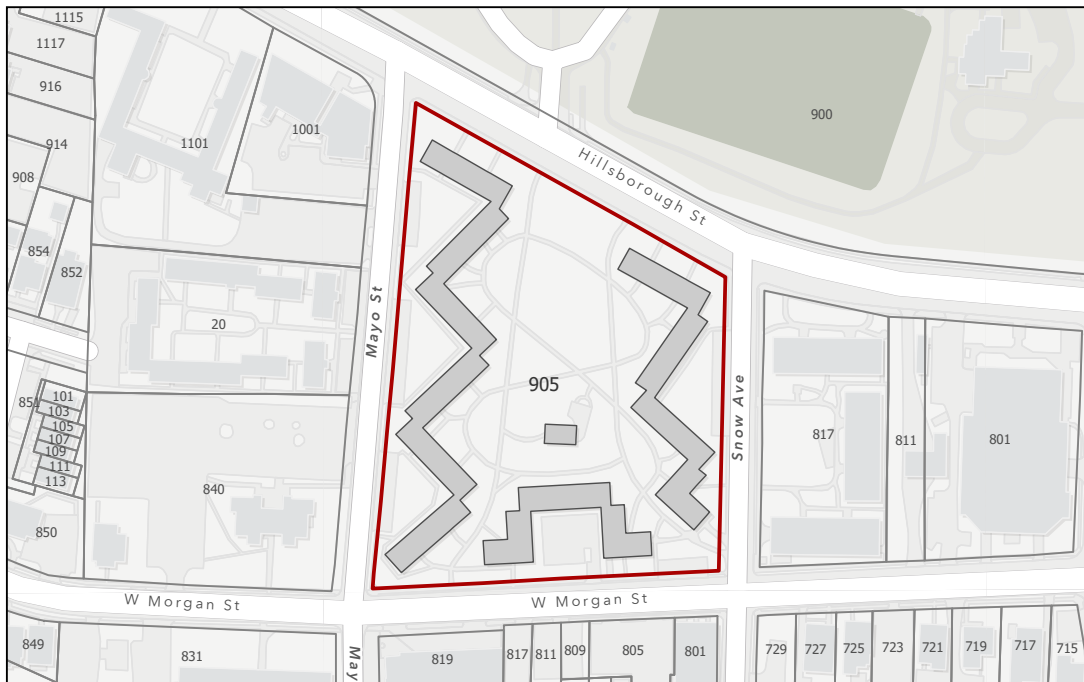


SITE NAME	Cameron Court Apartments / "Queens Court"
LOCATION	905 Hillsborough St.
BUILT/ALTERED	1938 (Wake County iMaps)
LGBTQIA+ ASSOCIATED YEARS	1980s-1990s
EVALUATION DATE & EVALUATOR	October 21, 2024 Cynthia de Miranda, MdM Historical Consultants, Durham



Location of Cameron Court Apartments, 905 Hillsborough St.

LGBTQIA+ Historical Significance: Oral tradition holds that Cameron Court, a large 1938 apartment complex, was popular with members of the LGBTQIA+ community in the 1980s and 1990s. The ability to choose to live in proximity with other LGBTQIA+ people created a physical community at a time in Raleigh when many people still felt the need to be discreet or even secretive about their sexual orientation.

Two other areas in Raleigh have been identified through oral history that were small enclaves for the LGBTQIA+ community. The Vance Apartment building at 105 E. Edenton St. was demolished in the 1980s. Young St., between Wake Forest Rd. and Ann St. in northeast Raleigh, is a roughly block-long area of single-family houses said to have been purchased by and rented out to gay men and drag performers in the late 20th century; the street was nicknamed "Queen Street."



Cameron Court, 905 Hillsborough St., apartment buildings and quadrangle, view to W. near S. end of quad.



Cameron Court, 905 Hillsborough St., apartment buildings at Hillsborough St., view to SW near NE corner of block.



Cameron Court, 905 Hillsborough St., view to NE of pavilion and patio near S. end of quadrangle.

Description: Cameron Court comprises 13 three-story buildings with brick exteriors, metal sash windows, and flat roofs. The buildings feature modest Colonial Revival-style details, including brickwork simulating corner quoins and flat-roofed entry porches with columns. Rectangular and L-plan buildings are arranged along the east, south, and west sides of the city block bounded by Hillsborough, Mayo, W. Morgan, and Snow Streets. Foundation shrubs soften the transition between land and building. The center of the city block is open space landscaped with mature shade trees, lawns, and resident amenities. Brick walkways wind through the quad and some low concrete retaining walls help shape the naturalistic landscape. Concrete benches offer repose in the shade. Toward the south end of the open quadrangle, a pavilion with fireplace and adjacent barbecue patio occupies a small area near the buildings fronting W. Morgan St. The pavilion and patio appear to be a relatively recent addition and do not detract from the overall naturalistic landscaping of the quad. Documentation of the complex dating to 1989 shows the appearance largely unchanged from that period. The complex appears to retain many, if not most, elements from initial construction.

Brief historical sketch: Cameron Court occupies the former location of the antebellum Duncan Cameron House. Early residents of the apartment complex included middle-class professionals and families. Some stayed for decades. Traffic past the buildings increased dramatically in 1975 when the City diverted east-bound lanes from Hillsborough St. to E. Morgan St. Long-time residents complained about the noise and pollution caused by traffic on W. Morgan St. in an article in the local paper, perhaps precipitating an increase in apartment vacancies in that period.

