

INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY FORM FOR

Iredell County

MULTIPLE RESOURCE OR \_\_\_\_\_ THEMATIC NOMINATION

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC  
Cornelius House  
AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER  
NE cor. of jct. of SR 1378 & SR 1302  
CITY, TOWN  
STATE  
North Carolina  
VICINITY OF  
 Vicinity of Shepherds  
CODE  
COUNTY  
Iredell  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
CODE

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME  
Mr. Henry Cornelius  
STREET & NUMBER  
Route 4 (Cornelius Road)  
CITY, TOWN  
Mooresville  
VICINITY OF  
STATE  
North Carolina  
28115

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC  
STREET & NUMBER  
CITY, TOWN  
STATE

**6 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE  
Laura A. W. Phillips (Winston-Salem)  
ORGANIZATION  
Consultant for Survey and Planning Branch  
STREET & NUMBER  
Archives and History  
CITY OR TOWN  
Raleigh  
DATE  
February 4, 1980  
TELEPHONE  
(919) 733-6545  
STATE  
North Carolina

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The early nineteenth century Cornelius House is situated in a grove of trees on a knoll above Lake Norman (formerly Cornelius Creek).

The Cornelius House exemplifies the Federal tripartite house type, which is rare for the Piedmont area of North Carolina and unique in Iredell County. A "T"-shaped frame building with a two-story center section and one-story wings on either side, the house has a field-stone foundation and a Flemish bond single shoulder chimney at each extremity. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century one-story Victorian additions (rooms and porches) have occurred, filling out the ground plan to a square. According to present owner Henry Cornelius, there was once a porte-cochere on the front of the house large enough for buggies to drive underneath. Stored on the property are two 8" square posts with large corner beads which may originally have been part of the porte-cochere. Also in storage are shutters with unusually wide louvers which were earlier removed from the house.

The Cornelius House is relatively simple in detail despite its formal plan. Interior detailing is applied consistently throughout the original part of the house and is remarkably intact. Mantels are transitional Georgian/Federal in style with a molded fireplace surround, a plain frieze flanked by a Doric pilaster corner treatment, and a heavily molded cornice and shelf which is blocked outward at the pilastered corners. Doors of six flat panels and 9/9 sash windows predominate. Both doors and windows have casings with molded back bands. Those of the windows extend to the floor creating panels or aprons in the simple wainscot below the windows. Interior walls and ceilings are flush sheathed, and molded chair rails and baseboards encircle the rooms. The open string stair, with simple balustrade and slender turned newel, has exaggerated brackets in the shape of cresting waves.

The Cornelius House is immediately surrounded by trees. Various twentieth century farm buildings, including a large frame and cinderblock dairy barn, are located on the property not far from the house, mostly on the south and east sides (the house faces north). The only outbuilding of interest is a two-story frame building, possibly a granary, with gable roof which overhangs the front wall. It appears to date from the second half of the nineteenth century. Near this structure are the overgrown remains of a stone and brick chimney which apparently was part of another early structure on the property.

The Cornelius House is now vacant and is becoming dilapidated. Nevertheless, the house and its details are remarkably intact and are well worth a concerted preservation effort.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

\_\_\_\_\_ NATIONAL

\_\_\_\_\_ STATE

X

LOCAL

## PERIOD

## AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

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### SPECIFIC DATES

ca. 1820 - 1830

### BUILDER/ARCHITECT

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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Cornelius House, probably built ca. 1820 to 1830, is a rare example in western North Carolina of the academic Palladian tripartite plan, with a two-story central block and flanking one-story wings, which was popular in Virginia in the eighteenth century and spread throughout the South in the nineteenth century. Although the beauty of the exterior massing has been somewhat compromised by late Victorian additions within each rear neck of the T-shaped plan, the original interior of Federal design is well preserved.

