

Charlotte landmark on Sardis Road for sale

By Reid Creager

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For more than 80 years, a Tudor-style mansion on 6 1/2 acres has been a stately, solitary staple along Sardis Road that inspires awe and intrigue for hundreds of passersby each day. But that could be changing.

The property's owner for the past 22 years put it up for sale for \$3,499,900 on July 13, this time with a possible option (pending city approval) for the prospective buyer to divide the land into 10 lots and sell them for \$400,000 each. With \$4 million in pocket, the new owner could keep the house for free and make needed updates and renovations.

So the 7,000-square-foot behemoth with five bedrooms and 4 1/2 bathrooms could remain the sole home on the property, become the showpiece in a subdivision plan that's been drawn but not approved, or even be torn down.

Meanwhile, with its contents all but emptied, a steady trickle of visitors are getting a glimpse of a bygone era.

Family ties

"You'll see houses that pop up every once in awhile that kind of look like this one, but it's a one-of-a-kind deal," says Charles Senn, son-in-law of owner E.H. Blanton, who made his fortune locally in office machines, computers and real estate. "Anyone who's lived in Charlotte for their whole life, there are houses that stand out in your mind.

"Everyone knows the house on Sardis Road. At the yard sales we've had lately, people say, 'I'll bring \$20 to buy anything in the house. I don't care what it is. I just want to see it.'"

Adds Gene Poore of Builders Realty, the broker in

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charge: “It has had a lot of interest by some people who have very deep pockets because it has some very unique features that you just don’t find in houses anymore. And the luxury houses are coming back pretty strong.”

For years, Charlotteans curious about what’s behind the stone façade could only imagine some of the grandeur and old-style elegance inside, with rich stories to match. If only those mahogany and travertine walls could talk, they would regale visitors with tales from three prominent Charlotte families.

Senn’s close relationship with his father-in-law, 92, has helped him piece together some details about the house’s previous owners and other little-known history:

The house was built in 1932 by the Akers Trucking Co. family, at a cost of about \$85,000. It was designed by renowned Charlotte architect Louis Asbury, who also designed the Mecklenburg County Courthouse and Myers Park United Methodist Church (and whose first job was as a paperboy for the Charlotte Observer, according to the website Building My Charlotte).

“It’s an exact replica of a Tudor in Scotland,” Senn says. “They sent an architect there, and he did drawings and duplicated it.”

Senn says the Goode family (of Goode Development Corp.) lived in the house the longest, though the timeframe is unknown. They sold to the Blantons in 1991.

The passing of E.H. Blanton’s wife, Mary, two years ago led to his putting the house up for sale. He says he was friends with the late Charlotte civic leaders and megaphilanthropists Mason and Nancy Akers Wallace, who urged him not to have the property developed. The Wallaces were married in the house in 1946.

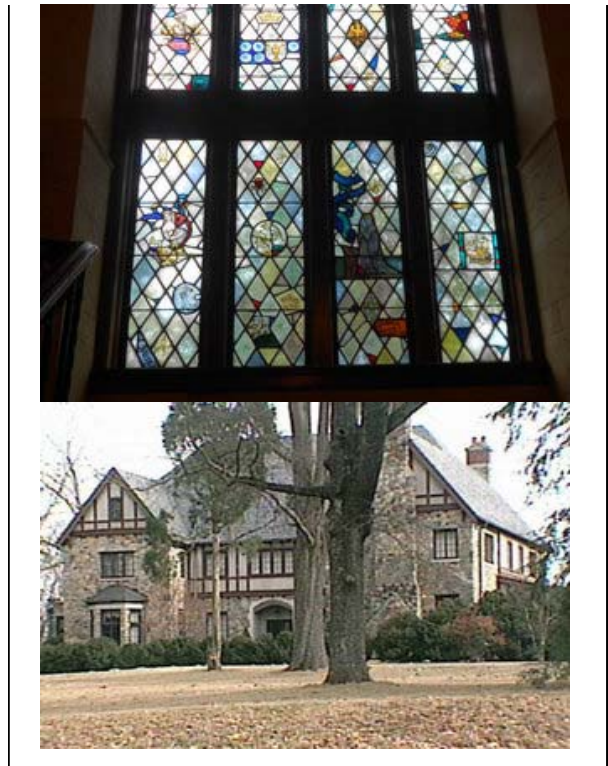
Blanton says he’d love to see the house basically stay as is. But when asked about his feelings on giving up the home, he said he didn’t care and that he’s just ready to sell.

Local, world history

The house’s fourth owner will be able to tell interesting stories about many of its architectural origins.

According to Senn, the stone on the house’s façade was quarried from the nearby Stonehaven neighborhood.

“There’s still a hole over there the size of a city block,” he says. “They brought the stone up on mule carts from the quarry.



“Marble from the travertine walls (on the ground floor) was from the same place they quarried the stone from the Sistine Chapel. Marble from the floor in the living room came from Italy.”

Stained glass windows adorned with detailed religious figures hover above a grand staircase that greets visitors at the front door. The name Emil Frei appears in small writing at the bottom of the windows. The Frei studio in St. Louis, which has been making stained glass for churches since 1898, long ago became known for some of the highest quality Munich pictorial stained glass windows in the world.

A grand dining room lined with mahogany walls is topped by an inlaid plaster ceiling that’s rife with intricate patterns.

“The (Akers) family brought an artist in to do it,” Senn says. “It’s all hand done. This was during the Depression. You could get help cheaply, artisans who were the best at what they did.”

The house even has its period curiosities.

Behind Blanton’s desk in his office just off the main staircase is a trap door.

“It takes you into the basement so you can exit out the back door,” Senn says. “I don’t know why someone put it there.”

A helicopter pad?

Although the house needs some significant TLC – including landscaping and many interior updates, especially in the smallish kitchen – Senn and Builders Realty’s Poore are confident this doesn’t pose a hurdle for wealthy suitors. Poore adds that the land is spacious enough to accommodate a helicopter pad “for the busy CEO or pro sports player to land their personal helicopter right at their back door.”

Although the house “is not in its heyday right now,” Senn says, “whoever gets it, I hope they don’t knock it down. The house is structurally incredible. There were people in here in their 90s the other day who knew the Goode family who said, ‘Please, please, don’t knock this down.’”

Senn and Poore can visualize it being a linchpin for a small subdivision, a particularly tempting concept given the scarcity of land for residential development in south Charlotte. The property is zoned R3, or multi-family residential.

“I’ve talked with people, and I don’t think there would be a problem with the plan being approved,” Senn says. “There’s a road in the back of it already that comes up and dead-ends into the yard. Everything’s there already.”

But the mansion remains the main draw on this vast, serene canvas.

“It’s not far out of town and is almost like a Hollywood house, one of the last of its kind and size that you can actually see from the road,” Poore says. “It was really a trend-setter for its day.”

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