

A History Of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County

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Preface

This is not an encyclopedic history of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. The story is too complex and too big for the scope of a project such as this. There are important parts of the history of this community that are left out or barely mentioned. What this writer attempts to do is highlight the major themes and pivotal periods of our past and tell dramatic tales that document the nature and significance of each. The story ends in the early 1980s, because everything thereafter is current affairs.

This writer asserts that two major themes have been present in the history of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County from the earliest days of Scots-Irish and German settlement in the 1740's until today. One is an intense desire for economic development and expansion. The other is the on-going saga of race. Whenever the pressures of the two have come into direct conflict, especially in the 1890s and in the 1960s and 1970s, economic considerations have won out.

This writer has depended heavily upon the research and scholarship of others. Especially helpful were several M.A. Theses written by graduate students at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Sadly, these manuscripts lie mostly unused and ignored. One must also make special mention of the superb scholarship produced by Paul Escott, Thomas W. Hanchett, Janette Greenwood, Jack Claiborne, Mary Norton Kratt, Mary Boyer, Frye Gaillard, Ken Sanford, and Alex Coffin. Hopefully, this book will encourage others to speak and write about this community's fascinating past. Remember, history is the past from the vantage point of today. That's why it is so instructive.

This writer is deeply indebted to his wife, Mary Lynn Caldwell Morrill, who in this as in all other aspects of his personal life has shown untiring support, patience, and understanding. A direct descendant of Alexander Craighead, she possesses all of the best qualities of her Scots-Irish heritage. This book is dedicated to her.

Chapter One

Native Americans and the Coming of

The White Man

Off Elm Lane in southern Mecklenburg County there is a massive boulder that sits majestically beside the bed of Four Mile Creek. Children from a nearby suburban neighborhood often scamper to the top of the so-called "Big Rock," hopefully unaware of the hate-filled graffiti that mars its ancient face. This is an evocative place for those who care about the history of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.



Location Of The Big Rock

The Big Rock was a campsite, rendezvous point, and observation post for the first human beings who inhabited what is now Mecklenburg County. They were Paleo or Ancient Native Americans whose forbearers had migrated from Asia across the [Bering Strait](#) made dry by advancing glaciers some 40,000 years ago. These initial nomads reached the Carolina Piedmont about 12,000 years ago. They had wandered over the Blue Ridge and Smoky Mountains in pursuit of big game. Living in highly mobile and lightly equipped groups, the Paleo Indians ambushed their prey, principally now extinct giant mammals, by thrusting spears into their flanks at close range.



The Big Rock is an ancient campsite and observation post.

The first Native Americans who resided here lived in tiny bands of one or a few families, rarely came in contact with other human beings, and inbred for centuries. They have left no evidence of permanent settlements, burial sites, pottery or agriculture; and, like the great majority of Native Americans, they never developed a written language. Despite the harshness of their existence, Paleo Indians saw their numbers increase in North America. Only the hardiest had completed the long trek from Asia, and the cold climate of the Ice Age may have eliminated many disease-causing organisms.



Shelter In The Big Rock

There is a small crevice or indentation on the backside of the eastern wall of the Big Rock. It would have provided protection from the strong, cold winds that blew across the almost treeless grasslands that covered the surrounding countryside in ancient times. Imagine what it must have been like for the small bands of Paleo Indians who spent wintry nights at the Big Rock thousands of years ago. The howl of wolves would have echoed in the pitch-black darkness. The men would have chipped stones into spear points, and the women would have roasted hunks of fatty meat in the flickering

flames of the campfire. Arising at first light, these small assemblages of nomadic hunters would have resumed their ceaseless chase after the herds of mammoth, horses, camels and bison that meandered across the Piedmont landscape.

About 10,000 years ago the glaciers started to retreat and deciduous forests began to predominate in this part of North America. Their habitat destroyed or massively altered, some large mammals, like the mammoth, disappeared, while others, like the camel and the horse, moved elsewhere. Paleo Indian traditions began to die out as the Native Americans adapted to their new environment. Archeologists have named the next cultural customs the "Archaic."

Archaic people, who also visited the Big Rock, foraged for plants and hunted smaller game, such as rabbit, squirrel, beaver and deer. Still nomads, they roamed within smaller territories than had their predecessors, because to succeed as hunters and food gatherers they had to become intimately familiar with local plant life and with the habits of indigenous animals. Indians of this era were more technologically proficient than their forbearers. One of their most ingenious inventions was the atlatl, a spear-throwing device that enabled them to kill deer and other large game more easily. They also used grinding stones and mortars to crush nuts and seeds, carved bowls from soapstone, and polished their spear points into smooth and shiny projectiles.



A momentous event in the history of the Native Americans of this region occurred about 2000 years ago. Indians of the so-called "Woodland" tradition began to practice agriculture and establish permanent settlements. Interestingly, the great majority of the Native Americans who inhabited what is now the Carolina Piedmont, including the Catawbas of this immediate area, were still following these Woodland customs when the first white men arrived in the 16th century. People of this tradition developed a sophisticated culture, replete with religious ceremonies and complex ethical systems. Their religion was polytheistic, meaning that Woodland Indians believed in many gods. Unlike followers of Judeo-Christianity, who divide existence into heaven and earth or separate celestial and terrestrial realms, Native Americans held that many spirits inhabit *this* world and that they must be appeased. Woodland Indians also had no concept of private property. Land was for use, not for ownership. Native Americans believed that carving up the earth into separate plots and fencing it off was as senseless as parceling out the air or cutting up the water. Such notions would come into direct conflict with the cultural values that white settlers would bring to the Carolina Piedmont.



Replica of Woodland Indian Structure.

The original permanent English settlement in North America appeared on the James River in Virginia in 1607, although European explorers had made contact with Native Americans along the Carolina coast as early as 1524, and the so-called Lost Colony had been established on Roanoke Island in 1585. Named in honor of the reigning King of England, James I, Jamestown struggled to survive until the discovery of tobacco gave the settlers a cash crop. Thereafter, new people began to arrive from Europe; and some traveled south from the James River into North Carolina in search of game and better land. The great majority of the white settlers of the Coastal Plain were Englishmen and Englishwomen who had come to the New World in search of greater economic opportunity. By the mid-1700's, writes historian Tom Hanchett, "the ports of New Bern and Wilmington, North Carolina, and Georgetown and Charleston, South Carolina, flourished where major river systems emptied into the Atlantic."

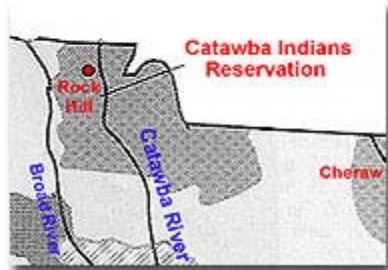
The first English-speaking people to move through this region were merchants who brought finished goods, such as iron utensils, pots, and axes, on the backs of horses or on their own backs to trade for animal hides prepared by the Catawbans and other Native American tribes. The Catawbans and other inland tribes also traveled widely. Long before the arrival of the white man, Native Americans had established trade routes along footpaths that stretched from the mountains to the sea. White explorers and traders became familiar with this system of reliable, well-established Indian trails and adopted it for their own use.

