by Wachovia Bank, and some \$1,700 plus interest was owed to the Greensboro Joint Stock Land Bank.⁵ On 3 March 1933 the *Carolina Watchman* published a legal notice for the “Sale of Valuable Real Estate,” comprising the 137.85 acres, to take place at the Rowan County Courthouse on Saturday,

11 March 1933, at twelve noon. The description of the property was essentially the same as that of the 1930 deed to the Griffiths. The advertisement carried no mention of either existing buildings on the tract or improvements the Griffiths had made. As of the date of foreclosure, the exterior of the grand flush sheathed house had been completed, its slate roof laid down, and copper guttering installed. The interior partitions were in place, subflooring and some finish flooring installed, and, as Mr. Sowers recorded, the “Main Dwelling (was) Completed to Readiness to Be Plastered.” Metal lath was in place. At the sale postponed from 11 March to 8 April 1933 Jesse Lewis Sowers, the Superintendent of Mails at the United States Post Office in Salisbury, bid the property in at \$2,905.00. The deed conveying the property to him is dated 19 April 1933 (Rowan Deeds, 219/493-94).⁶

Jesse Lewis Sowers (1904-1988) was one of five children born to Charlie George (1868-1955) and Susan Miller (1872-1963) Sowers and a grandson of Jesse and Mary (Swicegood) Sowers. He was a native of Rowan County, however, his parents and grandparents were natives of Davidson County and members of families prominent in the lower part of the county lying between Lexington and Salisbury. He was educated in the Salisbury public schools and the short-lived Salisbury Business College. Having been both a clerk and assistant Superintendent of Mails in the Salisbury post office, he became Superintendent of Mails in Salisbury in 1928, and he held the position until retiring in 1965. In 1933, when he purchased the unfinished Griffith house, he resided in a house at 208 West Lafayette Street which he shared with his parents.⁷

In 1934 he had the second-story rooms and a bathroom in the west wing of the Griffith-Sowers House plastered, the bathroom fitted with fixtures, and garage doors installed on the two-stall garage on ground level. The kitchen and an adjoining room, now the family dining room, on the west wing’s first story were apparently already plastered and habitable. Mr. Sowers, his parents, and his younger sister Mary relocated here from the West Lafayette Street house which was then rented. This family arrangement was temporary.

On 24 June 1936 Jesse Lewis Sowers was married to Ruth Elizabeth Stirewalt (1911-2004), a daughter of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther Stirewalt (1882-1960), who was then serving as pastor of St. John’s Lutheran Church, Salisbury. The young couple purchased a turn-of-the-century frame cottage at 209 South Ellis Street, Salisbury (Rowan Deeds, 231/294), repaired, redecorated, and furnished its rooms, and occupied the house in September 1936. They remained here until 1940 when further improvements were undertaken at the Griffith-Sowers House and the Ellis Street house was sold (Rowan Deeds, 250/291). The couple had become the parents of two sons: Charles Lewis Sowers (b. 1937) and John Luther Sowers (b. 1940).

Jesse Lewis Sowers, and, later, Mrs. Sowers recorded the expenses associated with the purchase of the one-story house at 209 South Ellis Street, its refurbishment, and those reflecting the completion and upkeep of the Griffith-Sowers House, the Kepley farm house, and other buildings on the country property from 1933 into 2000 in a small cloth-bound ledger.⁸ The finishing out of the Griffith-Sowers House occupied a shorter period, from

1933 until 1960-1962, when the east wing, including the music room on the first story and a "Guest Chamber" and adjoining bathroom on the second story were completed. This second-story suite was occupied then by John Luther Sowers and it remains his bedroom to the present. Among Mr. Sowers' earliest entries in his ledger are "Misc. Improvements" of \$816 in 1933 together with a new barn at \$180 and work on the Kepley farmhouse costing \$160. The unidentified improvements were probably to secure the house while those for the Kepley farmhouse were made for its occupation by a tenant laborer. The barn is believed to be the one now standing on Kepley Road outside the nomination boundary.

