



## The Frank Ramsay and Hulda McNinch House (1925)

*2401 Sharon Lane, Charlotte N.C.*



Frank Ramsay McNinch (1873-1950) and his wife, Hulda Groome McNinch (1894-1969), moved into their new Colonial Revival style home on Sharon Lane just outside Charlotte in early 1925.<sup>1</sup> Frank McNinch was a native Charlottean. He had returned to Charlotte from New York City the year before to resume a distinguished career as a lawyer, real estate developer, and civic activist.<sup>2</sup> He had worked in New York for the National Playground and Recreation Association. McNinch assumed that he would spend the rest of his life in Charlotte, the city he “loved more than anywhere else on earth.” That was not to be. He did resume the practice of law, mainly as a litigator. He also headed the company that developed Pharrsdale, a suburb on Biltmore Drive and Scotland Avenue between Providence Road and Eastover. But he would only reside continuously in Charlotte until 1931.

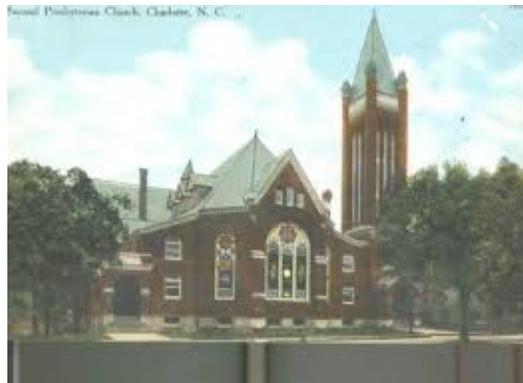
The business and political leaders of Charlotte held Frank McNinch in highest regard. He was a captivating public speaker. He was persistent, even dogged, in pursuing his objectives. McNinch did support the strictures of racial segregation; but within the context of his time he was consistently ethical. There is no known major blemish on his personal behavior. The *Charlotte News* praised McNinch when he announced that he would resign as Mayor of Charlotte in October 1920 to take a higher paying job with the National Park and Recreation Association. Mayor McNinch “has been alert and painstaking in visible efforts against all forms of immorality,” the newspaper declared.<sup>3</sup>



A Young Frank Ramsay McNinch

At the heart of Frank McNinch's world view were the teachings of the Presbyterian Church. Throughout his life he looked to Christian principles for guidance and understanding. McNinch was an active member of Second Presbyterian Church. In 1893, he was elected vice president of the young men's organization at Second Presbyterian. On November 25, 1894, the *Charlotte Observer* announced that McNinch would deliver a message on the "Tears of Jesus." "The people who reside in the city well know Mr. McNinch's native ability as a speaker and a good crowd should greet him" said the newspaper. In adulthood McNinch was a Sunday School instructor and teacher of Bible studies. He was also a strong backer of the Boy Scouts of America.

Believing that the veneer of civilization is fragile and dangerously thin, McNinch labored throughout his life to turn people away from what he regarded as a life of sin. To his way of thinking, community involvement, not self aggrandizement, should shape one's life. "Parasites are not confined to the insect kingdom" he proclaimed. "They are found in the human species. I see them everyday and so do you. We have some of them in this community. There is 'Mr. Busyman,' who is too busy with his own affairs to give a thought to what he owes to the community, and 'Mr. Idleman,' who has not the inclination for giving a part of time and energy to the community from which he draws his living." Mayor McNinch spoke to the benefits of community service in his address to the graduates of Queens College in May 1918. "If you will find your lives, you must lose them in unselfish service of humanity," he declared.



Second Presbyterian Church, Charlotte N.C.