Title Page Of Lawson's Journal.

On December 28, 1700, John Lawson set out in a large canoe from Charleston, South Carolina and headed upriver with ten companions and a favorite dog to explore the Carolina backcountry for the eight Lords Proprietors who had been awarded all the land south of Virginia and westward to the "South Seas." His journal paints a fascinating picture of the customs and habits of the Native Americans who resided in the Piedmont. Indigenous people lived along the banks of the rivers in small villages of bark-covered houses, each tribe controlling a few miles of a particular stream's course. Lawson and his compatriots saw countless corncribs as they paddled inland. Corn was the staple crop grown by North Americans of this region in soil that Lawson said was "red as blood"



Reproduction of a Catawba council house, 18th Century

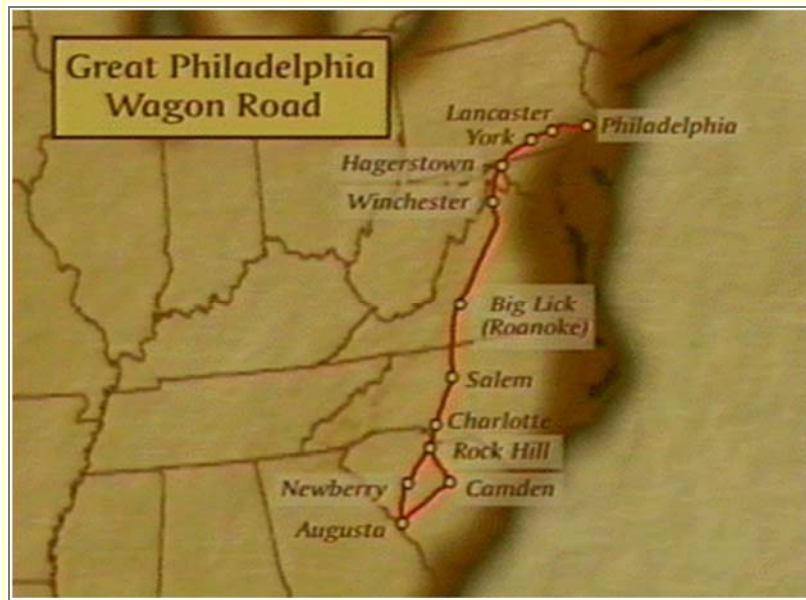


Location of Catawba Reservation



Example of Catawba pottery

When Lawson traveled through the Piedmont there was a population of 4000 to 5000 Indians in at least six villages scattered along a twenty-mile stretch of the Catawba River. Here the Catawba, a branch of the Souian language group, enjoyed the advantages of fertile soil, a fish-filled river, abundant wildlife and a hospitable climate, though they also faced periodic battles with their Cherokee neighbors to the west. In 1650, a legendary military engagement was fought at Nation Ford near present day Fort Mill, South Carolina. Approximately 1100 Cherokees and 1000 Catawbas were killed in a single day. The ensuing truce granted the Catawbas an area along the "Great River" from near its headwaters in North Carolina to what is now Chester County, South Carolina.



A fundamental transformation of the Yadkin-Catawba territory occurred in the 18th century when the era of Native American domination of the region came to a precipitous end. European civilization became predominant within a very few years. The initial white settlers drove their covered wagons into the Carolina Piedmont in the 1740s, mostly along ancient Indian trading paths. First in a trickle then a virtual flood, these immigrants, who were mostly from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware, came swarming down the Great Philadelphia Wagon Road to establish farms and homestead. Unlike the white traders who had preceded them, these families planned to stay. The road that brought these hardy souls into the Carolina hinterland was described during the 1750s as "a seldom trodden rocky farm road to the back field" amidst a "vast primeval wilderness arched high overhead by large wide spreading branches of majestic trees, ash, walnut, oak, pine, poplar and chestnut." Luxuriant forests and meadows abounded with game, including bear, deer, quail, and pheasant.



Early Scot-Irish and German Settlers House Type.

The pioneers changed what they found. To them the ancient home of the Native Americans was a wilderness to be tamed. The white settlers built houses, taverns, mills, established ferries, and cleared fields. The Catawbas were powerless to resist. "The Catawbas, like coastal tribes nearly a century before, found themselves in the midst of a growing swell of European immigration they could no longer resist," writes one scholar. By the 1760s, after only a decade of persistent white occupation, much of the Catawba's lands had been sold, bartered, or lost. The Catawba nation had dwindled to a population of about 1000, for in addition to tribal warfare they suffered from contact with European diseases and vices: chiefly smallpox and whiskey. In 1764, two years after the death of the last famous Catawba chief, King Haiglar, the colonial governor of South Carolina granted the Catawba fifteen square miles on the border of North Carolina and South Carolina. By 1840 the area had dwindled to 652 acres, and there were only seventy-five Catawba left. Little was thought about the surviving remnants of the Catawba until 1977, when Chief Gilbert Blue laid claim to the original fifteen square miles granted to the Catawba in 1764.



Catawba Indian Pottery

Unlike the white settlers who had migrated to the Coastal Plain a century earlier, most of the pioneers who moved into the Piedmont in the mid-1700s were Scots-Irish Presbyterians or German Lutherans. Their primary reason for coming was to escape oppression and to be "left alone." Certainly that sentiment was paramount among the Scots-Irish. Scotsmen and Scotswomen who had moved from Scotland to the Ulster region of Ireland in the early 1600s, the Scots-Irish were only too aware of the discriminatory actions the English could enact. Under provisions of the Test Act of 1703, the Church of England had refused to recognize the legitimacy of Presbyterian rites, including communion and matrimony, and had ordered Presbyterian ministers defrocked. After the Scots-Irish had succeeded in establishing a strong regional economy based upon raising and shearing sheep, Parliament had enacted legislation that excluded Irish wool from English markets. Adding insult to injury, English settlers proceeded to push the Scots-Irish off the best Irish land. The response of growing numbers of these beleaguered Presbyterians was to move again, this time to North America.

About 250,000 Scots-Irish immigrated to the New World in the first quarter of the 18th century, most entering through Philadelphia, Baltimore, or Lewes, Delaware. Learning that the land near the coast was already taken, the former residents of Ulster trekked inland and created farms until they reached the Alleghany Mountains. They then turned south and began filtering into Virginia and the Carolinas. Although both arrived in the Yadkin-Catawba region during the same years, the Germans and the Scots-Irish did not live side by side but settled in separate church-centered communities, the former along Buffalo Creek in what is now Cabarrus County and the latter in the southern reaches of the Catawba territory along the banks of Mallard Creek, Reedy Creek, Sugar Creek, Long Creek and the Catawba River.