During most of this period from 1940 through January 1963, the Griffith-Sowers House was occupied by two essentially separate households. After Mr. Sowers' marriage in 1936 the west wing of the house remained the residence of his parents to the death of his father, Charlie George Sowers, on 17 April 1955, and the home of his mother until her death on 22 January 1963. The two principal rooms on the wing's second story, labeled "Study" and "Maids Room" on the 1930 floor plan, never served their intended purpose; they were bedrooms from 1934 to 1963.

With his relocation to the house in spring 1940, Mr. Sowers mounted a sustained finishing effort which continued to October 1942. During this period, the first- and second-story stair halls and the rooms on the west side of the halls in the main block were plastered and finished out. The architectural millwork and doors were supplied by the Rowan Lumber and Supply Company, and Goodman Lumber Company was the source of the flooring and other materials. When Mr. Sowers purchased the house, the three cupboards and mantel in the proposed Griffith dining room had been installed. Mr. and Mrs. Sowers used it instead as their living room and that use continues to the present. The couple occupied the bedroom above their living room as their bed chamber while their sons shared a bedroom in the

"Study" in the west wing. As the house came into use without the intended servants, the butler's pantry, located at the west end of the house's T-plan first-story hall and linking the kitchen with the proposed Griffith dining room, was not finished according to Mr. Bloxam's plan. Instead, it became a service hall while the area designated for a servant's sink here was partitioned as a lavatory/utility room. With his mother in control of the designated kitchen in the west wing, Mr. Sowers installed a simple, yet serviceable kitchen for his wife and their family in the east end of the first-story hall, in the space north of the proposed Griffith living room. Whether the remaining part of the back hall, with windows looking out on the brick terrace of the portico was used temporarily for dining or sitting is unclear. In time, in about the mid-1940s, the walls of the Griffith living room were temporarily covered with celotex and wallpaper; the north end of the room, adjoining the simple kitchen was used for dining while Jesse Lewis Sowers and his family used the south end of the large room as a sitting area.

Between September 1948 and February 1949, Mr. Sowers saw to the complete finishing of the two major rooms on the west side of the hall. The Salisbury Lumber and Supply Company milled poplar logs cut on the farm into paneling for the large first-story room and

provided white oak flooring, millwork, and other necessary finishing materials for both rooms and the adjoining master bathroom on the second story. The Salisbury firm of L. S. Bradshaw and Sons executed the plasterwork. The now-paneled first-story room continued in use as a dining and sitting room while the designated "Master Chamber" above became the bedroom of Charles Sowers. It was not until March through June 1958 that the master bathroom was fully fitted with fixtures and fittings as was the powder room below on the first story.

The finishing and decorating of the house's east wing occurred in an extended effort between March 1960 and October 1962. The aforementioned Salisbury firms, L. S. Bradshaw and Sons, Salisbury Lumber and Supply Company, and Goodman Lumber Company, provided materials, labor, and services, including milling farm-cut logs into paneling that was installed in Mr. Griffith's proposed "Music Room" and the bedroom above it. On completion the bedroom and adjoining bathroom on the second story were occupied by the Sowers's younger son, Luther, who uses them to the present.

The death of Susan Miller Sowers on 22 January 1963 ended the two-household occupation of the Griffith-Sowers House. From that point until the present the house has served as the single-family residence of Jesse Lewis Sowers, his wife, and their youngest son through Mr. Sowers's death in 1988 and that of Ruth Stirewalt Sowers in 2004. Doing so exceeded the intention of James Francis Griffith, who in 1930 saw the large country house as home for himself and Mrs. Griffith. There were bedrooms designated on the plans for a maid and guests but none for children. In February 1963 Mr. Sowers launched his last major project at the house.