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### CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

- C. The Cornelius House embodies the distinctive characteristics of the tripartite plan, here interpreted with Federal style detailing typical of Piedmont North Carolina houses built during the 1820s and 1830s.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Unique in Iredell County, the Cornelius House is a rare example in piedmont North Carolina of the academic tripartite plan, which was popular in Virginia in the eighteenth century and spread throughout the South in the early nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The Federal architectural detailing found throughout the dwelling suggests it was built in the first decades of the 1800s; yet the first recorded ownership of the property upon which the dwelling stands does not appear in the surviving documentary records until the late 1840s.<sup>2</sup> Thus either an unrecorded deed or will prevents a certain knowledge of the builder of this plantation house. On 15 March 1843 Joseph F. Gillespie of Mecklenburg County, a rather wealthy planter of some pretensions, married widow Terisa P. Sloan of Rowan County; and although both parties owned extensive tracts of land in their respective counties, neither apparently owned land at this time in south Iredell.<sup>3</sup> Soon afterward, however, the newly married couple and their family settled into the Cornelius House, which was then the manor house for a plantation of some 1,000 acres. Exactly how, when, and from whom Joseph F. Gillespie acquired this land could not be determined, but it seems safe to surmise that the Cornelius House was already standing when he did; it is very unlikely that a wealthy planter like Gillespie would have constructed such a retardative dwelling in the late 1840s.<sup>4</sup>

Joseph F. Gillespie was born in 1800, probably in the upper end of Mecklenburg County just south of the Iredell boundary. His parentage has remained obscure, although he seems to have come from a rather well-to-do family.<sup>5</sup> As a young man he established a sizable plantation along Rocky River in northern Mecklenburg near the Charlotte to Statesville Road, and he apparently prospered during the early antebellum years; the 1840 census recorded him as the master of twenty-four slaves.<sup>6</sup> After the death of his first wife (whose name has also remained unknown) and marriage to Terisa P. Sloan, Gillespie sold his Mecklenburg plantation, rented out the new Mrs. Gillespie's Rowan lands, and settled his new family across the boundary in south Iredell.<sup>7</sup>

The 1850 census recorded Joseph F. Gillespie, wife Terisa, and eight family members (three children from Joseph's first marriage, four from Terisa's previous union, and an infant of their own) along with overseer W. W. Neil as living under the roof of the Cornelius House. Worked by twenty slaves, the plantation's 1,000 acres, 150 of which were improved, produced large quantities of cotton and corn and supported a good number of livestock.<sup>8</sup> Following the death of Joseph F. Gillespie intestate in 1856, the plantation was divided among his large family by the court; widow Terisa received the dwelling house and some 288 acres as her dower. Mrs. Gillespie and her young son James continued to farm the plantation on a much smaller scale until after the Civil War, when Mrs. Gillespie returned to her Rowan County property and lease the Cornelius House and dower tract to the family of James A. Ramsey.<sup>11</sup> Various members of Ramsey's family and Ramsey kinsmen farmed the tract throughout the 1870s, and the multitudinous

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Charlotte Journal, The (Statesville) Landmark, and Statesville Sentinel (newspapers), microfilm copy, State Archives.

Cornelius, Bert, author's interview with. Mooresville, 12 March 1980.

Federal Census Records, 1790-1900, microfilm copy, State Archives.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 33 acres

### UTM REFERENCES

A	[1,7]	[5 1,1 8,9,0]	[3,9 4,2 3,6,0]	B	[1,7]	[5 1,1 6,0,0]	[3,9 4,2 3,6,0]
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	[1,7]	[5 1,1 6,0,0]	[3,9 4,2 9,7,5]	D	[1,7]	[5 1,1 8,9,0]	[3,9 4,2 9,7,5]

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION That part of Tract 11 lying east of SR 1378 and north of

SR 1302, in Block A, Map 2R, Davidson Township, as outlined in red on map.

The property being nominated includes the house and the surrounding 33 acres, which is all of the tract that remains uninterrupted by roads. This acreage is necessary to help preserve the rural quality of the property in the face of encroaching lakefront development.

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places  
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date entered
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Historical Background (Cont'd)

Ramseys<sup>12</sup> acquired other portions of the original plantation from the Gillespie heirs as well.