Tradition holds that the first Scots-Irish pioneer to bring his family to Mecklenburg County was Thomas Spratt. A marker in the 1900 block of Randolph Road marks the spot where Spratt constructed his home. Erected by the Colonial Dames in 1926, the marker reads:

SITE OF THE FIRST COURT HELD IN MECKLENBURG COUNTY,
FEBRUARY 26, 1763. HOME OF THOMAS SPRATT, FIRST PERSON
TO CROSS THE YADKIN RIVER WITH WHEELS. HERE WAS BORN
ANNE SPRATT, FIRST WHITE CHILD BORN BETWEEN CATAWBA
& YADKIN RIVERS.



The chief spokesperson for the Scots-Irish settlers of what is now Mecklenburg County was the indefatigable and peppery [Alexander Craighead](#). He was summoned to be minister at [Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church](#) and Rocky River Presbyterian Church in 1758. Before Craighead's arrival, itinerate ministers had met with the Presbyterian faithful in local farmhouses. Only the chimney remains at Richard Barry's house across from the intersection of Neck Road and Beatties Ford Road in northwestern

Mecklenburg County, where John Thompson, a Presbyterian preacher, held worship services in the early 1750s.



Craighead, whose grave is located in the oldest burial ground of Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church on Craighead Road off North Tryon Street, was born in Donegal, Ireland and died in Mecklenburg County in March 1766. He traveled as a child with his parents to Pennsylvania in the early 1700s. Ordained in 1735, Craighead became an outspoken critic of the Church of England and even succeeded in alienating the majority of his fellow Presbyterians because of his extreme views on religious issues and because of his intemperate criticisms of the king. Craighead accompanied [George Whitefield](#) in Pennsylvania and became a participant in the Great Awakening. He also was heavily influenced by the teachings of Gilbert and Charles Tennent. In 1733 Gilbert Tennent insisted that only those preachers who were pure in heart should be allowed to conduct services. He also began preaching in an emotional manner, even encouraging church members to stand and shout. Craighead followed the same pattern. In 1736 he began emoting from the pulpit and even refused to let his wife take communion because she was not sufficiently contrite. Several of his own church members said Craighead "was under some dreadful delusion of Satan." Finally, in 1741, the traditionalists, who insisted only on commitment to the Westminster Confession of Faith and formal religious education as requirements for preaching, ousted the New Side preachers from the Synod of Philadelphia.



Location of Alexander Craighead's Grave

To Craighead's way of "New Side" thinking, even the Presbyterian Church was tainted because of its commitment to maintaining traditional dogma rather than emphasizing the importance of faith and spontaneous emotion in religious matters and because of its willingness to make peace with British officials. Craighead preached fiery sermons and exhorted his flock to resist any threats to their independence. He warned his people that Presbyterian leaders were allowing "swarms of profane Creatures" and "scandalous Persons" to come into the churches. The Philadelphia Synod finally expelled Craighead from Pennsylvania because of his radical views. It was only on the frontier that ministers of Craighead's persuasion and penchant toward emotionalism were able to establish themselves and preach and administer the rites of the Presbyterian faith as they understood them.

Alexander Craighead faced a monumental challenge in Mecklenburg County. This was a raucous place in the mid-1700s. After all, it was on the frontier. The great majority of people were illiterate. Squabbling and fighting were routine. Men purposely allowed their thumbnails to grow long so that they could more easily gouge out the eyes of their adversaries in a brawl. Drunkenness and fornication were widespread. Modern concepts of hygiene, derived largely from the advent of the germ theory of medicine, had no place in 18th century life. The most common house form was the log cabin, sometimes with three walls. Typically, the only opening in the exterior wall was for an entry door. The floors were dirt. A permanent fire in a large fireplace at the end of the main room billowed smoke into the cramped living quarters, frequently turning the air into an acrid cloud. Privacy, even for the most intimate acts, was virtually unattainable.



Arthur Dobbs

Arthur Dobbs, the Royal Governor of North Carolina, visited what is now Mecklenburg County in 1755. He observed that the great majority of the inhabitants were impoverished. Most families had six to ten children, all "going barefooted," and the mothers were barely clothed. A good place to visit to get a feel for the harshness of 18th-century farm life is the President James K. Polk Birthplace Memorial near Pineville. The log outbuildings at [Latta Plantation](#) in Latta Plantation Park off Beatties Ford Road can serve the same purpose. Their authenticity, however, would be enhanced if they were less tidy and more malodorous.



[Charles Woodmason](#), an Anglican minister, described the Scots-Irish residents of Mecklenburg County as "vile, leveling commonwealth Presbyterians." They are, he continued, "profligate, audacious Vagabonds . . . Hunters going Naked as Indians." C. W. Clerk, a companion of Woodmason's, found them "Rude - Ignorant - Void of Manners, Education or Good Breeding." ([Click Here To Read About Sexual Habits](#)) Andrew Morton of the Church of England visited the Catawba-Yadkin region in 1766 and wrote a similarly unflattering description of the settlers. He told his superiors in London that "the Inhabitants of Mecklenburg are entire dissenters of the most rigid kind." Admittedly, officials of the Church of England were predisposed to castigate the Scots-Irish Presbyterians of the Carolina hinterland. Still, their observations were not created entirely out of whole cloth. There was considerable truth in what Woodmason and his associates wrote about the early white settlers in Mecklenburg County.

Chapter Two

Independence and Revolution

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Alexander Craighead's principal legacy was to instill among the people of his congregations a fierce determination to resist the imposition of unwanted authority from outside the community, especially from the State capital in New Bern or from London. "Social historians studying the more than two-century story of Mecklenburg might well agree that this community's character has its roots in the independent-mindedness of her early citizenship," writes LeGette Blythe in his popular 1961 history of Mecklenburg County. Dramatic proof of this commitment to noninterference occurred during the so-called "Sugar Creek War" in 1765, the year preceding Craighead's death and three years following the creation of Mecklenburg County from a portion of Anson County in 1762. Conflict arose when Henry McCulloh, one of Governor Dobbs's partners in land speculation and an agent for another absentee property owner, Lord George Augustus Selwyn assembled a team of surveyors in the area to determine the boundaries of Lord Selwyn's land so that the Scots-Irish, many of whom were squatters, could begin paying the rent that they lawfully owed but had never attempted to defray.



Grave of Alexander Craighead

A group of local ruffians, led by Thomas Polk, warned McCulloh to desist or he would be "tied Neck and heels and be carried over the Yadkin, and that he might think himself happy if he got off so." Undeterred, McCulloh attempted to perform his duties and ordered the "parcel of blockheads" to stand aside, whereupon the squatters, their faces blackened,

attacked McCulloh's men, including several members of the locally prominent Alexander family. Abraham Alexander was "striped from the nape of his neck to the Waistband of his Breeches," declared one participant in this act of defiance. According to McCulloh, "Jimmy Alexander very near had daylight let into his skull." McCulloh retreated and departed for New Bern. Lawlessness succeeded in winning the day.

