

## **BUILDINGS OF OLIVER NESTUS FREEMAN**

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### **PRESERVATION OF WILSON, VISIONING COMMITTEE**

Note: I have followed the order in the Stone Houses inventory found on the Preservation of Wilson website, adding additional buildings and structures at the end of the list.

#### **1. 1115 EAST NASH STREET**

Dr. Joseph Cowan House, 1930

Dr. Cowan was recruited from South Carolina to serve as house physician at Mercy Hospital. He also maintained a private practice in the black business district at 559 East Nash Street (near Jackson Chapel). Cowan was educated at Shaw College in Raleigh. The Cowan House was originally a much more dramatic-looking one-story house with a flat roof surmounted by stone posts. A stone garage stood behind the house. Today the house is a story-and-a-half bungalow with a roof gable facing the street, a shed dormer and half-timber decoration in the porch gable. The original part of the house is stone veneered. A distinctive feature is the turret-form entry porch with pointed-arch openings on three sides. A small terrace on the south side of the turret has broken-tile flooring. A brick garden planter and stone gate posts appear to be original landscape features. Deed: 194:48. August 6, 1930. Oliver Nestus Freeman and Willie Mae Freeman to Dr. Joseph Cowan and wife Annie Mae.

#### **2. 1007 NASH STREET**

E. F. Nadal House, 1916-18

Builder B. J. Boyles (West Wilson National Register nomination) OR C. C. Rackley (Preservation of Wilson website); stonework by Oliver Nestus Freeman

This elegantly rustic California-style bungalow features rough stonework and dark-stained stick work in the gables, porches and porte-cochere. Nestus Freeman was responsible for the masonry elements, including porch and carport plinths, chimneys, and perimeter posts. He also built a fish pond in the back yard, which survives. On April 27, 2018, Sargent Russell removed the front-room mantel shelf. Written on the concrete behind it in bold script is: "L. V. Freeman, Norfolk V. A." We think that this refers to the tile work around the fireplace. On the underside of the shelf was written: "March 30, 1918 [illegible initials] Johnston [illegible writing]." Although we know of no Freeman relatives with the initials "L. V.," Nestus Freeman's oldest brother

was Lovette Freeman. He worked as a blacksmith in Rocky Mount after his Tuskegee Institute education.

**3. 114 NORTH ROUNTREE STREET**

W. T. Barkley House (Lawshe-Barkley House), 1917-20

This robust Western-style bungalow is distinguished by its massive stone porch pillars and hefty stickwork accenting its flared Oriental gables. (See page 6 below for description of the next-door Allie Fleming House.)

**4. 115 NORTH CHURCH STREET, EUREKA, Eureka NC**

(Note: The address on the house is 115, not 114 North Church Street)

Yelverton House, ca. 1918 - 1919

This large, story-and-a-half Western-style bungalow is nearly identical to the Smith-Bishop House at 1301 West Nash Street, built in 1918. Oliver Nestus Freeman was responsible for the stonework at 1301 West Nash Street, and presumably here as well. This stonework gives the house its strong presence, and includes massive porch piers, carport, posts at lot corners and driveway, and chimney. Urns (probably cast by Freeman) still top many of the stone piers, some have fallen off but are still present. On October 3, 2017, Gloria Freeman, Sargent and Ellen Russell visited this house and spoke with neighbor Al Yelverton, who told us the house was built for his grandparents, and now belongs to his brother Marshall.

**5. 1209 EAST NASH STREET**

William Wells House, c. 1927 (THIS HOUSE IS GONE)

Nustus Freeman built this story-and-a-half bungalow for automobile mechanic William Wells and wife Mazie H. The Wellses were living there in 1927, and they owned the Wells Garage next door. The house had a gable roof and engaged front porch. It appears to have been demolished when Ward Boulevard and Wainwright Street were reengineered.

**6. 1310 EAST NASH STREET**

James J. Joyner House, c. 1930

This story-and-a-half brick-veneer and clapboard bungalow has a large central dormer, battered porch posts and expressed exterior engaged chimney. The distinguishing feature is the great overhang on the main and porch roofs. Auto mechanic James Joyner and his wife Annie lived here in 1930; he had an auto repair shop on the same lot.