Beginning in 1933, with his purchase of the property, Lewis Sowers carried on farming operations here in the fields and meadows with the help of a tenant who worked as a farm hand for six months, the hall kitchen was dismantled and fixtures from it and the aged Mrs. Sowers' kitchen were relocated to the basement. Oak flooring was laid in the east end of the hall and its appearance was made consistent with that of the remainder of the first-story hall. The house's planned kitchen was remodeled and furnished with new appliances, fittings, and cabinets. These remain in place. The room on the south side of the kitchen, designated on the 1930 plan as two rooms, a breakfast room and pantry, that had been Mrs. Susan Sowers' sitting room, was redecorated and came into use as the family dining room. The remainder of the house continued in its then current use. A laborer and lived in the Kempley family house. Mr. Sowers recorded little of these operations in his ledger except for expenditures on the tenant house, income from crops in 1937 and 1938, and incidental information. The first agricultural entries occur in 1933 when an orchard, mainly of apple trees, was planted in an open meadow between the Griffith-Sowers House and the Kempley house. An aged pear tree survives to the present. In 1935 Mr. Sowers paid \$200 for terracing work, principally in the fields south and west of the house, which remain open meadows today. The first tenant family was that of Robert and Josie Tabor. From the onset of farming operations, cotton was the principal cash crop and it remained so into the early 1950s when cotton lost its profitability because of the boll weevil and the Tabors moved to Salisbury. In both 1937 and 1938, the only years for which specific agricultural income is known, cotton accounted for nearly one-half of the modest farm income, \$549.08

in 1937 and \$445.26 in 1938, followed by pork, butter and honey. Cotton was grown in the large field overlooking the Statesville road, in the field west of the barn, and another on Kepley Road. The tenant raised vegetables in a garden about midway between his house and the new/present barn

For the longest period of his ownership, from ca. 1950 to about 1986, Jesse Lewis Sowers raised registered Aberdeen Angus cattle on the farm. He sold heifers and bull calves to others for stock raising; he did not sell his animals into the beef market. The large field west of the barn and a smaller one adjoining it on the south were planted in grass and put in use as pasture. Another large field, due north of the house, which had been fallow, was graded, planted in grass and also used for pasture. The large open field to the west of the driveway, leading north from the highway, was cultivated as a grass meadow for hay, while the smaller field on the east side of the drive was used as a supplementary pasture. The other fields on the property were put in use as either pasture or for hay. The original portion of the expansive frame barn (#5), standing west of the house and the studio (#3), providing stabling for the family milk cows, was expanded to the west and north, time and time again through the years, and lastly in association with the Angus cattle operations. Today all of the open areas, including the former pastures and hay meadows retain their grass cover.

The grounds of the Griffith-Sowers House have remained the acreage purchased by Mr. Sowers in April 1933 except for a sale in 1943 and three much smaller sales in 1951, 1952, and 1965 associated with a series of easements on the property. In March 1943 the Sowers sold the somewhat isolated acreage lying on the west side of Walnut Branch, comprising about twelve acres, to Ira Henry Barringer and his wife (Rowan Deeds, 270/211). Beginning in 1949 Mr. and Mrs. Sowers granted a series of easements for the transmission of natural gas in underground pipelines. The first of the easements was conveyed in 1949 to the Transcontinental Gas Pipe Line Corporation; it was in the form of a nearly straight path, seventy-five feet wide, carrying diagonally across the southeast corner of the holding (Rowan Deeds, 322/84). Two years later, in July 1951, the Sowers and Dr. Martin Luther Stirewalt, who held a mortgage on the property, conveyed a square tract, measuring 100 feet on its four sides, partially atop the above easement and located on the extreme east edge of the farm, beside Kepley Road, to the Transcontinental Corporation for the purpose of erecting a metering station on its line (Rowan Deeds, 349/128-130). In September 1952, the company purchased a very small adjoining triangular-shaped parcel on the south side of the 1951 purchase, described in the deed as “.005 acres of land,” to expand its metering operations (Rowan Deeds, 363/53-55). On 29 June 1965 Jesse Lewis and Ruth Sowers executed two deeds with the Piedmont Natural Gas Company associated with the construction of a gas pipeline feeding off the Transcontinental line to a large textile plant built some two and one-half miles to the west. One deed conveyed a small quadrangular-shaped parcel of unspecified acreage on the south side of the Transcontinental metering station to the Piedmont Natural Gas Company (Rowan Deeds, 499/335). This tract was the connection point between the two lines, and the Piedmont Company erected a small metering station on it. The second deed recorded a right-of way agreement, fifty feet in width, for the installation of the gas

pipeline following a generally east/west path through the meadow on the south front of the Griffith-Sowers House grounds (Rowan Deeds, 500/82-83).⁹