Frank McNinch immersed himself in multiple public issues. As a member of the Mecklenburg County Board of Education in 1902, he championed the building of new and better school buildings. "You wouldn't send your child," he asked, "to a hovel, would you?" "It is very hard to make a community respect a school when the schoolhouse is not respectable even if you have the finest teacher in the world there." McNinch was compassionate. He advocated providing financial assistance to the needy. In January 1897 he was Secretary of the Charlotte Humane Society, which at that time responded to human financial distress. The *Charlotte Observer* reported that the Humane Society was "being deluged with orders for medicine

from poor people.” Frank McNinch’s concern for the impoverished endured. “Translate, through the alchemy of love, the glory of giving into gain,” he told the Charlotte Goodfellows Club in December 1927.

Frank McNinch devoted large amounts of time, both professionally and vocationally, to persuading local governments to increase the number of public parks and playgrounds. After his return to Charlotte in 1924, McNinch was asked to list the major issues the city should address. “The situation with regards to parks and playgrounds is one that requires immediate action,” he answered. When McNinch had his home constructed on Sharon Lane, the site was in the County. He soon became an outspoken champion for building parks and playgrounds in what he called the “ruralside.” In his mind, the ability of people to recreate out of doors improved their moral as well as their physical health. “We have been living on the physical and mental patrimony, the hale and hearty old pioneers who blazed the trails of civilization for us today,” he declared in 1927. “There will be a breaking down in the physical and mental vigor of this generation and the next unless we seek some medium through which to develop and exercise in God’s open air.”

The public issue of greatest importance to Frank McNinch was Prohibition. He believed that the production, sale and distribution of whiskey were utterly destructive and evil. As a leader of the Charlotte Chapter of the Anti-Saloon League, he worked tirelessly to ban liquor from Charlotte and the United States as a whole. McNinch gave many public speeches that described the deleterious effects of booze. On June 30, 1904, he addressed a large crowd at an “Anti-Saloon rally” at Third and McDowell Streets. On November 28, 1909, he talked to an assembly of church members in Concord, N.C. “Mr. Frank R. McNinch will leave today for Concord where tonight he will give an address on prohibition,” reported the *Charlotte Observer*. McNinch explained many years later that “it was chiefly for the protection of our homes and women and children that prohibition was enacted.” Whiskey was banned in Charlotte in 1904 and in all of North Carolina in 1908. The ratification of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1919 brought total victory to the Prohibitionists. The manufacture, sale, and distribution of alcoholic beverages became illegal everywhere in the United States and its territories.



Prohibition Advertisement



Frank Ramsay McNinch (1928)

The most frenetic period of McNinch's participation in the prohibition movement occurred while he and his wife lived in their fine new home on Sharon Lane. A staunch Democrat, Frank McNinch was alarmed when Alfred "Al" Smith (1873-1944), Governor of New York, became the nominee of the Democratic Party in the Presidential election of 1928. Herbert Hoover (1874-1964) was the Republican candidate. Although they were born in the same year, McNinch and Smith were polar opposites on the issue of Prohibition. In addition to being a Roman Catholic, Smith ran as an unapologetic "wet," meaning that he wanted to chip away at Prohibition and eventually nullify the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment. To McNinch such a move was totally unacceptable, even unthinkable. To end Prohibition, he insisted, would open the door to a new era of barbarous drunkenness and domestic abuse. McNinch called Smith the "arch enemy of prohibition, the apostle of the saloon." By attacking the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, said McNinch, Smith has "flung a particularly threatening challenge at the feet of American womanhood."