**7. 1300 EAST NASH STREET**

Oliver Nestus Freeman House, 1911

In May, 1911, Nestus Freeman purchased two lots on the old Plank Road (now Nash Street) in a subdivision being sold by the Singletary estate. There he built a one-story stone-faced house for his growing family. Ten years later he altered and enlarged the house to its present appearance. During Freeman's lifetime the lot was much larger than it is today (the reconfiguration of Wainwright and Nash streets took a considerable amount of the front yard). There was a stone fence and many concrete lawn ornaments, including a bird bath and planters. There was a fish pond in back, and sheds for the menagerie of animals (including five or six trained bears) Freeman kept. In 1971 Willie Mae Freeman left the house to her daughter Connie Freeman Banks who lived there until 1989 when her daughter and son-in-law Mary Frances and Robert Tate moved in with their two sons. The house is still in Freeman family ownership. [Deeds, Book 97, page 392.] Opposite the Freeman House, on the north side of Nash Street, stood the Brown Service Station, a business built and owned by Nestus Freeman. (It no longer stands.) This was a brick-veneer structure with a stepped gable. A shed-roof porch extended to the curb on narrow wood piers. The garage carport was a gable roof carried on sturdy square brick piers. Signs on the gable end advertised Texaco gasoline and motor oil, and carried the name "Brown Service Station." Here, in addition to servicing automobiles, Freeman sold bags of peanuts for people to feed to his bears.

**8. 1301 WEST NASH STREET**

Smith-Bishop House, 1918

One of several Western Stick-Style bungalows built for William E. Smith, developer of the West End subdivision, this house is said to have been inspired by the Yelverton House built in Eureka at around the same time. The broad porch gable and smaller porte-cochere gable are filled with decorative wood latticework. Nestus Freeman's massive stone piers, posts, and urn-topped lot-corner and driveway gateposts further distinguish this house. The chimneys, in an unusual detail, are made of rounded river stone. (See Goldsboro house on page 7.)

**9. 612 VANCE STREET**

Our Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1941

The Reverend F. L. Lineberger drew up the plans for this handsome small bellcote-form church building in the English country Gothic style. The pointed main gable is surmounted by a stone cross, while the narthex is a gable-roof enclosed porch. Nestus Freeman is responsible for the masonry.

The rock-faced random ashlar walls are gray Wake Forest granite. The message board in the front yard is original work, also by Nestus Freeman. This building is related to the parsonage and church office next door, and to the two nearby stone houses at 112 and 114 North Rountree Street.

#### **10. 204 VICK STREET**

Naomi Freeman House, c. 1928

Nustus Freeman built this house for his daughter Naomi. She sold it back to her parents in 1937, four years before she died. It was later owned by another Freeman daughter, Mary F. Ellis, who gave it to her daughter Denise. Locally unique, the rock-faced random-ashlar veneered house features a small dome-capped turret at the front entrance. An original low stone fence was recently removed.

#### **11. 1000 BLACK CREEK ROAD SOUTH (883 LINCOLN STREET SOUTH)**

This one-and-a-half-story house has a cross-gable roof with ridge parallel to Black Creek Road. Smooth-faced random ashlar sheaths the ground floor, under a clapboard gable field. A concrete bench on a small front terrace may be original Freeman work. There is a side porch on the Black Creek Road side of the house. There are no outbuildings.

#### **12. WORLD WAR I PYRAMID FLAGPOLE**

Ward Boulevard at Wilson County Fairgrounds, 1935

This multi-colored granite pyramid base is a memorial to the soldiers, sailors, marines and nurses from Wilson County who served during the First World War. It was commissioned by the Wilson Chapter, American War Mothers and dedicated on Memorial Day, 1935.

### **THE FOLLOWING BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES ARE NOT ON THE PRESERVATION OF WILSON INVENTORY**

#### **1119 EAST NASH STREET**

c. 1922

This one-story, L-shaped, pink-painted brick-veneer cottage has a half-hip roof and an arched porch entry. There is a rough-faced stone foundation, and the porch floor is studded with broken tile mosaic. There was an original garage, now gone.

### **NESTUS FREEMAN ROUND HOUSE**

1202 East Nash Street, 1945-1946

Freeman built this one-story, circular stone house with cone-shaped roof as an affordable rental for servicemen returning from World War II. It had three wedge-shaped rooms – living room, bedroom and kitchen. Freeman added a small bathroom addition later. The exterior walls appear to be stone, but they also include large chunks of concrete sidewalk, other aggregate, and even a full bag of solidified concrete. The studs on the inside wall are small peeled pine saplings. The house originally stood on its own lot to the rear of the Freeman home, at 1307 Freeman Street. The City of Wilson bought it from Freeman's family and moved it in 2001 to the intersection of Nash and Hines streets where it stands today. The site also contains a rough-stone outbuilding, also circular, with a cone-shaped roof. The outbuilding is roofed with rectangular scraps of tin – as the Round House itself may once have been. Ornaments around the house came from Freeman's yard; they include the larger of two concrete dinosaurs Freeman cast around 1954, a picnic table with semicircular bench, and a planter. During the renovation the partitions forming three rooms were removed so the building could be used as a museum. This is said to have been Freeman's favorite among the houses he built. On a picture postcard he wrote: "Picked up 100 tons of stone, broken cement, scrap tin and pine poles for studding. Constructed a round house of three rooms."