William Tryon, who became Royal Governor in 1765, sought to quell unrest in the backcountry by settling the outstanding land disputes. He appointed Thomas Polk and Abraham Alexander to a two-member commission to study the issue. Not surprisingly, the commission decided that McCulloh's and Selwyn's claims were invalid because they had not attracted a sufficient number of settlers to their property. Tryon accepted this decision and proclaimed McCulloh's and Selwyn's proprietorships null and void. The Proprietors had to sell their land to the settlers or to the Royal government.

Governor Tryon donated part of the land formerly belonging to the Proprietors as the site for a county seat. Abraham Alexander and Thomas Polk were put in charge of the creation of the town in 1768, to be named "Charlotte" in honor of the Queen of Great Britain. Martin Phifer, leader of the Lutheran community of Dutch Buffalo Creek in northeastern Mecklenburg, protested the location of the county seat and labored unsuccessfully to have it moved. Eventually Buffalo Creek would separate from Mecklenburg and form Cabarrus County in 1793.

The County seat was the center of power political power in Colonial America and in the early years of the United States. County courts, composed of appointed Justices of the Peace selected by the Governor, registered deeds, issued business licenses, collected taxes, and verified wills. Local courthouses also settled disputes among residents. The Justices of the Peace appointed local officers of the court, including the sheriff. One can understand why Thomas Polk wanted Charlotte to be in southern Mecklenburg County, where the Scots Irish were especially strong.

The growing wealth of Mecklenburg's elite notwithstanding, deep-seated resentments against the Royal government continued to exist among the Scots-Irish. A particularly vexing issue was the status of the Presbyterian Church. Governor Tryon was most interested in strengthening the position of the Church of England in North Carolina. He pressured the colonial legislature to pass two acts that were galling to the Scots-Irish. The first assured that tax money would flow to the Anglicans. The second, the Marriage Act of 1766, denied non-Anglican ministers the right to legally bind couples in matrimony. To be legitimate, couples had to pay a fee to the Church of England. The Presbyterians of Mecklenburg County spoke out vigorously against the Marriage Act.

The Mecklenburg Scots-Irish felt slighted again when they petitioned the colonial legislature in 1770 to establish a seminary in Charlotte. This was the first institution of higher learning south of William and Mary. They proposed to name it Queens College. North Carolina Statutes forbade the creation of dissenting schools. Governor Tryon supported the petition because of Mecklenburg's help in subduing the Regulator movement in Orange County in 1770, but the King disallowed the establishment of the school. It closed in 1773.

A dramatic manifestation of defiance of Royal authority by the Scots-Irish of Mecklenburg County happened in May 1775. Indeed, this series of incidents has become a matter of enduring controversy, at least in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. It is a fascinating story. Allegedly, a group of leading citizens of Mecklenburg County drafted and signed the

so-called [Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence](#) on May 20, 1775, and were therefore the first colonists to break their legal ties to Great Britain -- fourteen months before the Continental Congress met in Philadelphia and approved Thomas Jefferson's more famous Declaration of Independence that we celebrate every Fourth of July.

It was not until 1819, forty-four years after the alleged signing of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, when Virginia and Massachusetts were arguing over which of the two states had been first to break with Great Britain, that U.S. Senator Nathaniel Macon and William Davidson, the latter representing the Mecklenburg County district in the U.S. House of Representatives, put forth the astounding claim that the Scots-Irish of North Carolina were the first to declare their independence. Thomas Jefferson dismissed it as a hoax "until positive and solemn proof of its authenticity shall be produced."

Even its staunchest defenders admitted that no copy of the actual document existed. "Nearly all of my father's papers," declared a son of John McKnitt Alexander, "were burned in the spring of 1800." A document was supplied, but it was John McKnitt Alexander's account of what transpired in May 1775, not the actual Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence itself. To bolster their case, supporters of the so-called "Meck Dec" interviewed several signers, all of whom had attained advanced age by the time they were asked to search their memories. These elderly gentlemen, mostly Presbyterians, all agreed that they had attended a meeting in May 1775 but could not recall the exact date. William Polk, son of Thomas Polk, published a pamphlet containing these testimonials and declared the matter settled. In 1825, a large crowd gathered in Charlotte on the 50th anniversary of the alleged signing of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence and heard it read by Reverend Humphrey Hunter of the Presbyterian Church. What further proof could one want?

Trouble for the backers of the "Meck Dec" surfaced in 1838. An archivist uncovered an article in the July 12, 1775, issue of a Massachusetts newspaper that reproduced a series of resolutions that had reportedly been drawn up in Charlotte on May 31, 1775. Unlike the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, [the Mecklenburg Resolves](#) expressed the hope that the exercise of independent authority by officials of Mecklenburg County would end if Great Britain would "resign its unjust and arbitrary pretensions with respect to America." This was a remarkable display of defiance, but it was not an unequivocal pronouncement that the people of Mecklenburg County were "free and independent." Any doubt about the authenticity of the Mecklenburg Resolves disappeared in 1847, when scholars found the entire text published in the *South Carolina Gazette* of June 13, 1775. No such contemporary verification of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence has ever come to light.

The fact that the leaders of Mecklenburg County backed a conditional separation from British rule just eleven days after they allegedly declared their independence seems oxymoronic. Also, none of the participants who was interviewed years after the dramatic events of May 1775 made any mention of the Mecklenburg Resolves. One cannot help but wonder whether these aged men remembered the meeting where the Mecklenburg Resolves was signed, not the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence.

Defenders of the authenticity of the "Meck Dec" have labored tirelessly to prove their case. They note that a diarist in the Moravian settlement at Salem, now part of Winston Salem, recorded in June, 1775 that the citizens of Mecklenburg County had "unseated all Magistrates and put Select Men in their places." The bearer of this news to the Moravians was Captain James Jack, who did deliver a document or documents to North Carolina representatives to the Continental Congress then meeting in Philadelphia. The question is what did Captain Jack have in his satchel, the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, the

Mecklenburg Resolves, or both? The preponderance of evidence suggests that it was the Mecklenburg Resolves. Captain Jack, for example, traveled through Salisbury when the court was in session in early June, 1775. The timing of his arrival in Rowan County is congruous with May 31st, not May 20th when the Mecklenburg Declaration of independence was purportedly signed.

Supporters of the legitimacy of the "Meck Dec" have pointed with special pride to the fact that the date " May 20, 1775," appears on the North Carolina flag. But politicians, not historians, put it there. On May 20, 1861, North Carolina seceded from the United States of America and became part of the Confederate States of America. The State Convention put both dates on the state flag to underscore its contention that the same "opposition to tyranny" that had produced the American Revolution also gave rise to the Civil War. The date "May 20, 1861" was removed from the state flag in 1885, but "May 20, 1775" was retained.

According to Chalmers Davidson, Professor of History and later archivist at Davidson College, Archibald Henderson provided the strongest evidence for the authenticity of the "Meck Dec." A member of the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Henderson launched his campaign in 1919. He calculated that the news of the Battle of Lexington outside Boston had arrived in Charlotte on May 19th, the date when the heads of Mecklenburg militia units and other leaders had supposedly gathered to consider an appropriate course of action in light of this auspicious news and the day preceding the signing of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. "The evidence is as good that it did happen as that it didn't happen," Chalmers Davidson told this writer in an interview in the 1980s.