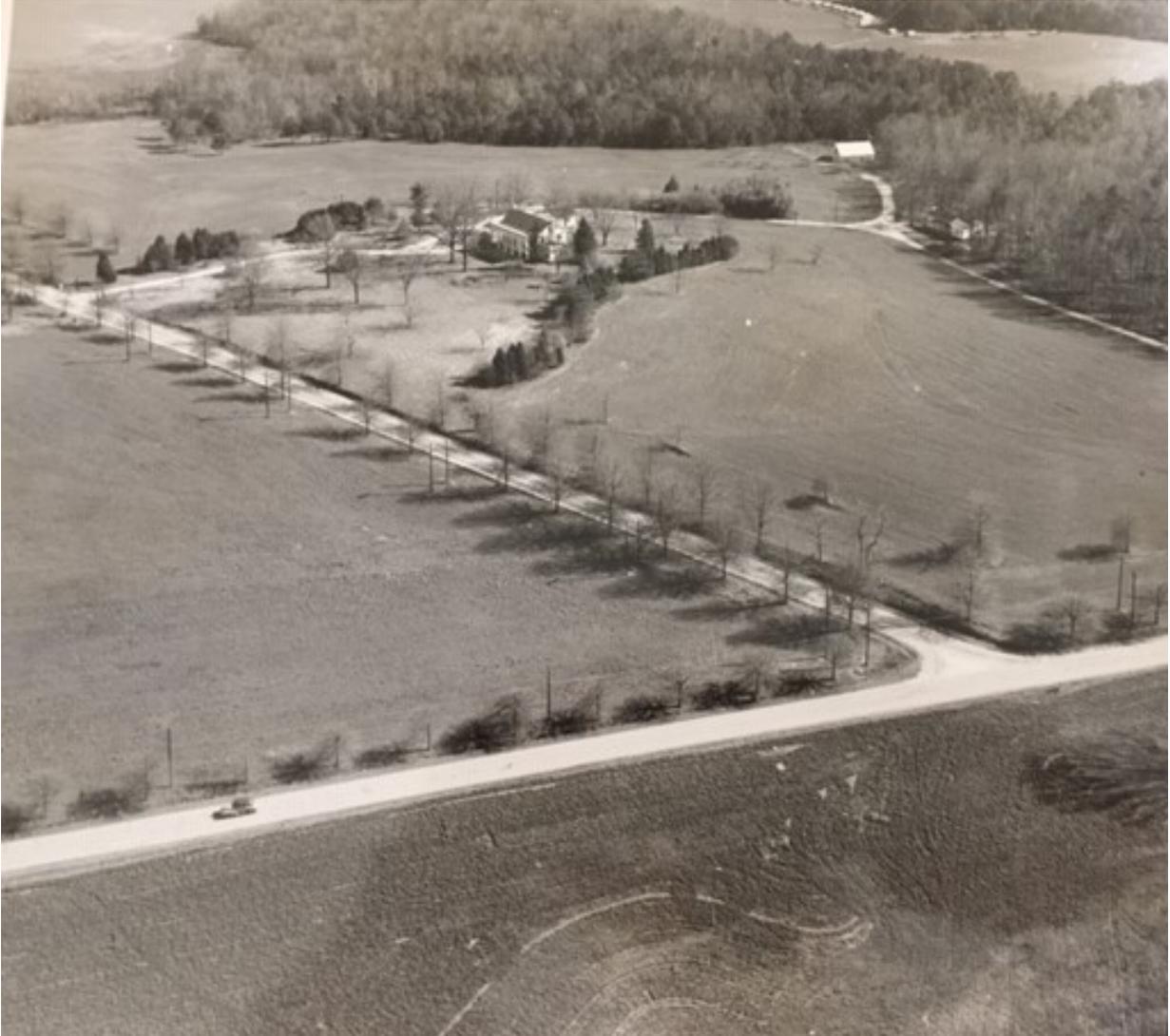
McNinch was so appalled by Smith's position on Prohibition that he took the unprecedented step of establishing and heading a "Democrats For Hoover" organization. From his home in Charlotte he traveled to communities from one end of North Carolina to the other, using all of his oratorical skills to castigate Smith and encourage Democrats to vote for Hoover. It was a raucous, hard-fisted campaign. The Executive Committee of the North Carolina Democratic Party accused McNinch of breaking the law by refusing to reveal his list of donors. At a rally in Rocky Mount, McNinch injected the issue of race into the campaign. He reported that a "Negro" who worked at Democratic headquarters in New York City had a White secretary. Hoover won the election; and Prohibition seemed safe, at least for now.