Preceding the death of Mr. Sowers's mother in January 1963, the family circle lessened with the departure of the couple's two sons for college. Charles Sowers attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, whence he graduated in 1959 from the business school. He relocated to Charlotte to work, before returning to Salisbury where he was married and established his own accounting firm. In 1958 Luther Sowers traveled to Philadelphia where he attended Tyler School of Art at Temple University. He received a bachelor of fine arts degree in 1962 and continued with a year of graduate study at Temple University. In 1963 he transferred to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he continued his graduate studies as an arts educator in a program that included a teaching position in the public schools. His posting was to Wilson, and in 1964 he took a full-time position at R. L. Fike High School, Wilson, which he held through the spring term of 1974. In 1972, Luther Sowers erected a one-story frame studio to the west of the house, between it and the barn, that forms the core of the expanded studio building (#3). In 1974 he returned home, lived with his parents, and gave private art lessons for about a year, before undertaking his costuming work for films, principally military uniforms and equipment, museum work, and other work in the arts that remains his profession to the present. In 1976 he was commissioned to execute bronze doors for the façade of St. John's Lutheran Church, Salisbury, overlooking West Innes Street. The doors, cast in the foundry added to the studio here and comprising paired panels for the double-leaf center entrance and single panel doors in the flanking doorways, were dedicated on 25 September 1977 (Agner, 401-02).

Jessie Lewis Sowers, who had retired from the United States Postal Service as Superintendent of Mails in Salisbury, died on 10 September 1988 and was buried from St. John's Church in Chestnut Hill Cemetery, Salisbury. His widow, Ruth Sowers, who had a thirty-year career in the Rowan County public school system, inherited the Griffith-Sowers House and its grounds. She lived here with her younger son until her death on 24 January 2004. She was buried beside her husband in Chestnut Hill Cemetery. Mrs. Sowers devised her estate equally to her two sons, who are the owners of this property. John Luther Sowers, a bachelor, lives alone in the Griffith-Sowers House to the present. He continues to work in costuming for films, television, and museums. The maid's room on the 1930 plan is his principal work room. The second-story bedrooms, excepting his own, are used for uniform and costume storage, as is the proposed music room in the east wing, and a portion of the basement area of the house. (NHR nomination section 8, p.13-21 Dayd Foard Hood, 2008)

2. Exterior construction was begun in 1930 and completed in 1934. Interior alterations were made in 1940 and again in 1962.

3. The exterior of the house has not been altered. The interior was converted to use for extended family in 1940 and then restored to a single-family dwelling in 1962/1963.

IV. Assessment

1. The Griffith-Sowers House occupies an important and unique place in the architectural history of Rowan County, North Carolina, holds local significance in the area of architecture, and meets National Register Criterion C. The Griffith-Sowers House is an important example of twentieth-century interwar period building in Rowan County, reflecting both the Colonial and Classical Revival styles popular in the period and country house architecture of which it is one of two significant surviving examples in the county.

2.,3,4 . The house, located about seven miles west of Salisbury, was designed for James Francis Griffith and his wife in 1930 by the English-born Salisbury engineer Percy Bloxam. Alfred Ross Lazenby, the prominent Salisbury contractor of the early-twentieth century, began its construction in either late 1930 or early 1931. By 1932 he had completed the flush-sheathed exterior of the house, covered it with a slate roof, and brought the partitioned, sub-floored interior to the point it was ready for plaster when the Griffiths suffered financial reverses and defaulted on a mortgage. At that time, it was the largest house in rural Rowan County and one whose size and ambition was equaled or exceeded only by the Hambley-Wallace House (NR, 1997) and the Walter Franklin McCanless House, both in Salisbury. On Saturday, 8 April 1933, the house and grounds of 137.85 acres was offered at auction at the county courthouse door and bid in by Jesse Lewis Sowers, a bachelor employee of the United State Postal Service in Salisbury.