Backers of the "Meck Dec." were overjoyed in 1905 when *Colliers Magazine* published what purported to be a facsimile of the June 3, 1775, edition of the *Cape Fear Mercury* of Wilmington, N.C. There for everybody to see was a contemporary reference to the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. Definitive proof seemed at hand. "Here at last was the contemporary documentation that skeptics and scoffers had been demanding for years," writes Richard N. Current in his 1977 article on the "Meck Dec." in the *North Carolina Historical Review*. Supposedly found in a trunk of a diplomat who had stolen it, the issue of the newspaper turned out to be hoax. Alas, there was still no definitive proof of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence.

The controversy over the "Meck Dec." is unending. Despite solid evidence produced against it by a distinguished list of scholars, including Charles Phillips, James C. Welling, William Henry Hoyt, and R. D. W. Connor, supporters of the genuineness of the document are unyielding. Dr. Edward S. Perzel of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, a disbeliever, knows what it is like to be a skeptic. "This is very, very serious to a lot of people here," he declared. "When they figure out who I am, they're just not nice."

The residents of Mecklenburg County have held many May 20th festivals over the years to mark the alleged signing of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. The largest was the Centennial Anniversary in 1875. As reported by one source, 40,000 people gathered in an around the Square at Trade and Tryon Streets to observe a parade, fireworks, horse races, a hundred-gun salute, and cockfights between North and South Carolina birds. Former Governor William Alexander Graham, whose father claimed to have seen the events of May 19 and May 20, 1775, gave the principal address. Graham insisted that the "oral evidence of living witnesses" provided sufficient proof for any fair-minded person. President Woodrow Wilson participated in the festivities on May 20, 1916. President Dwight Eisenhower came in 1954. The most recent grand celebration of the "Meck Dec." occurred on the occasion of its Bicentennial in 1975. A local citizen was hired to impersonate Captain James Jack. The

hapless fellow was even dispatched up I-85 on horseback to carry the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence to Philadelphia. What a ride!

Every May 20th a small group of dedicated citizens from the Mecklenburg Historical Association, the local historic society, gathers at the monument that was erected in 1898 in Uptown Charlotte by the defenders of the document. It is a poignant scene. Most Charlotteans drive by in their sleek automobiles and take no notice of what is transpiring. Someone reads the "Meck. Dec.," and a wreath is laid at the base of the obelisk. Then the faithful disperse and resume the routine of daily living, only to return for another brief ceremony 365 days later.

Let's make one thing clear. One cannot demonstrate conclusively that the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence is a fake. The dramatic events of May 19th and May 20th could have happened. Ultimately, it is a matter of faith, not proof. You believe it or you don't believe it. One cannot help but wonder, however, what interest there would be in proclaiming the authenticity of the "Meck Dec." if the British and Tories, the local supporters of King George, had prevailed in the American Revolutionary War instead of the other way around? Happily, such considerations are the responsibility of philosophers, not historians.

In this writer's opinion, the most unfortunate consequence of placing so much emphasis upon the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence is that little attention has been focused upon the Mecklenburg Resolves of May 31st. It was a bold and radical document that reflected the political beliefs that Alexander Craighead had planted and nurtured among the Scots-Irish of the Yadkin-Catawba territory. "The Presbyterians of Mecklenburg County," writes H. Beau Bowers in his M.A. Thesis at UNCC, "owed much to the Reverend Alexander Craighead and his unique mix of Old World Presbyterianism and New Side Theology." Josiah Martin, Royal Governor of North Carolina, opined that the resolves "surpass (sic.) all the horrid and treasonable publications that the inflammatory spirits of this Continent have yet produced." "The Mecklenburg Resolves placed its supporters at the forefront of colonial resistance in 1775," Bowers maintains. North Carolina's delegates to the Continental Congress regarded the Mecklenburg Resolves as excessive and "premature" and decided not to reveal its contents to their compatriots meeting in Philadelphia.

There is no controversy concerning Mecklenburg County's pivotal role in the American Revolutionary War. In 1780-1781 British and Tory troops invaded the Carolina hinterland and brought the war literally to Charlotte's doorstep. Indeed, one can reasonably contend that the most important events in Mecklenburg County from a national perspective occurred during those few fateful months in 1780 and 1781 when the success of the effort by the American colonies to defy British authority hung in the balance.

In 1778, a complex combination of considerations induced the British government to make the South the main arena of military operations. Uppermost in King George III's mind was the assumption that by sending a large army to Georgia and the Carolinas he could encourage the Tories to come out in large numbers. On December 29, 1778, Savannah fell to the redcoats; and Charleston suffered a similar fate on May 12, 1780. Charles Cornwallis, the newly-appointed commander of the British army in the South, was then instructed to take his troops inland and provide protection for the backers of the King. Among his subordinate officers was Banastre Tarleton, a highly aggressive commander of cavalry who inflicted a devastating and controversial defeat on Colonel Abraham Buford's Continental troops in the Waxhaws on May 29th.



Charles Cornwallis 1738-1805

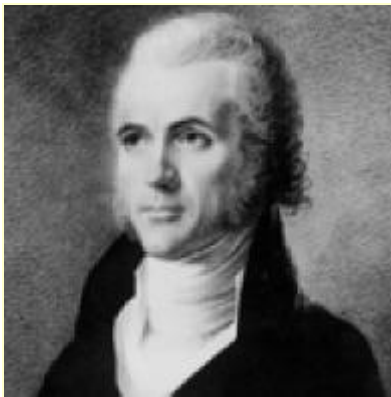
Any realistic expectations that the Patriots or Whigs could stop Cornwallis from having his way in the Carolina backcountry appeared to end on August 16th in the pine forests outside Camden, South Carolina, where Cornwallis and Tarleton overwhelmed General Horatio Gates's force in a bloody, frontal assault. There was no denying the enormity of the defeat. Sent to block the British advance and recapture Charleston, Gates had instead suffered a humiliating setback and had left his men behind to wander about in small groups with no instruction where to gather. Only about 700 dispirited Continentals, regular troops, finally joined Gates in Hillsborough, North Carolina.

The people of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County faced an ominous threat in the late summer and early fall of 1780. Regardless of their political leanings -- there were plenty of Tories and even more potential Tories in Charlotte and its environs -- local folks recognized that a powerful occupying force was about to come into their midst. It was one thing for local farmers to join with their neighbors in signing the Mecklenburg Resolves. It was quite something else for them to pick up their rifles and resist Cornwallis's army that was fast approaching from the southeast. No doubt many serious conversations were held in the scattered log homes of Mecklenburg County in those fateful weeks when everybody

anticipated the imminent arrival of the British army. The reasons for someone becoming a Whig or a Tory continued to be complex and highly personal.