After the death of Mrs. Terisa Sloan Gillespie in 1884, title to the dower tract descended to the six remaining Gillespie heirs, who each proceeded to sell their 1/6 interests to various parties including the families Ramsey, Cornelius, Patterson, and Cowles, among others. Further complicating the title was the fact that the Ramsey interests were encumbered by heavy mortgages, and upon their default various creditors joined the claim for Gillespie plantation lands. As one might expect, a messy litigation ensued, and the actual property title was contested in court from 1884 to 1896.<sup>14</sup> In April of that year, Clarence H. Cornelius finally secured a clear title to the dwelling by purchasing it and the surrounding 100 acres at a sheriff's sale for \$704.<sup>15</sup>

The association of the Cornelius family with the house that now bears their name, however, dates back some thirteen years before the above sale, when Albertus Cornelius (Clarence's father) purchased a 1/2 interest in the Gillespie lands for \$3,000.<sup>16</sup> The next year (1884) he secured an interest in the dwelling itself from the Ramseys, and the Cornelius family apparently possessed the house during the twelve years of litigation from 1884 to 1896.<sup>17</sup> A 1884 court deposition stated that Albertus Cornelius had made "valuable improvements to the dwelling," undoubtedly the late Victorian additions within each rear neck of the original T-shaped plan which today fill out the ground plan to a square.<sup>18</sup> A fairly well-to-do south Iredell farmer, Albertus Cornelius (1838-1891), whose plantation and homestead lay just south of the Gillespie land, apparently purchased "the old Ramsey place" for members of his large and expanding family and son Clarence H. (1868-1920) eventually secured ownership to the property as discussed (his descendants own the structure today).<sup>19</sup> The family of Clarence H. Cornelius operated the plantation as a dairy farm well into the twentieth century, and various nineteenth and twentieth century farm buildings now surround the dwelling, including a late nineteenth century two-story granary. Remnants of a stone and brick chimney which apparently was part of another early structure on the property are located near the granary. The Cornelius House itself is now vacant and rapidly deteriorating, and it is hoped that a concerted preservation effort may save this unique Iredell property.

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Bibliographical References (Cont'd)

Iredell, Mecklenburg, and Rowan County Records: Deeds, Estates Papers, Court Minutes, Wills, etc. State Archives.

Keever, Homer M. Iredell-Piedmont County. Statesville: Iredell County Bicentennial Commission, 1976.

Ramsey, Robert W. Carolina Cradle: Settlement of the Northwest Carolina Frontier, 1747-1762. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964.

Survey and Planning Branch Files, Cornelius House folder (notes compiled by Ruth Little-Stokes and Laura A. W. Phillips), Lewis-Smith House, Raleigh.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Notes compiled by Ruth Little-Stokes and Laura A. W. Phillips, Cornelius House folder, Survey and Planning Branch files, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as Survey and Planning Branch files.

<sup>2</sup>Iredell County Estates Papers, Joseph F. Gillespie folder, State Archives, hereinafter cited as Iredell County Estates Papers.

<sup>3</sup>Charlotte Journal, March 30, 1843. Terisa P. Sloan was the widow of Henry Sloan (d. 1839), who owned considerable property in the Mooresville region of Rowan County (Rowan County Estates Papers, Henry Sloan folder).

<sup>4</sup>An extensive search of the deeds, wills, and estates papers of Rowan, Mecklenburg, and Iredell counties failed to produce any record of Joseph F. Gillespie's acquisition of the land in question.

<sup>5</sup>The multitudinous Gillespie family settled throughout the Rowan-Iredell-Mecklenburg area during the 1750s. They apparently originated from Maryland. See Robert W. Ramsey, Carolina Cradle: Settlement of the Northwest Carolina Frontier, 1747-1762 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 40-42.

<sup>6</sup>Mecklenburg County Deeds, Book 21, p. 24; Book 23, p. 451, microfilm copy, State Archives; hereinafter cited as Mecklenburg County Deeds; Fifth Census 1840: Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, 281, microfilm copy, State Archives, hereinafter cited as Fifth Census, 1840, with appropriate schedules and page numbers.

<sup>7</sup>Mecklenburg County Deeds, Book 23, p. 259, 387; Book 25, p. 396; Book 1, p. 83; Iredell County Estates Papers, Joseph F. Gillespie folder.

<sup>8</sup>Sixth Census, 1850: Iredell County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, 208.

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Footnotes (Cont'd)

<sup>9</sup>Sixth Census, 1850: Iredell County, North Carolina, Slave Schedule, 344; Agricultural Schedule, 17. In 1850 the Gillespie plantation produced 175 bushels of wheat; 1,300 bushels of corn; 100 bushels of oats; various other produce; and 25 bales of ginned cotton weighing 400 lbs. each. Livestock included 9 horses, 2 asses, 15 milk cows, 15 cattle, 20 sheep, and 75 swine, valued collectively at \$800. Total cash value of the farm was assessed at \$4,600.