In 1934 rooms in the west service wing were plastered and occupied by Mr. Sowers and his parents, Charlie and Susan Sowers, who resided in the wing until their deaths in 1955 and 1963, respectively. With his marriage in 1936 Mr. Sowers and his wife acquired a house in Salisbury at 208 South Ellis Street (see Salisbury Historic District, NR, 1975). In late spring 1940, Mr. Sowers, his wife, and their eldest son occupied the west half of the house's main block. By October 1942 the first- and second story halls and the west half of the main block were plastered and their architectural finish completed. Next, in a series of projects between 1948 and 1962, the east half of the main block and the east wing of the house were finished out and occupied by the family. Following the death of Mrs. Susan Sowers in January 1963, the house designed as the residence of Mr. Griffith, his wife, and a live-in maid/housekeeper, was occupied for the first time as a single-family residence.

The Colonial and Classical Revival styles, seen in the design and finish of the Griffith-Sowers House gained their identity and national popularity contemporaneously in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The Colonial Revival style saw its earliest and most sustained expression in residential architecture, where designers and builders freely adopted and adapted the generally classical architectural vocabulary of the American Colonial period and the Federal styling of the early national period, as well as features of the American Greek Revival style. Doing so, they produced buildings of appealing character, a balanced if not

insistently precise symmetry in their plans and elevations, and classical detailing that included both literal representations and imaginative, free adaptations of admired features of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century buildings. The features of the Colonial Revival style appeared first in the finish of Queen Anne- and Shingle-style buildings in the 1870s, however, the style quickly gained its own distinct identity, and enjoyed wide popularity in its several modes, including the Georgian Revival style, up to World War II (and beyond).

The Classical Revival style was likewise defined by an adherence to symmetry and balance, and the classical orders of ancient Greek and Roman architecture, the architecture of Renaissance Italy, and the works of Andrea Palladio. Coinciding in its American popularity with Beaux Arts classicism, the Classical Revival style gained unparalleled status as the favored style at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. Thereafter, the Classical Revival style was widely adopted for the design of public and institutional buildings, churches and synagogues, and educational buildings whose elevations were enhanced with its signature hallmark, a two-story or giant-order portico. The Rowan County Courthouse and the former United States Post Office and Courthouse, both in Salisbury, are important expressions of the style. The relative costliness of Classical Revival-style architecture generally limited its adoption for domestic architecture, and saw expression most often in domestic

architecture in combination with the Colonial Revival style, when handsome porticos, porches, and colonnades enriched the facades and elevations of brick, frame, or stone houses from the 1890s through the 1930s.

The Griffith-Sowers House reflects this important combination of the Colonial and Classical Revival styles in a domestic building and it is the only surviving house in rural Rowan County that features a two-story portico/loggia in its design. While it shares a certain kinship with the now-lost White Hamilton House at Mount Ulla, where a two-story portico and one-story wraparound porch were added in the 1910s to an 1860s brick house, the design of the Griffith-Sowers House reflects a more accomplished stylishness. In its massing, composition, symmetry, and finish the house, and particularly its eleven-bay south facade, reflect the signal features of the Colonial Revival style, including the hierarchy of component parts that distinguish the best examples of the style. The realization of a five-part composition incorporates gable-front wings, which are recessed behind the center block and project on the north elevation, where they frame the two-story Classical Revival-style loggia. This combination of geometry, symmetry, and spare classical finish continues on the interior of this remarkably intact, well-preserved house, whose siting, scale, and fabric, including its flush sheathed elevations also set it apart as an important example of country house architecture of the interwar period. The circumstances of its history prevented the development of ancillary features, including gardens, complementing outbuildings, and other enhancements that were common features of the country house movement, however, Jesse Lewis Sowers saw to completion this important Rowan County example of country house architecture.