Frank McNinch benefited from his support for Herbert Hoover. President Hoover appointed McNinch to the Federal Power Commission in December 1930. The McNinches never maintained continuous residency in the house on Sharon Lane after their move to Washington, D.C. in 1931. They visited occasionally on weekends or during vacations. They also rented the house to tenants from time to time. Frank McNinch did remain active in public affairs. He held important appointed positions in the Federal government during Franklin Delano Roosevelt's (1882-1945) Presidency. Among them was the Chairmanship of the Federal Communications Commission. Frank Ramsay McNinch died in Washington, D.C. on April 20, 1950. Hulda Groome McNinch died March 25, 1969. Both are buried in Elmwood Cemetery in Charlotte.

The *Charlotte Observer* said the following about Frank Ramsay McNinch at the time of his death:

*Mr. McNinch was a man of exceptionally keen intellect, diligent, energetic and virile, a fluent and forceful speaker, a most attractive personality, and withal a man of high ideals.*

Enough said.



**Frank Ramsay and Hulda McNinch House With Farm (c. 1927)**

**The Road Running Parallel To The Bottom Of The Photograph Is Sharon Road. It Dates From The Early Years Of Mecklenburg County. It Derives Its Name From The Fact That It Led From Charlotte To Sharon Presbyterian Church. The Road Running Perpendicular To The Bottom Of The Photograph Is Sharon Lane. First Called New Sharon Road, It Dates From The 1920s. The White House On The Hill To The Right Of Sharon Lane Is The McNinch House. The McNinch House Pre-Dates All Other Houses In The Neighborhood. Its Original Setting Was Rural. Notice There Is Only One Automobile In The Photograph. It's Different Today.**



**Isabelle Wade Reynolds (1911-2007)  
Married To Morgan Ayers Reynolds,  
Isabelle And Her Daughter Lived In The  
House From 1943 Until 1959.**



**Daughter Rosalie Wade Reynolds (1939-  
Present) 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Picture. Rosalie Currently  
Resides In Charlotte.**

Frank and Hulda McNinch sold their Sharon Lane home and 25.03 acres of land to Isabelle Wade Reynolds (1911-2007) on December 29, 1943. She was the daughter of wealthy investor, realtor, and manufacturer Howard Madison Wade (1876-1961). Isabelle Reynolds, who divorced from her husband in 1952, sold off most of the land for homesites.<sup>4</sup> Approximately 3 acres remain with the Frank and Hulda McNinch House today. The property has had several owners in recent years, including Dr. William J. Wortman, Jr., Peter Ridder, publisher of the *Charlotte Observer*, and the current owner, Caldwell Rose, who purchased the Frank Ramsay and Hulda McNinch House in 2006.

The Colonial Revival style Frank Ramsay and Hulda McNinch House is the oldest residence in the neighborhood. The home was the centerpiece of a farm of more than 25 acres when it was erected in 1924-1925. Its original setting was essentially rural. Sharon Lane was unpaved. There is no architect of record for the house. Frank McNinch hired Thies-Smith Realty Company to oversee the design and construction of the residence. Colonial Revivalism reached its ascendancy in the United States between 1910 and 1930. Approximately 40 percent of American homes built during those years exhibited the characteristics of that design motif.



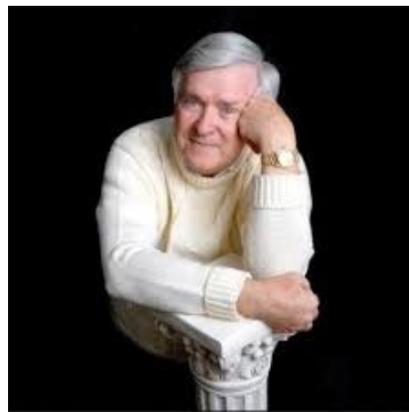
**Dining Room Of Frank Ramsay And Hulda McNinch House**