### **1301 EAST NASH STREET**

This California-style bungalow has rough-stone porch posts, rustic cobble chimneys, a stone-piered carport and stone gate posts flanking the front walk. It is clearly the work of Nestus Freeman.

### **OLIVER N. FREEMAN, JR. HOUSE**

209 Reid Street, c. 1947?

This simple one-story house has a gable roof with its ridge at right angles to Reid Street. It is on the other side of the block from the Vick Street house Oliver Nestus Freeman built for his daughter Naomi. This house belonged to Freeman's son O. N. Junior. The house is partially veneered in rough stone, as though Freeman did not quite complete the work.

### **GERVAAS L. & MITTIE WIGGINS PARKER HOUSE**

603 Herring Avenue, 1927-1928

This one-story rubble-stone-faced Mission-style house was built for Mittie W. Parker and her husband Gervaaas L. on land subdivided for development from the Hackney Wagon Company property at the intersection of Ward Boulevard and Herring Avenue. The house has a red pantile roof. There is an attached

stone-piered carport with pebblestone-aggregate driveway extending back to a stone garage at the rear of the lot. The brick gatepost where the driveway enters the lot features fancy herringbone-incised bricks. One of the most interesting of Freeman's stone houses, the Parker House bears a resemblance to the Dr. Joseph Cowan House (1115 East Nash Street, 1930) in its original flat-roofed form. Although no documentary evidence has been found to attribute this house to Nestus Freeman, the stylistic resemblance to his other work is remarkable. Further, Freeman's life and work constantly took him out Herring Avenue to the countryside east of Wilson. This was the route to Wilbanks, where Nestus and Willie Mae taught school for a few years, and to Nestus' father Julius's farm in Gardners Township. Nestus Freeman himself owned a farm a short distance out Herring Avenue on land now occupied by the Firestone plant. Those familiar with Nestus Freeman's work believe that he built the Parker House.

### **ALLIE FLEMING HOUSE**

112 North Rountree Street, c. 1919

An English-cottage-style house, this one has smooth stucco surfaces, smooth-looking but sturdy stonework, and its roof is not, but suggests, thatch. (See description of the next-door W. T. Barkley House on page 1.)

### **OLD WILSON COUNTRY CLUB (WILLOW SPRINGS COUNTRY CLUB)**

301 Ward Boulevard (e. side opp. Contentnea Creek spillway), 1915

Chartered on May 6, 1915, the Wilson Country Club was popular as the only golf course on the train route between Charleston, SC and Richmond, VA. It catered to members and tourists. A historic photograph of the clubhouse shows a large story-and-a-half bungalow-type building with roof extended to cover the porch, which is carried on four massive rough-stone piers. Ells to the side and rear exhibited similar stonework. The clubhouse has been altered and sided so that much of the stonework is concealed. Additional Freeman work may include a rough stone bridge carrying the driveway into the parking lot, and a broken concrete structure beside the creek.

### **WILSON TRAIN STATION**

401 East Nash Street, 1924

Nustus Freeman laid the floor of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Passenger and Freight Depot in 1924. The architect was A. M. Griffin. The City of Wilson bought this station from CSX in 1994, and restored it between 1996 and 1998. The building is the Wilson Amtrak passenger depot.

## **WILSON COUNTY COURT HOUSE**

Nash Street, 1924

Oliver Nestus Freeman helped to lay the floors in the court house.

## **HOUSE IN GOLDSBORO**

Wayne Memorial Boulevard opposite Wayne Community College

This large and sophisticated bungalow features golden-brown riverstone posts marking the perimeter of the lot, many of which still carry urns on top. The house has other stone features that resemble Nestus Freeman's Wilson work.

## **ARTIFACTS**

There has been no survey of the stone walls, planters, pylons and other artifacts made by Oliver Nestus Freeman and located throughout and around the City of Wilson. The few listed here merely indicate that these items can still be found.

They include:

- Washington and Powell street corner: two planters and a pylon
- Park Avenue near Hines Street: a wall and a planter
- J. W. Woodard Monument, Tartt's Mill Road, east side. This four-foot tall gray stone pylon bears a white marble plaque inscribed: "J. W. Woodard/ RFD #4/ Box 33/ Wilson NC/ Nov. 12 1935." It marks the entrance to a quarter-mile driveway leading back to a well-known and long-lived African-American night club that opened just after Prohibition ended in 1933 (but not ratified in NC until 1937). The nightclub occupies a structure that was originally a house and later a pack barn. The club was once illegal, and is now a popular party venue. It has been known as "Woodard's Inn," "Tom's Place," and "The Barn." Performers have included James Brown, Little Richard and others. We do not know why Nestus Freeman built the pylon marking its entrance, but on a dark night the white marble would have helped people locate the entrance to the driveway.