The Colonial and Classical Revival styles appeared in Rowan County almost simultaneously around the turn of the twentieth century in the architectural composition and/or decorative finish of late Queen Anne-style houses. The Louis H. Clement House at 302 South Ellis Street, Salisbury, built in about 1899, is an early, lavish example of the melding of these

styles. Another important early reflection of this stylistic amalgam is the two-story-with attic frame house built at 208 South Fulton Street, Salisbury, for Milton Brown. Its Queen Anne-style form, with a three-stage octagonal corner tower capped by a bell-cast roof and an expansive one-story porch, reflects a degree of Colonial Revival style symmetry in its fenestration and a gambrel-front wall dormer while its variant “Palladian” window was a common feature of both styles. Other houses of the period, whether large in scale or cottage-like, reflected a similar synthesis of elements.

As the eclecticism of the Queen Anne style gave way in the pre-World War I period, house builders in Salisbury and Rowan counties erected appealing examples of both Classical Revival- and Colonial Revival-style houses. Two-story giant-order porticoes, a distinguishing feature of the Classical Revival style, appeared soon in Salisbury on the handsome house designed by J. M. McMichael and built by Alfred Ross Lazenby at 202 South Fulton Street for Mr. Brown’s sister, Mrs. David Franklin (Ella Williams Brown) Cannon in 1906 and on the brick residence of Judge R. Lee Wright, erected at 302 South Fulton Street in about 1912 to plans drawn by Charlotte architect Louis H. Asbury (1877-1975). James Francis Griffith, then resident a few blocks away, would have seen both houses being built as well as the United States Post Office and Courthouse of 1909-1911 and the Rowan County Courthouse of 1914 on Main Street, designed by A. Ten Eyck Brown of Atlanta.

Houses in the Colonial Revival style, mostly frame and of one or two stories, with symmetrical elevations, classically-detailed doorways, porches, and architectural finish, and often covered with hip roofs, proved to be more popular in Salisbury, Rowan County, and its smaller towns. The now-lost, two-story frame house with a balustraded widow’s walk and lavish architectural finish completed in 1900 in the 200 block of West Horah Street, Salisbury, for the Reverend Dr. Francis Johnstone Murdoch (1846-1909) is an early, elegant example of the Colonial Revival-style house. Another important example is the two-and-a-half-story brick manse, with a five-bay facade, pedimented gable ends, and handsome Doric porches on both West Innes and South Jackson streets, completed for the minister of First Presbyterian Church in 1913. However, the style was expressed more often in simpler versions such as the ca. 1915 Reamus-Hambley House at 602 Fulton Avenue (see *Fulton Heights HD, NR, 1999*) and in the 1913 remodeling of two houses at 310 and 314 South Ellis Street by Louis H. Clement in a spare Colonial Revival-style fashion complementing his own elegant house at 302 South Ellis Street. The Paul Tallmadge Goodman House, erected about 1916 near Gold Hill, is one of the finest examples in the Rowan countryside, which is punctuated with occasional, substantial Colonial Revival-style houses.

The combination of the Colonial and Classical Revival styles in Rowan County’s domestic architecture continued through the 1920s and into the 1930s, culminating, it can be argued, in the Griffith-Sowers House. One such example, erected in Salisbury in 1923-25 in the west corner of Innes and Fulton streets, two blocks from Mr. Griffith’s Church Street residence, was well-known to the future housebuilder. In about 1923 English-born architect Sir Alfred Charles Bossom (1881-1965) drew the plans for an elegant new residence for Walter Henderson Woodson (1875-1964) and his wife Pauline Bernhardt (1879-1942).¹⁰ The design of the Woodson House is based on that of the Morris-Jumel Mansion, a grand Georgian country house built by Colonel Roger Morris in 1765 and remodeled ca. 1810 by Stephen and Eliza Jumel, that stands today on residual grounds above West 160th Street in New York City.

Its elegant classical portico, its flush-sheathed elevations, and its general proportions were recast in the house occupied by the Woodsons and their four sons in 1925.

