

Survey of Historic Buildings and Structures in Center City Charlotte

September 2004



I. Statement of Purpose. This Survey attempts to identify those buildings and structures in Center City Charlotte that possess the requisite special significance to be eligible for designation as local historic landmarks or local historic districts and have not yet been so designated. Such designation would assure that the identified properties are not inadvertently destroyed and that the impact of future developments upon these properties is considered as part of the comprehensive planning process. Hopefully, this Survey will allow historic preservation to be an *initial consideration* when determining whether an intended action in Center City Charlotte is or is not in the public interest or how that intended action might be altered to accommodate the needs of historic preservation.

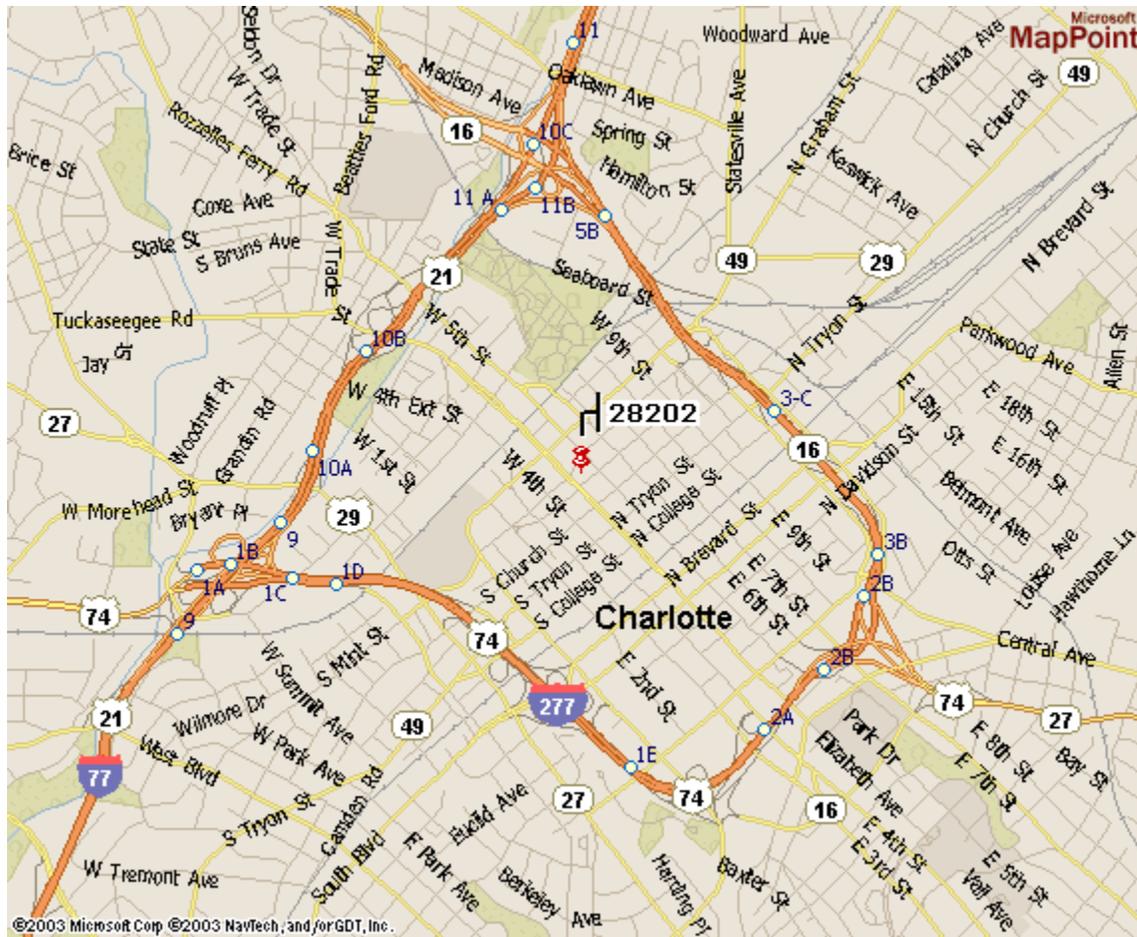
An additional purpose of the Survey is to provide sufficient contextual background so that the identified properties can be processed for

historic landmark designation without preparing a Survey and Research Report on each. It is anticipated that this approach will expedite the designation of the identified properties as historic landmarks and thereby put into place more quickly the legal safeguards associated with such designation. Intense developmental pressures suggest that haste is essential and prudent if historic preservation is to play a significant role in the planning for the future of Center City Charlotte.