Colonial Revivalism took its inspiration from a veneration of the early American past. The Frank Ramsay and Hulda McNinch House is a two-story, wooden structure, painted white. The plan of the McNinch House is strictly rectangular, and the front façade is symmetrical. Especially evocative were Colonial Revival style homes that in terms of setting, massing, and design emulated Mount Vernon, George Washington's plantation house on the Potomac River. A full-façade front porch on the McNinch House with six Tuscan style square piers supporting a flat roof with a Chippendale-style balustrade is suggestive of Mt. Vernon, especially when combined with the original sylvan setting of the residence. A side-gable roof surmounts the house, which has brick end chimneys. The principal windows are twelve-over-twelve and eight-over-eight double-hung sash with simple moulded surrounds. Modifications of the interior of the Frank Ramsay and Hulda McNinch House have occurred, but the essential arrangement of the center hall plan survives. Original flat and raised-panel doors, French doors, and oak doors remain. Original mantels survive in the living room and the dining room. A half-turn stairway rises in two flights from the stair hall to the second story.



**Stair Hall And Stairway Of The Frank Ramsay And Hulda McNinch House**

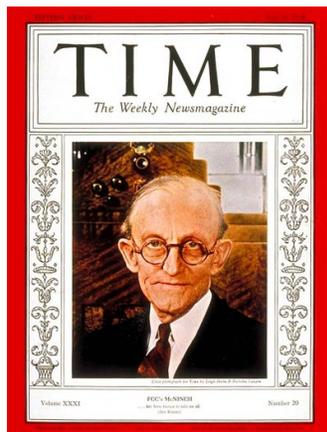
**The future of the Frank Ramsay and Hulda McNinch House is uncertain. The present owner has decided to sell the property and is working with Preserve Mecklenburg, a private, non-profit, preservation agency, to obtain from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission approval for a new site plan. The new site plan will call for the construction of eight infill houses on the property. The owner will allow Preserve Mecklenburg to place a preservation easement on the McNinch House that will assure its preservation in perpetuity.**



**Dr. William J. Wortman, Jr. (1934-2020) He Moved Into The McNinch House In 1975. Dr. Wortman Was A Man Of Many Talents. A Surgeon And OB GYN Specialist, He Also Was An Avid Traveler, Poet, Wine Connoisseur, And Chef. He Hosted Elegant Dinner Parties.**



**Proposed Infill Plan For Frank Ramsay And Hulda McNinch House**



**Frank McNinch Appeared On The Cover Of The Time Magazine Issue Of December 29, 1930 When He Was Named To The Federal Power Commission. He Was Called A "Hoovercrat."**



**View From Dining Room Through Stair Hall To Living Room**



**The Frank Ramsay And Hulda McNinch House (1925)**

**Dr. Dan L. Morrill  
March 20, 2020**



1 The *Charlotte Observer* of July 11, 1924, reported: "Mr. McNinch will build a home on his farm beyond Myers Park on the new Sharon Road. Ernest Moore place, he said, and expects the home to be ready for occupancy about the first of the new year."

2 McNinch was an alumnus of the University of North Carolina. He was licensed to practice law in 1899.

3 Frank McNinch was the Mayor of Charlotte from May 1917 until October 1920. These were tumultuous years, internationally and locally. In April 1917, the United States entered World War One. Mayor McNinch joined other local businessmen in persuading the U. S. Army to select Charlotte as the location of a major training base. It was named Camp Greene in honor of Nathanael Greene, an American Revolutionary War General. Unknowingly prescient, McNinch made the following comment when he learned that Charlotte, a town of less than 40,000 residents, was about to be the "host city" for approximately 29,000 military trainees. "It is a great thing for Charlotte, as I view it, that we have secured this great military camp for Charlotte," McNinch said. "Also," he continued, "the coming of Camp Greene will create for the city officials new problems which we must meet in the most satisfactory way."