In early 1930, when Francis Griffith was planning this house, Salisbury had no known resident architect. For the design of his new house, Mr. Griffith turned to Percy Bloxam, who was trained in England as an engineer and had undertaken architectural design work since his arrival in Salisbury in about 1924. The Griffith-Sowers House is possibly the only known surviving building designed by Mr. Bloxam alone. Percy Bloxam (1888-1943) was born in Chesham, Buckinghamshire, England, the son of John and Sarah (Richardson) Bloxam. He immigrated to the United States in 1920.¹¹ By 1923 Mr. Bloxam and his family had relocated to Salisbury, which would be his penultimate place of residence in North Carolina. On 28 February 1924 the *Salisbury Evening Post* reported that Mr. Bloxam had formed a partnership with Willard G. Rogers (ca. 1863-1947), the Charlotte-based architect who had earlier worked in partnership with Charles Christian Hook (1870-1938). Mr. Bloxam was to have charge of the Salisbury office while Mr. Hook would remain in Charlotte. On 18 September 1924, Mr. Bloxam and his wife Olive Wide Bloxam separately purchased lots of the P. C. Wood subdivision in west Salisbury where they lived (Rowan Deeds, 182/226-27). On 14 December 1924 the *Salisbury Evening Post* carried a story on the firm's work that included a ten-story limestone-clad building, the new Elizabeth School, and an addition to the Dilworth School, all in Charlotte. The character and extent of the partnership's work remains to be confirmed, however, one important client was Catawba College, which had recently relocated its campus from Newton to Salisbury. Drawings for the college gymnasium survive, bearing the name of both Mr. Roger and Mr. Bloxam and dated to 1925; the gymnasium, now lost but standing as late as 1984, was built in 1926, after Mr. Rogers withdrew his association with Mr. Bloxam on the Catawba College work in March of that year. Zartman Hall, a dormitory erected in 1926, was also designed by the partnership. A house for the college president, the third campus building known to have been designed by the partnership, was succeeded by the present president's residence built in 1930. The partnership between Mr. Rogers and Mr. Bloxam appears to have ended in 1926, and in 1927 Mr. Bloxam and Catawba College ended their association. Except for Mr. Bloxam's identification as president of the Percy Bloxam Company on a deed in 1934, there is little known record of his professional work in the 1930s. By 1941, when he and Mrs. Bloxam sold property they had acquired in 1924 (Rowan Deeds, 259/223), they were living in Roxboro, Person County, North Carolina, where Mr. Bloxam ended his professional career as city manager. Percy Bloxam died in Roxboro at the age of fifty-five on 29 May 1943, and his body was buried in the city's Burchwood Cemetery.

The career of Alfred Ross Lazenby (1867-1943), the resident Salisbury builder of the Griffith-Sowers House, is better known yet also incomplete. Mr. Lazenby, the son of Humphrey B. and Elizabeth (Tomlinson) Lazenby was born in Iredell County and grew up in Statesville where he is said to have begun work as a contractor in the late 1880s. After his marriage in 1899 he relocated to Salisbury where he carried on a prominent and successful contracting business until his death, erecting an important series of buildings that remain as landmarks in town and country. He gained important status early in this period in the Rowan County seat with the construction of a Chateausque-style mansion for Egbert Barry Cornwall Hambley at 508 South Fulton Street (NR, 1997), completed in 1903 in partnership with his brother. The Classical Revival-style house built at 202 South Fulton Street for Mrs. David Franklin Cannon in 1906 was another of his early domestic projects of which the vast majority remains to be

documented. His construction of institutional and commercial buildings is better recorded and these include the Washington Building and the Empire Hotel on Salisbury's Main Street and the Central Methodist Church in Spencer. Other important early twentieth-century buildings, including churches for Salisbury's First Baptist and First Methodist congregations, the Whitehead Stokes Hospital, and the Ellis Street High School, are lost. His work here for Francis Griffith is the last known important building of his career. Given the financial reverses suffered by Mr. Griffith in 1932, which forced the sale of this unfinished house, Mr. Lazenby probably also came to disadvantage in this relationship. In 1941 he was named city building inspector, and he was serving in that position when he died on 14 November 1943.¹³