Community input on the LGBTQIA+ Historic Context Study in the early 2020s reported that the apartment complex was popular with LGBTQIA+ people in the 1980s and 1990s. A "missed connections" classified ad in *The Front Page*, a newspaper for the LGBTQIA+ community, mentioned the Cameron Court Apartments in 1988. Later that year, for a few months, an advertisement for 1- and 2-bedroom apartments at the complex ran in *The Front Page's* classified ads. The listing reads as though there had been frequent inquiries: "We finally have openings for 1- and 2-bedroom units. Hardwood floors, central AC. Laundry. Beautiful downtown location. \$595 and \$695." A respondent in the City of Raleigh survey about LGBTQIA+ places noted that the 1988 Pride parade marchers passed Cameron Court "which in the 80s and 90s had been famous for a heavy LGBT presence in residents, who sometimes jokingly referred to it as 'the gay ghetto.'" On the Goodnight Raleigh blog, some commenters noted they were assumed to be or asked if they were gay because of their residence at Cameron Court.

Before Cameron Court, the Vance Apartments were popular with LGBTQIA+ Raleigh residents. Another survey respondent mentioned that the Art Deco-style Vance Apartments housed a concentration of "gay and gay-friendly" occupants in the 1970s "and was host to many after club parties." The commenter described "double French doors into the bedrooms, and a majestic stair in the lobby, complete with a rickety old cage elevator" and noted that "Rent was \$175 when I lived there in '79." According to the commenter, the Vance, at 105 E. Edenton St., was demolished in the late 1980s, perhaps paving the way for renters to reconvene at Cameron Court.

Another survey respondent noted that a block of small houses on Young St. between Wake Forest Road and Ann St. in northeast Raleigh were owned by and rented to gay men. The area was anecdotally known to be associated with drag performers. Such enclaves were few and insufficient relative to the number of LGBTQIA+ people looking for housing in an area where they could fully express themselves. In a 1996 letter to the editor of the *News & Observer*, Jim Duley, the editor of *The Front Page*, wrote "Raleigh is a great place to live, even as a gay man or lesbian. However, I do think twice before holding hands with a date, and when looking for a romantic restaurant I usually end up in Chapel Hill." Duley went on to advocate for development of a "gay neighborhood" complete with housing in Raleigh and presented it as a net positive for the city. "If Raleigh truly wants to revive downtown, it will create incentives for developers to build housing near Legends. The demand for downtown housing is already growing among gays and lesbians."

Historical integrity evaluation: Cameron Court retains all seven aspects of integrity for its association with LGBTQIA+ Raleigh history, as indicated by the check marks and explanations below.

- ✓ **Location:** The complex remains at its original location.
- ✓ **Design:** Integrity of design is evident in the stylistic architectural features that decorate the complex and express the Colonial Revival style and the garden apartment residential concept. The stylistic features include faux corner quoins and

columned porch entries. The buildings, the quadrangle formed by their arrangement on the city block, and the mature trees and winding brick and concrete paths are all important components of the overall garden apartment design and have remained unchanged since construction.

- ✓ **Setting:** The buildings, the quadrangle formed by their arrangement on the city block, and the mature trees and winding brick and concrete paths are all important components of the overall setting and have remained unchanged since construction.
- ✓ **Materials:** The building exteriors and hardscaping retain original materials, including steel casement windows, brick, and wood porches, including molding and columns, and concrete-lined brick paths and low concrete walls.
- ✓ **Workmanship:** Workmanship is evident in the finish and construction of exterior architectural features, including brick exteriors with faux corner quoins; porch columns, roofs, and molding; and brick paths and landscaping walls.
- ✓ **Feeling:** The buildings remain an apartment complex and therefore retain their integrity of feeling and association as a residential quarter between downtown and early twentieth-century suburbs.
- ✓ **Association:** The complex is the actual location of a concentration of queer apartment residents in the 1980s and 1990s.

Note that the question of whether any physical expression of the complex's LGBTQIA+ association in the period has not been determined. It seems likely that there was no physical expression at the exterior, however, as many LGBTQIA+ people were still rather discreet about their sexual orientation in this period.

RHL Eligibility Assessment: The integrity of the complex is excellent, both from its original period of construction and from its period of significance associated with Raleigh's LGBTQIA+ community. Not enough is known about LGBTQIA+ people intentionally choosing to reside as neighbors at Cameron Court—and potentially other parts of Raleigh—to make an eligibility assessment. Research questions could include the percentage of tenants who identified as queer in the period; how and why Cameron Court (and possibly other areas) became popular with the community; the effect the demographic shift had on the overall Cameron Court community in the period; and any possible physical changes, whether permanent or temporary, that the residents may have made to express their identity. Oral history interviews are likely the best source for compiling the history and information about this and other enclaves of LGBTQIA+ residents for comparison. From the information known to date, however, it does appear very likely to be a good candidate for Raleigh Historic Landmark eligibility if research bears out that Cameron Court stood out among other enclaves that existed in the period.

Sources:

"Cameron Court Now Completed," *News & Observer*, November 13, 1938.

"Road project brings traffic noises closer to home," *News & Observer*, July 7, 1975.

"Civic leader Mamie Wyatt dies in Raleigh at age 93," *News & Observer*, March 1, 1982.

"Raleigh's gay potential," *News & Observer*, February 1, 1996.

"Cameron Court Apartments," and "Grosvenor Gardens," Goodnight Raleigh Blog.