

# The White House on US 15-501

*Bill Sharpe, June 2023*



This stately house is on the left as one drives up US 15-501 headed north, toward the Manns Chapel Road crossing. It attracts attention because it is so different from anything else on this commercial part of the highway. It is described on page 187 in the 1991 book entitled 'The Architectural Heritage of Chatham County, North Carolina.'

The entry is:

*William Brooks Cheek House  
Chapel Hill Vicinity*

*William Brooks Cheek (1857-1959), a Chatham County sawmiller and builder, constructed this two-story three-bay high-hipped roof house with fanciful multiple gable interruptions in 1923. Prior to that he had constructed two other houses in Bonlee and part of the Bonlee Baptist Church, most notably its patterned wood ceiling.*

*This white frame house, Check's last, is prominently situated on U.S. 15-501 and shaded by large oak trees. Lumber from the property was used to construct the double-pile central-hallway dwelling with its wraparound porch, projecting gable-roof bays, and interior brick corbeled chimneys. Its single-leaf entrance is framed by sidelights. Each of its many bays is pierced by a four-over-one sash window that is paired at each gable end. Fanciful crockets lend emphasis to the tin-shingle roof.*

*The notable interior contains specially ordered three-inch sheathing in the hall and two front rooms, which also feature French doors, built-in bookcases, and heavy mantels with turned brackets. An open-string stair with turned balustrade rises from rear to front in the hall. The rear rooms of the house are sheathed in Cheek's own plainer lumber. Cheek apparently also delighted in embellished outbuildings. Behind the house are a two-story German-sided barn, chicken houses, carbide light house, wood house, wash-house, smokehouse, and garage – all in excellent condition. Cheek's two daughters Nellie and Mabel Cheek are now the property owners.*

My home place, now known as Polks Landing, adjoined the Cheek property. The boundary between them was Cub Creek which originates in a small spring up the hill on our property, flows under 15-501 and then turns north and curves around into Jordan lake on its way to the Atlantic Ocean via the Cape Fear River.

The old Colonial Road from Hillsboro to Fayetteville ran across the front yards of both properties. Vestiges of it remained in my boyhood as a trench about four feet deep and 12 feet wide worn down by the traffic over the decades. A section of it still exists on the Cheek property. It was a wonderful place to play – fighting off Germans to the East or Indians to the West. I enjoyed exploring the woods and old roads in those days, but my parents had warned me not to cross the Creek. The temptation became too great and on one Sunday afternoon I jumped across the Creek and walked up the old road. I came upon Mr. Cheek's abandoned sawmill. It was fascinating with big wheels and belts, saw blades, platforms on rails, and a steam engine. The house was a hundred yards away, but I didn't want to be seen, so turned and ran.

A year or two later my mother took me to visit his daughters – Mabel and Nell Cheek. They were both schoolteachers, and I would occasionally go up there to borrow books. When I was quarantined with hepatitis in high school, Nell brought me her copy of the collected works of Arthur Conan Doyle.

The house stayed in the family and Nell's granddaughter, Carol Kirby Cheek, now owns it. I stopped to see her for a pleasant visit in the yard in September. I was surprised that despite the difference in our ages we had similar recollections of neighbors and the area. Her grandfather, Foy P. Kirby, had helped build the Cheek house, and in 1953 built a one-room addition to my home which became my bedroom. Prior to that I had occupied the old one-room kitchen detached from the original house when it was built in the 1870s.

When I moved back home in 2010, I visited Carol and went into the house. It looked the same inside as I remembered it from some 60 years earlier. Built in 1923, its excellent condition today is a testimony to the quality of the workmanship 100 years ago.