Mr. Griffith's decision to build a house in the countryside west of Salisbury links it to the American country house movement that flourished from the late nineteenth-century through the 1930s. The Griffith House dates to the last decade of the movement when the economic conditions that developed into the Great Depression either curtailed construction by those who suffered its woes, or enabled others, who were wealthy and had escaped difficulty, to utilize a depressed building industry to their advantage and build better, larger houses and estates than they might have in the competitive environment of the 1920s. In this instance, Mr. Griffith's financial reverses resulted in default and the forced sale of his unfinished house at auction, and its completion between 1933 and 1962 by Mr. Sowers. In other compromised projects of this period the finish of houses was sometimes lessened in quality, or wings of houses were left unbuilt. After accepting the fact that North Carolina became the location of Biltmore, the largest country house built in the United States, at the outset of this period, the movement spawned the construction of relatively few country houses in North Carolina outside the suburban residential parks, such as Reynolda Park, in Winston-Salem, that were often anchored by golf or country clubs. Richard Joshua Reynolds' Reynolda estate at Winston-Salem and Cameron Morrison's Morrocroft near Charlotte are important reflections of a sophisticated adoption of rural life in this state, as is Boxwood Lodge (NR, 1995) nearby in Davie County, which replaced a simpler hunting box on the property. In other instances wealthy estate-makers acquired older rural houses and remade, rebuilt, and enlarged them and often added gardens to their expansive grounds. Two examples reflect the range of this country house place-making. In Brunswick County the Sprunt family overbuilt and embellished Orton Plantation, with the help of architect Kenneth M. Murchison, and created an elegant historic retreat from life in Wilmington. In western North Carolina, in Henderson County, the Mallett family refitted Bryn Avon (NR, 1999) in the English Manorial Style and added a terraced boxwood garden.

The architectural styling of country houses in North Carolina generally followed patterns seen elsewhere in the nation, and it was repeated here in Rowan County. Most country houses and their attendant outbuildings were designed in one of two principal overarching styles: The Manorial mode, reflecting both English and French traditions, as well as the Tudor and Norman revivals, was adopted for the design of Graylyn in Winston-Salem of 1929-1932, smaller estates in Reynolda Park, for Morrocroft in Charlotte, Bryn Avon in Henderson County, and with half-timbering at Eastover of ca. 1934-1935 near China Grove in Rowan County. The Colonial Revival-style, incorporating features of the Classical Revival style, was adopted for the design of Boxwood Lodge in adjoining Davie County, and Orton Plantation near Wilmington, while a very appealing combination of the Colonial Revival and Craftsman styles appears in the design of the Reynolda Estate. The design of the Griffith-Sowers House reflects the handsome synthesis of the Colonial Revival and Classical Revival styles.

In its local context, Rowan County, the Griffith-Sowers House is one of two important country houses erected in the 1930s that are distinct from other substantial rural or village houses of the period, such as the John Carlyle Sherrill House of 1938 at Mt. Ulla, that were erected for country merchants and leading farmers. The circumstances that prompted Francis Griffith to undertake the construction of this house remain unclear, however, the fact that he had three large reception rooms on the first story, including a music room for recitals and home performances, suggests that he and Mrs. Griffith were expecting to entertain and dispense hospitality on a generous scale. But they were never to occupy the house. Eastover, Rowan County's second country house, was erected to plans drawn in 1934 by Louis H. Asbury for Hearne Swink (see Hood, 220-21). The Manorial-style brick house, with a half-timber gable and other decorative flourishes, was built on generous wooded grounds on the west side of US 29 and north of China Grove. Mr. Swink (1900-1975) was an executive with Cannon Mills. (NHR nomination section 8, p.21-28, Dayd Foard Hood, 2008)

5. The Rowan Historic Landmark Commission would like to designate the main house and surrounding 30 acres to be in alignment with the National Historic Register designation of the property. (NHR designation # 9000703)

1. Digital photography attached / NHR documents at the NC office of Historic Preservation.

2. Floor plan sketch documentation at NC office of Historic Preservation

3. Site plan documentation at NC office of Historic Preservation

4. Plat/Tax map attached

5. Local board does not require additional information

VI. Bibliography

National Register of Historic Places Nomination Application, # 900703, 2009.

(All footnotes are referenced in the National Register nomination)

