

6h

Uptown is a compact African-American neighborhood in Hertford, North Carolina bordering the westside of the commercial district. Few people use the term Uptown nowadays, but older folks who remember the town of fifty-plus years ago know the Uptown neighborhood. It was walkable, close to worksites such as the mills on the Perquimans River.

Present-day Uptown has a neglected feel. Many houses have been abandoned and fallen into disrepair. Some have boarded-up windows and “Do Not Enter” signs posted. Too many are considered non-contributing to this once-vibrant historic district for all of the Uptown area to be considered for historic district status. Thus this application identifies a segment of the Uptown community for this Study List Application hereinafter referred to as “Uptown West.”

Edenton Road Street, a busy thoroughfare, marks one edge of Uptown West. East Railroad Avenue, not surprisingly situated parallel to the railroad tracks, marks the opposite edge. Roadside Cemetery is at one end of East Railroad Avenue and extends down to Edenton Road Street. The cemetery was developed around 1887 for burial of Black citizens. More than a few Uptown residents of the early twentieth century are buried there. Market Street is the fourth boundary.

East Railroad Avenue actually runs north and south. Across the tracks is West Railroad Avenue. This unusual naming convention is found elsewhere in Hertford. For example, East Academy Street and West Academy Street are one-block-long streets that parallel each other, originally on opposite sides of a school. These streets are north-south streets.

Between Edenton Road Street and East Railroad Avenue is a one-block-long street, Cox Avenue. Also in Uptown West are sections of King Street, Dobbs Street and Market Street. These three streets lead downtown, ending at Church Street, Hertford’s main commercial street.

Going in the opposite direction, King and Market end at the railroad tracks but Dobbs Street continues for several blocks further away from downtown, going all the way to the town limit.

Many current Uptown West residents are African-American. According to recent data (Perquimans County Tax Office property cards), of 67 properties in the target area, only twelve are owner-occupied (plus one locally owned church). Twenty-three owners live out of state. Some of these owners are related to Perquimans County residents or perhaps lived in Hertford themselves at one time. Seven houses are owned by folks living elsewhere in the neighborhood and seventeen are owned by people who live elsewhere in Perquimans County (ten) and further away in the state of North Carolina (seven). Having so few owners living in the houses has contributed to neglect in many cases.

Central to the Uptown West area is Cox Avenue, a one-block-long street with 10 houses. On the 1916 Sanborn map, the street is called Cox's Alley.

All Cox residents in the 1920 federal census were Negro, most born in North Carolina. Of the ten houses counted, eight were owned by the residents. Occupations of the men listed were laborers in the nearby lumber mill or on a farm. One young man was teaching in public school and another was driving an ice truck. Women were laundresses or servants in private homes, and one was a life insurance agent.

Cox was the center of a working-class Black neighborhood.

Most of the houses on Cox Avenue today are likely not the ones that were there in 1920, according to Perquimans County property cards. The present-day houses were built in the twentieth century, with the newest constructed in 1972; definitive construction dates are elusive.

The neighborhood has a unified feel due to the homes of wood frame construction sharing characteristics of two stories with steeply pitched roofs, gable ends facing the street. This house plan is found elsewhere in Hertford and also in nearby communities

such as Edenton. The building that once housed the library for the Black community looks similar to the houses.

A noted Black carpenter in Edenton, Hannibal Badham Sr., built his own home in this style in the late nineteenth century and may well have influenced the building of homes for Negroes in Uptown.

The oldest house on Cox Avenue is at 407, built in 1930. The house at 412 was built in 1938. At 409 is a 1 ½ story brick home built in 1952. The residences at 410 and 406 were constructed in 1960 and 1965 respectively. Added in the 1970s were the homes at 411, 413 and 414. Most of these newer homes replaced houses already on the lots. At present there is only one vacant lot where a house once stood.

The houses on this street are complementary, with most being frame two-story dwellings of modest proportions. There is a small brick house at 409 and a larger brick house at 414. At 411 and 413 sit two bungalows built in 1970, apparently from the same design.

Probably the feature most common in Uptown West houses is the gable end facing the street. Houses of this simple design are found on other streets in the neighborhood, and, according to Dorothy Spruill Redford, author of *Somerset Homecoming*, was a typical choice of builders in Black neighborhoods in the early twentieth century. The houses differ in the types of pillars on the front porches and the location of the front entrance. Evidence of changes from the original design is seen in the screened-in porches and, sometimes, the steps leading up to the porches.

These are simple houses on fairly small lots, ranging in size from .03 to .21 acres. There are no garages although there are now storage buildings on many of the lots. These homes have no fancy porches, although some of the porches might have had more obvious ornamental detail before they were enclosed by screening to keep out insects and increase living space. The entryways are not elaborate. Unfortunately, many now have aluminum storm doors. Most of these houses do not have central heating. Some window

air conditioning units are visible; central air conditioning systems are rare in this neighborhood.

One block over from Cox Avenue is King Street. Over the years this street has seen the loss of homes due to fire, vandalism and neglect. There are empty lots where houses once stood. Although there are several houses in the 400 block of King Street, only three have been identified as contributing to the historic district.