Nathaniel Greene

Cornwallis and his 2300 men marched out of Camden on September 8, 1780. The initial British objective in North Carolina was Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, where numerous gristmills along its fast-flowing creeks would allow Cornwallis to replenish his supplies before proceeding on to Salisbury and eventually to Hillsborough. Opposing him was General William Lee Davidson, commander of the patriot militia in western North Carolina following the capture of General Griffith Rutherford at Camden. A 35-year-old former Indian fighter, Davidson had seen extensive service under General George Washington before returning to Rowan County in 1780. Determined to slow down the British advance, Davidson dispatched William R. Davie and a small force of mounted militiamen into the Waxhaws to torment the redcoats. Davie, a South Carolinian, did just that. At daylight on September 20th, he led his men on a daring strike at Wabab's Plantation in what is now Union County. The British army, however, moved inexorably toward Charlotte.



William R. Davie

Cornwallis reached Charlotte late in the morning of September 26, 1780. Davidson had ordered Davie's militia, assisted by local irregular troops commanded by Joseph Graham, for whom Graham Street in Uptown Charlotte is named, to fight a delaying action. Outnumbered about ten to one, Davie's small force of about 300 men looked southward down Tryon Street from the courthouse, then located in the middle of Charlotte, and waited for Cornwallis's redoubtable army to appear. Apprehension and disquietude must have permeated the scene.

According to Davie, Charlotte was a town containing "about twenty Houses built on two streets which cross (sic.) each other at right angles in the intersection of which stands the Court-House." Graham described the structure as "a frame building raised on eight brick pillars ten feet from the ground, which was the most elevated in the place." A rock wall some three and a half feet high extended between the pillars so that the local residents could use the ground beneath the courthouse as a marketplace.

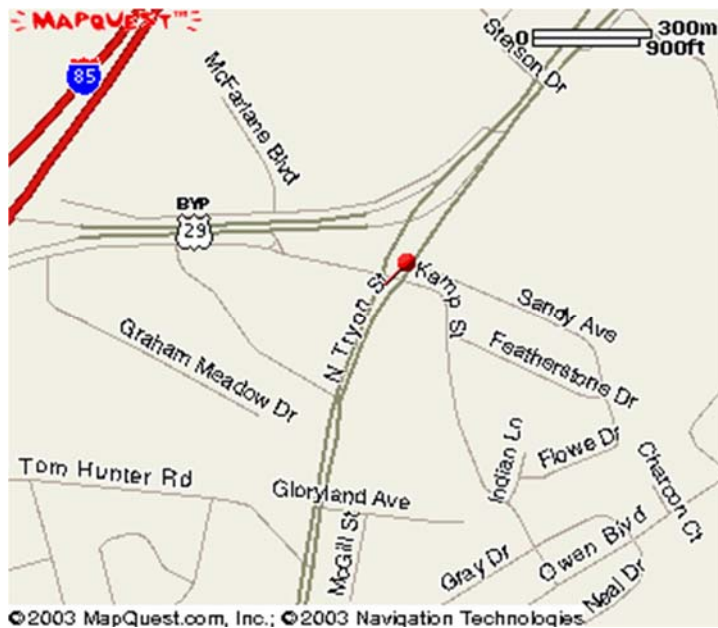
Davie placed some of his soldiers behind the rock wall beneath the courthouse and sent others down Tryon Street to hide among the fences, houses, and outbuildings to protect his flanks. It was not long before sentries rode into Charlotte with the news that the redcoats

and Tories were about to enter the town. The rolling of drums could be heard in the distance. The first to arrive were the green-coated cavalrymen of Tarleton's Legion. Tarleton was ill, so command of the unit fell to the rakish Major George Hanger . " . . . the legion was forming at the distance of three hundred yards with a front to fill the street, and the light infantry on the flank," Davie declared in his official report issued following the battle. Convinced that the patriot militia could be easily dislodged, Hanger ordered his men to gallop pell-mell toward the courthouse, swords swinging menacingly overhead. Davie instructed the militia to hold their fire until the last moment.

A sheet of flame announced the presence of the patriots behind the rock wall beneath the courthouse. Stunned by a well-executed volley, Hanger and his men turned back, leaving several horses writhing in agony in the street. A second attempt also failed. Davie was exultant. "They were again well received by the militia and galloped off in the utmost confusion," the patriot commander declared. Unable to protect his flanks against the sheer number of troops that Cornwallis could throw against him, Davie eventually had to order his militia to mount their horses and retreat northward on Tryon Street toward Salisbury. In keeping with the military tactics of the day, the Tory cavalry vigorously pursued the departing patriots in order to prevent them from forming another battle line and delivering an effective volley. The Tories caught up with George Locke, a young lad from Rowan County, swooped down upon and cut his body to pieces.



**Monument erected by the DAR, in remembrance of
fallen Revolutionary War soldier.**



A marker in the median of Tryon Street just south of its intersection with the connector road from I-85 commemorates Locke's death. Almost nobody knows that it is there. Joseph Graham, who commanded Davie's rear guard, was severely wounded. The patriots suffered five killed and six wounded in the Battle of Charlotte. The British reported their losses at twelve killed and wounded. Charlotte is the only town in North Carolina that had a Revolutionary War engagement fought in its very heart.

Charles Cornwallis and his army encamped in Charlotte from September 26th until October 12th. The British were not surprised when they found it to be an inhospitable place. "It was evident," said Tarleton, "and it had frequently been mentioned to the King's officers, that the counties of Mecklenburg and Rohan (sic.) were more hostile to England than any others in America." Davie and his militiamen continuously harassed the foraging parties that Cornwallis dispatched into the dense forests that surrounded Charlotte to gather food and supplies from local farms and grist mills. The British attempted in vain to win the support of the people of Mecklenburg County. Davie reported that a large contingent of redcoats and Tories marched "in the direction of the Catawba, near Tuckasegie Ford" According to the patriot commander, the enemy was "cajoling and flattering the people to take Paroles."

Cornwallis's efforts to pacify the local population were unsuccessful, causing the British to label Mecklenburg County a "Hornets' Nest." One particularly unpleasant episode for the redcoats and Tories occurred in the first week of October at McIntyre's Farm on Beatties Ford Road. Some 300 troops, marching toward a grist mill on Long Creek near Hopewell Presbyterian Church, were engaged in gathering livestock and farm produce along the way. "Some . . . horses were harnessed to the farm wagons, and parties began to load them with the various products of the fields," writes one scholar.

Local farmers had been warned of the approach of the enemy and were laying in ambush in the woods bordering the farm with rifles in hand. Incensed when the redcoats and Tories "shouted joyously amidst their plunder," the farmers opened fire on their unsuspecting victims and sent them scurrying back to Charlotte. "A large number of the dragoons were shot down," reported one observer. "The leading horses in the wagon were killed before they could ascend the hill." Militiamen followed the enemy most of the way back to town, taking

up position in the woods all along the way and making life miserable for the Cornwallis's soldiers.