An unforeseen consequence of thousands of young men, mostly from Massachusetts, arriving in Charlotte by rail in the second half of 1917 was the outbreak of infectious diseases. On January 25, 1918, Mayor McNinch summoned local public health officials, including representatives from Camp Greene, to his office to consider how the City should respond to the growing number of people in Charlotte who were inflicted with spinal meningitis. Knowing that bacterial spinal meningitis is commonly spread by people coughing or sneezing, McNinch supported the implementation of a stringent and comprehensive quarantine. The other attendees agreed. Mayor McNinch issued a proclamation closing all but essential gathering places, including schools, churches, and restaurants, for two weeks and ordered all troops at Camp Greene to stay on base except those having to travel on official business. "I realize that this action is drastic and I regret the necessity for it," McNinch declared. "But the time to act has come and half-way measures would not meet the exigency." On February 6<sup>th</sup> Mayor McNinch announced that the quarantine was being extended an additional week due to the "estimated presence of from 1,200 to 1,500 carriers of cerebro spinal meningitis in Charlotte." The quarantine was lifted on February 22<sup>nd</sup> after public places and the buildings at Camp Greene had been "fumigated."

The Spanish Influenza pandemic reached Charlotte during the first week of October 1918. Mayor McNinch responded by placing Charlotte under quarantine again. All public gatherings were banned. By October 8<sup>th</sup> nurses and physicians were overwhelmed by the volume of calls for assistance. Charlotte architect Charles Christian Hook informed McNinch that the Red Cross would provide volunteers to help with caring for the sick. Susie Harwood VanLandingham, the wife of Ralph VanLandingham, oversaw this initiative. On October 19<sup>th</sup> the *Charlotte Observer* reported that health officials in Charlotte believed that the pandemic was "still a matter of grave concern." Mayor McNinch ended the quarantine on November 11, 1918. But the influenza onslaught continued. There were 590 influenza deaths in Charlotte by year's end. Hundreds were also dying at Camp Greene. Their coffins were stacked daily at the Southern Railroad Station on West Trade Street, waiting for trains to arrive to haul the corpses to grieving families throughout the country. These days were so tense that Frank McNinch on one occasion remained at his home on Hawthorne Lane to regain his energy. The Spanish influenza pandemic did not abate until the arrival of warm weather in April 1919.

Frank McNinch faced one more major challenge during his tenure as the Mayor of Charlotte. It was the most violent incident of civil unrest in Charlotte's history. On August 10, 1919, the streetcar motorman and conductors went on strike when James B. Duke's Southern Public Utilities Company refused to increase their pay and recognize their union. The *Charlotte Observer* predicted that the dispute would be settled in a "spirit of fairness and friendship." Such was not to be. When the company refused to agree to the workers' demands and threatened to hire and train replacement motormen and conductors if their employees stayed off the job, the strikers remained adamant. Mayor McNinch intervened. He held meetings with representatives of both sides in an attempt to resolve the dispute. "We feel that some progress has been made," he announced on August 14<sup>th</sup>, "but the parties are still far apart." McNinch appointed a citizens committee to work on trying to ease tensions. Meanwhile the Southern Public Utility Company carried through with its threat to hire new crews to operate the streetcars. Trolley service resumed on August 25<sup>th</sup>.

A large crowd gathered at the Car barn on South Boulevard and hurled insults throughout the day at the replacement motormen and conductors. The trolley crews carried guns. In mid-afternoon a group of spectators began throwing stones at a passing streetcar. The crew opened fire, and the crowd dispersed. Tensions continued to mount, especially after dark. Gunfire erupted outside the Car barn about 3 a.m. on August 26<sup>th</sup> between the police and demonstrators. Four demonstrators were killed. Fourteen others were injured, some seriously.

4 The Reynolds family experienced great grief in January 1948, when Morgan Ayers Reynolds, Jr. (1942-1948) died in the home. The five-year-old child was buried in Elmwood Cemetery. Isabelle's second husband was Charles Bacon. She lived in New York City after 1959.