This July 2003 photograph shows two historic buildings being demolished on E. Trade St. to make way for the new Uptown arena. Efforts to save the building were "too little, too late."

2. Methodology. Dan L. Morrill and Stewart Gray, the principal investigators, identified Center City Charlotte as that area bounded by I-77, I-85, and I-285; and, as a general rule, they included buildings and structures in that area that were erected in 1960 or before. Morrill and Gray used the information already available for those properties identified by the Commission either through the conducting of surveys or the preparation of Survey and Research Reports. Especially useful was Dr. Thomas Hanchett's comprehensive history of the physical evolution of Center City Charlotte, developed for the Historic Landmarks Commission in the early 1980s. [Click here to read.](#)



The Survey places the identified properties within one of the following six contexts.

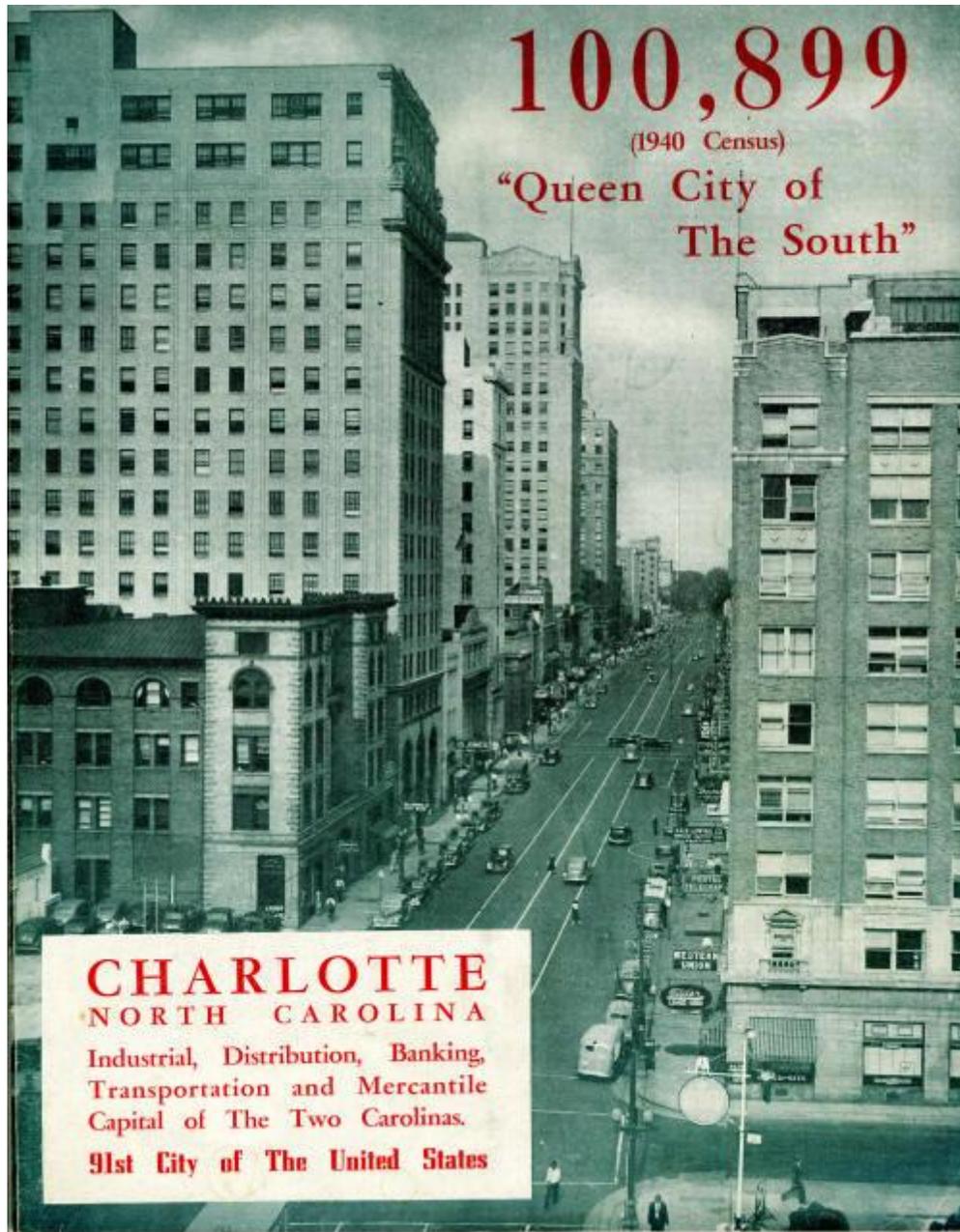
A. **[High Rise Buildings.](#)** High-rise buildings have occupied an important place in the built or man-made environment of Charlotte since the construction of the Realty or Independence Building in 1908-09. They have served as compelling symbols of economic power and progress. **[Click here to see the implosion of the Independence Building in September 1981.](#)**

B. **[Bridges.](#)** Charlotte, a crossroads town, has been impacted by railroad tracks since the arrival of the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad in October 1852. A major challenge has been to allow traffic, especially after the advent of the automobile, to navigate over these tracks. The solution has been the construction of a series of railroad bridges, some of which possess special historic significance.