One of two homes on King Street that are owner-occupied, the two-story frame house at 406 is painted an attractive beige with dark shutters. The front door opens into a screened porch that runs across the front of the twenty-foot-wide house and is topped with a retractable striped cloth awning. A notable feature is the diamond-shaped window in the gable of the steeply pitched shingle roof.

The other owner-occupied house, at 407 King, was constructed in 1973. It is a one-story brick house with enclosed front porch. Attractive and well-maintained, it does not resemble any of the other houses nearby but does not draw attention to itself.

The houses at 412 and 413 King Street were constructed in 1940. The two-story brick house at 412 is presently owned by a man living in Norfolk VA. Judging by the number of vehicles parked in the front and side yards at any given time, the house is rented to and lived in by a number of adults. It is an attractive dwelling in need of some repairs.

At 413 King stands a house compatible with its neighbors. It has been neglected, with vines and overgrown bushes hiding its salient features.

According to the 1940 federal census, all residents of King Street were Negro and all but one had been born in North Carolina. Six respondents were owners of their own homes and seven were renters. Men's occupations were saw mill laborer, janitor, cotton oil mill laborer, truck driver, hotel waiter, and graded school teacher. One man was a high school principal, another owned his own shoe cobbler business and another was assistant foreman at a saw mill.

The women's work outside the home was listed as laundress, seamstress, maid, cook, and grammar school teacher. One older woman was proprietor of a rooming house.

King Street's African American residents were contributing to the economy of Hertford in various ways.

The street paralleling Cox Avenue on the other side is Dobbs Street, often referred to as Dobb Street. There are seventeen lots on Dobbs.

The house at 417 Dobbs is the oldest on the block. Improvements in the 1980s have altered its appearance so that its 1910 origin is no longer evident. A screened front porch with a metal storm door and wrought iron handrail along the steps conceal what may have once been features compatible with other houses in the neighborhood.

Next door, at 419 Dobbs, is a well-kept two-and-a-half-story home with the street-facing gable common in the neighborhood. It's one of the newer houses on the street, built in 1970.

At 421 Dobbs a white bungalow with red trim resembles other houses of its size in the Uptown West district. It retains much of its original charm but needs some painting and repairs. It was at this site in 1975 but the construction date is unknown. Bungalows of this type are the second most common type of housing in Uptown West.

In the middle of the 400 block of Dobbs are several houses that bear a striking resemblance to one another: two-story frame construction with street-facing gable. Built in the 1960s, they contribute to the cohesive feel of Uptown West.

Two streets over from Cox Avenue is Market Street. The eight properties in this block are compatible with others in the Uptown West neighborhood. At 407 Market stands an attractively painted two-story frame house built in the 1930s. It features wrought iron railing and posts on the open front porch and faux stone trim around the front door. The gable with cornice returns does not face the street. A brick house next door may have been constructed in 1975, perhaps earlier. Wrought iron railings along the front steps and

jealousie windows facing the street lend an air of modernity not seen in neighboring homes.

The houses at 406, 412 and 414 Market, dating from the 1960s or earlier reflect the style of construction found throughout the district: two-story frame with street-facing gable. These houses unify the area.

There are two streets that Cox, King, Dobbs and Market lead to: East Railroad Avenue and Edenton Road Street. East Railroad has three properties in the Uptown West district. One seems to be undergoing renovation (205) and another seems to be in the final stages of renovation (101). The third (207) is a two-story frame structure with vinyl siding, a metal roof and a roofline unlike any other in the neighborhood.

Edenton Road Street, also U.S. Route 17 Business, carries traffic from the highway to the center of Hertford. The houses along this street are an eclectic mix. Some (108, 110) look like houses on the neighboring streets, with the narrow end of the building fronting the street. The property at 106 is a small brick church, home to First Gospel Tabernacle of Pentecostal Followers.

An out-of-state entrepreneur who attended high school in Hertford is updating a shotgun house at 102; it will look very nice when finished but will have lost its historic appearance. The same man plans to restore or renovate the house at 104, which is a Southern cottage style found only a few other places in Hertford. Behind it on the same lot is a two-story house in disrepair.

At 200 Edenton Road Street is a small one-story office building with vinyl siding and bars on the windows. Next door is a one-story home covered in yellow asbestos shingles, with two aluminum storm doors leading into separate living quarters.

The brick home at 206 Edenton Road Street was built in 1964. Its attractive façade contrasts with the older (1930) house next door which resembles many of the houses

already described. Asbestos shingles, street-facing gable with cornice returns and curved brick edging on the front steps mark this house at 208 as historic and needing attention.

The house at 210 shares the same features as many in the area and also shares the same unfortunate updates, such as enclosed front porch with metal door.

Although the large two-story brick house at 212 Edenton Road Street was built in 1960 or before, it looks newer. It has an attached garage. Like other houses on this street, it is different from the others in its own way.



A section of Dobbs Street showing the predominant house form in Uptown Hertford