A far greater calamity for the British happened on the afternoon of October 7, 1780, at the Battle of Kings Mountain about thirty miles southwest of Charlotte. Patrick Ferguson, an athletic man of slight build and one of the best professional soldiers in the British army, was killed and his entire force of some 900 men were shot dead or captured by a roughly equal contingent of Patriot militiamen. " . . . never was the trite apothegm *that the greatest events often proceed from little causes* more fatally confirmed than by the present check," said Henry Clinton , British commander in North America. The snorting hogs, circling buzzards, and howling wolves that infested the macabre hilltop the day after this horrific engagement sent a terrifying but unmistakable warning to many Loyalists who dared to take up arms for the King.

One important consequence of the major setback at Kings Mountain was that Cornwallis decided to retreat into South Carolina and await reinforcements from Charleston. He took his army to Winnsboro. The respite for the people of Mecklenburg County from the Revolutionary War was not long-lasting, however.

Nathanael Greene rode into Charlotte on December 2, 1780, and assumed command of the Continental Army of the South, which General Gates had recently brought to town. "The appearance of the troops was wretched beyond description, and their distress, on account of provisions, was little less than their sufferings for want of clothing and other necessities," Greene proclaimed. A former Quaker from Rhode Island and George Washington 's favorite subordinate, the new commander was also concerned about the lack of self-control he found among the soldiers in Charlotte. "General Gates had lost the confidence of the officers," Greene explained, "and the troops all their discipline, and they have been so addicted to plundering that they were a terror to the inhabitants." To demonstrate his resolve to restore proper comportment among his troops, Greene had a wayward soldier publicly hanged in the town square of Charlotte as an example to the others. "New lords, new laws," said one eyewitness.

In December 1780, an impressive coterie of combatants walked up the courthouse stairs in Charlotte, their swords clanking against the wooden risers. There was Colonel William Washington , second cousin of George Washington . Greene also conversed with Colonel John Eager Howard of Maryland and General Isaac Huger (pronounced "u-gee") of South Carolina. The most famous of Greene's subordinate officers at Charlotte was the volatile but unsurpassed tactician Brigadier General Daniel Morgan . A resident of the Virginia frontier, Morgan was a boisterous, coarse, irreverent, and rowdy backwoodsman. "Outsiders in particular found Morgan a dangerous man to cross," writes historian Don Higginbotham. In one "mass brawl" in a tavern near Winchester, Virginia., Morgan and his friends had overpowered their adversaries by "resorting to kicking, biting, and gouging."

After listening to the advice of his fellow officers, Greene sat at a table in the Mecklenburg County Courthouse in the heart of Charlotte and finalized his plan of military operations. He realized that his army could not remain in Mecklenburg County because troops from both sides had picked the countryside clean. Defying the dictum that one should never divide an army in the face of a superior enemy, Greene left Charlotte with the larger part of his army on December 16th and marched to a new camp just across the Pee Dee River from Cheraw, South Carolina. He placed the rest of his troops under the control of the always resourceful Morgan. The Old Wagoner led his soldiers out of Charlotte on December 20th and headed westward across the Catawba and Broad Rivers.

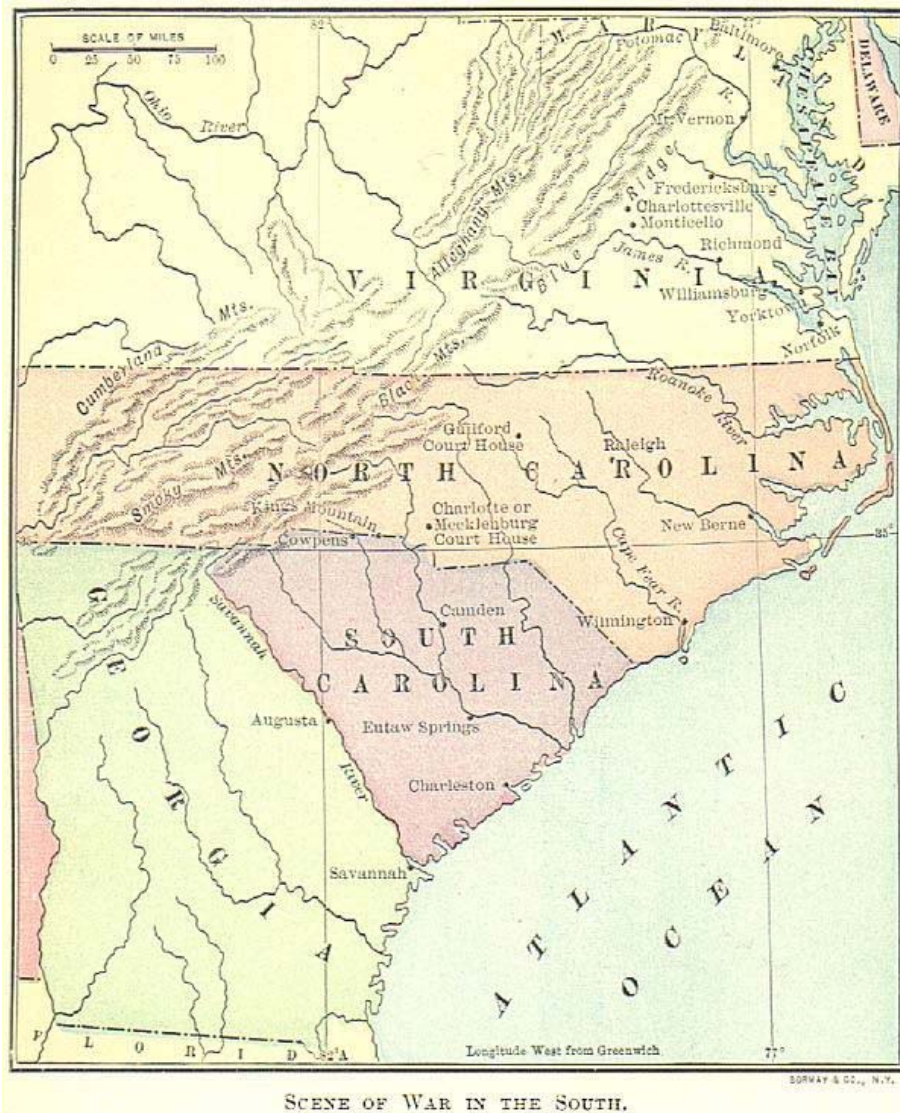
Morgan's troops won a decisive victory over a British and Tory army headed by Banastre Tarleton at Cowpens in upper South Carolina on January 17, 1781. Cornwallis then set out from Winnsboro in an effort to catch Morgan's troops before they could cross the Catawba and join up with Greene's soldiers who were retreating northward through Salisbury. The British marched through Lincoln County and reached Cowan's Ford at the opposite shore from Mecklenburg County shortly after Morgan and his men had reached the other side.

Nathanael Greene had ridden with an aide and two cavalymen through 120 miles of Tory-infested territory. He arrived in Morgan's camp on January 30, 1781. On the same day, the waters of the Catawba receded enough to allow Cornwallis to begin making plans to cross the river. Greene ordered William Lee Davidson to delay the British advance while Morgan and his troops dashed for Salisbury and the Trading Ford on the Yadkin River.