<sup>10</sup>Iredell County Estates Papers, Joseph F. Gillespie folder; Iredell County Deeds, Book 1, p. 377.

<sup>11</sup>Seventh Census, 1860: Iredell County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, 32; Slave Schedule, 537; Agricultural Schedule, 17; Eighth Census, 1870: Iredell County, North Carolina Population Schedule, Davidson Township.

<sup>12</sup>Iredell County Deeds, Book 4, p. 754; Book 6, p. 743.

<sup>13</sup>Iredell County Estates Papers, Joseph F. Gillespie folder; Albertus Cornelius folder; Iredell County Deeds, Book 4, p. 754; Book 6, p. 743; Book 11, p. 70; Book 13, p. 575; Book 17 p. 20.

<sup>14</sup>Iredell County Deeds, Book 21, p. 323; Iredell County Estates Papers, Joseph F. Gillespie folder; Albertus Cornelius folder.

<sup>15</sup>Iredell County Deeds, Book 21, p. 323; Iredell County Estates Papers, Joseph F. Gillespie folder; Albertus Cornelius folder.

<sup>16</sup>Iredell County Deeds, Book 11, p. 70.

<sup>17</sup>Iredell County Deeds, Book 17, p. 20; Iredell County Estates Papers, Albertus Cornelius folder; Joseph F. Gillespie folder.

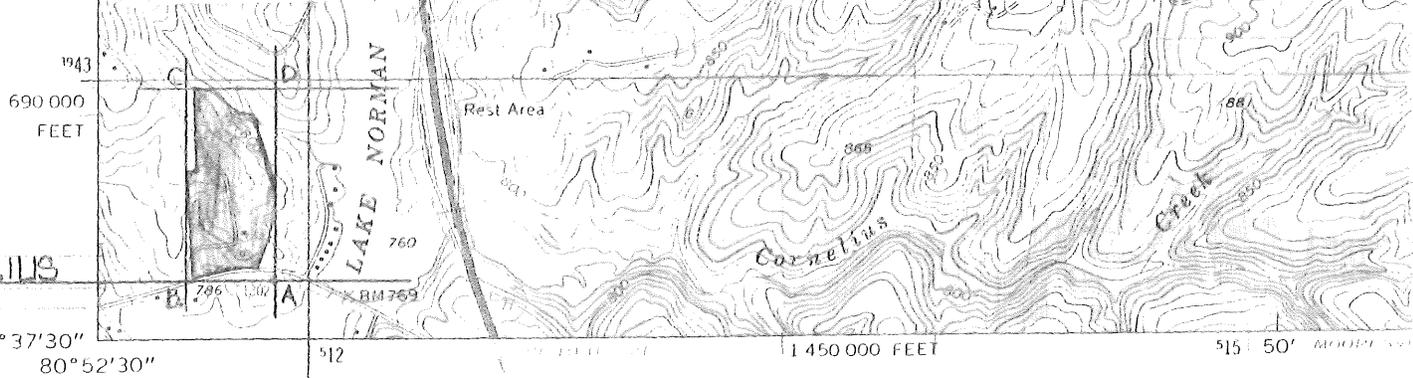
<sup>18</sup>Iredell County Estates Papers, Joseph F. Gillespie folder; Albertus Cornelius folder.

<sup>19</sup>Author's interview with Bert Cornelius, Mooresville, 12 March 1980 (notes in Cornelius folder).



Cornelius House  
 NE cor. jct. SR1378 & SR 1302, Shepherds vic  
 Iredell Co., Shepherds Quad  
 Scale 1:24000, 33 acres  
 UTM Reference: Zone 17  
 A Easting 511890 Northing 3942360  
 B 511600 3942360  
 C 511600 3942975  
 D 511890 3942975

TD16



#27  
CORNELIUS  
HOUSE

4255 III SW  
(LAKE NORMAN  
NORTH)

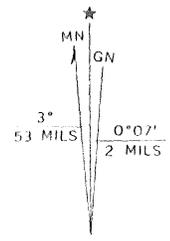
Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

Control by USGS and USC&GS

Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs  
taken 1965. Field checked 1969

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000 foot grid based on North Carolina coordinate system  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 17,  
shown in blue

Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where  
generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked



UTM GRID AND 1969 MAGNETIC NORTH  
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