C. Industrial/Commercial. Charlotte emerged as a major industrial and commercial center during the second half of the nineteenth century. Principally but not exclusively based upon textiles, this industrial base is reflected in Charlotte's built or man-made environment. The coming of the railroad also stimulated the growth of Charlotte as a wholesale and retail commercial center.



Charlotte's Union Bus Terminal was demolished in May 2004 to make way for part of the Johnson and Wales Campus. This was Charlotte's best surviving example of Art Moderne style architecture.



Above: Post-WWII Queen City of the South promotional booklet published in 1945 by the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, under the leadership of Executive Vice-President Mr. C.O. "Booster" Kuester. [Click here to read the entire booklet.](#)

D. **Institutional.** A major component of the so-called New South philosophy of progress was the expansion of public schools, including schools for African Americans. Also, Charlotte's leaders were interested in constructing imposing public buildings, including courthouses and city halls. Finally, several churches survive in Center City Charlotte.

E. **Residential.** What is now Center City Charlotte was essentially the entire city until the early twentieth century. Accordingly, Uptown Charlotte contains several residential structures, both individual houses and apartment houses.

F. **Retail.** Charlotte emerged as a major retail center following the arrival of the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad in 1852. The Center City has retained that status over the decades, as the nature of the built environment has changed in response to market forces.

3. Findings. The Survey identified 52 individual properties and 3 districts that appear to be eligible respectively for designation as local historic landmarks or local historic districts. [Click here for the list of properties and districts.](#)

4. Implementation Strategy. As noted above, it is essential that the results of this survey become part of the comprehensive planning process for Center City Charlotte. In our opinion, historic preservation has too long been relegated to the sidelines as far as planning for Center City Charlotte is concerned.



The Art Deco style Charlotte Observer/Charlotte News Building was demolished in 1970 with no serious attention having been given to its preservation. Preservation has never been a vital part of comprehensive planning in Charlotte.

A. Increasing Public Awareness. The Commission should make every reasonable effort to increase community awareness of the

findings of the survey and, just as importantly, of what the implications of local historic designation mean. *Many in the general public continue to believe that historic designation mandates that the structure be saved. That is not what it means. Historic designation requires instead that the historic significance of the structure be considered in future planning. In some instances preservation is warranted. In others partial preservation or photograph documentation might be the proper course to follow.* Also, many people continue to think that historic preservation is exclusively involved with the preservation of beautiful old buildings, as one sees in Charleston, S. C. or Savannah, Ga. The Commission needs to underscore the importance of Charlotte's buildings as "historic artifacts" that document the history of *this* community. To build public awareness and support, the Commission should work with local media to publicize the findings. Also, presentations should be made to Historic Charlotte and local representatives of Preservation North Carolina, and other appropriate historic preservation advocacy groups, such as the Mecklenburg Historical Association.



These humble abodes are the only textile mill workers' houses that remain in Center City Charlotte. Because they were designed by D. A. Tompkins, they are significant historic artifacts of *this* community. They are highly endangered.

B. Processing Endangered Properties. Certain properties in Center City Charlotte are endangered and require immediate attention if their fate is to be taken into account as part of the planning process. The Commission should move forward with seeking historic designation by the Charlotte City Council for the following endangered historic resources. The usual designation procedures will be followed, including the solicitation of the attitudes of owners, which the Commission can

take into account as it chooses. [Click here to view a list of ten properties that may merit immediate attention.](#)

C. Consulting With The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission. The Commission should arrange with the planning staff to make a presentation to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission of the findings of this Survey and to solicit its input as to the best means available, including historic designation, to assure that the identified properties are taken into account in future planning for Center City Charlotte.

D. Processing Remainder Of Identified Properties. After consultation with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission, the Commission should move forward with seeking historic designation by the Charlotte City Council of the remainder of the identified historic resources in Center City Charlotte. The usual designation procedures will be followed, including the solicitation of the attitudes of owners, which the Commission can take into account as it chooses.