Joel Jetton, a patriot militiaman, awoke suddenly on the morning of February 1st at Cowan's Ford, when he heard the whinnying of horses and the sloshing of water somewhere out on the river. Grabbing his rifle, he ran to the edge of the water and peered into the misty half-light of dawn. Coming straight at him were three mounted British officers in resplendent scarlet and white uniforms and hundreds of redcoats. "The British! The British!" Jetton yelled as he scurried up the bank and awoke his startled compatriots. The militia opened fire, making the muddy waters of the Catawba turn red with British blood.

The gunfire caused General Davidson to rush to Cowan's Ford, where he began rallying the militia and organizing reinforcements. The British, who had now gained the shore in sufficient strength to deliver volleys, fired their muskets at the patriots. A musket ball penetrated Davidson's chest, killing him instantly. Thereafter, any semblance of resistance on the part of the militia evaporated, as young and old alike fled for their lives. The British officially claimed that they suffered three killed and thirty-six wounded at Cowan's Ford. The actual figures were probably considerably higher. "A great number of the British dead were found on Thompson's fish dam, and in his trap, and numbers lodged on brush. . . . the river stunk with dead carcasses, the British could not have lost less than one hundred men," claimed one militiaman.

Davidson's ultimate sacrifice paid great dividends for Greene and Morgan. It gave the patriot army the critical head start it needed to reach the Yadkin at the Trading Ford, seven miles beyond Salisbury, and get across the river in boats before the first elements of Cornwallis's army arrived there on the night of February 3rd. Frustrated because the Yadkin River was out of its banks and because he had no boats to cross it, Cornwallis, who got to the Trading Ford on February 4th, could do little more than fire an occasional artillery shell at Greene's camp, which he could clearly make out with an unaided eye on the opposite shore of the Yadkin.



Mecklenburg County was no longer to be affected directly by the American Revolutionary War. As the tide of battle surged back into South Carolina and eventually into Virginia, where Cornwallis was entrapped at Yorktown and forced to surrender his army to General George Washington on October 19, 1781, the farmers of the Carolina Piedmont returned to the performance of their daily chores. They fed chickens. They shucked corn. They slaughtered hogs. Even the formal end of hostilities and recognition of the United States of America by Great Britain on September 3, 1783, did little to alter the humdrum lifestyles of the residents of Mecklenburg County.

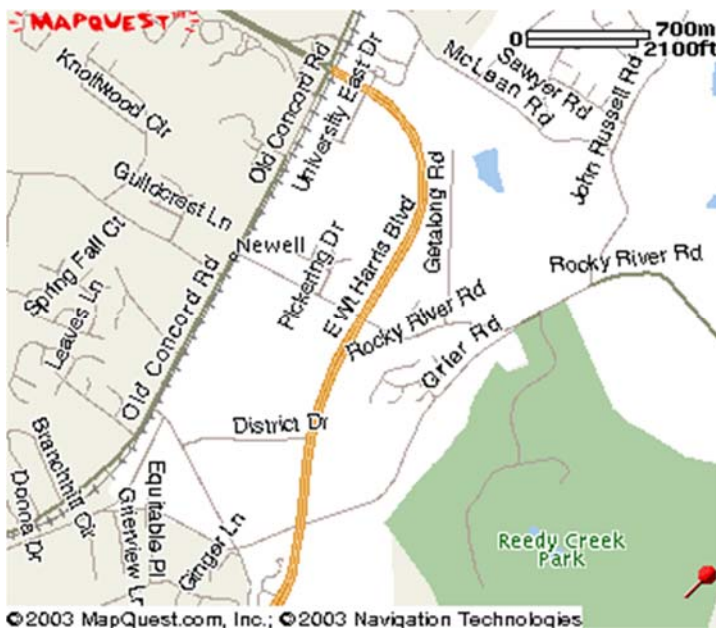
The great majority of the early settlers of Mecklenburg County scratched out a meager living in the fields they labored to keep free from unwanted trees. Their humble log dwellings have long succumbed to insects or the hands of man. These subsistence farmers grew what they ate and made what they wore. The staple crop they raised on the land they owned or rented was corn, either eaten directly or indirectly after it had been used as fodder for the animals, mainly pigs. Some farmers did raise livestock that they turned loose to graze on the open range of the Piedmont and herded periodically for drives to coastal markets. Some corn was distilled into whiskey and sold. But most settlers knew nothing about commercial

agriculture. They were poor and malnourished. Infectious diseases like measles, influenza, whooping cough, and dysentery could easily take anyone away. Go to the cemeteries of the oldest Presbyterian Churches in Mecklenburg County, such as Providence, Steele Creek, Hopewell, Sugaw Creek, and Philadelphia, and you will encounter the numerous graves of infants and of women who died in childbirth. The "good old days" were not so good.



There were a few people of considerable wealth living in Mecklenburg County in the Colonial era. One was Hezekiah Alexander, whose imposing rock house erected in 1774 off what is now Shamrock Drive is the most impressive remnant of the local built or man-made environment of the Colonial era. The Hezekiah Alexander House is now administered by the [Charlotte Museum of History](#). In 1767, Alexander, a blacksmith by trade, sold his property in Pennsylvania and moved to Mecklenburg County, where he already owned land and where he had influential relatives. Recognizing that more and more settlers were moving into the Yadkin-Catawba territory, Alexander employed his sons and nephews as teamsters and had them haul Mecklenburg's cash crops, mainly flour, cattle, furs, and pinkroot (a drug used to treat hookworm), to Philadelphia, where they were traded for manufactured goods and slaves. The return of the wagons would assure Alexander a hefty profit. Alexander's slaves were also essential for his business enterprises.

Men like Hezekiah Alexander and Thomas Polk represented a small but influential elite of artisan-planters in early Mecklenburg County. In addition to farming, members of this class built mills and ferries, operated taverns, and financed purchases by their neighbors. Slaves were a symbol of social status on the colonial frontier. Thomas Polk and his kin owned eighty-one slaves. The largest slaveowner was Adam Alexander, who held 55 people in bondage.



Location Of Robinson Rock House Ruin

A smaller and lesser known rock house is now a ruin deep in the woods at Reedy Creek Park. It is the John Robinson House, possibly built as early as 1783. Another old home, also constructed in the 1780s, is the Kerr House on Arlington Church Road in eastern Mecklenburg County, which has been substantially altered. Its initial owner was a veteran of the American Revolutionary War, as was Major John Davidson, who erected an imposing brick home, called Rural Hill, on Neck Road in northwestern Mecklenburg County in 1788. The house at Rural Hill burned in 1886, and only the ghost-like columns of its once-grand portico remain. Tradition holds that General William Lee Davidson spent the night before the Battle of

Cowan's Ford at Davidson's first house at Rural Hill. Hugh Torance, a peddler from Salisbury, married a Revolutionary War widow and built a log home on Gilead Road in 1779. It is now part of the Hugh Torance House and Store, a public historic site. More about him later.

The largest landholder in Colonial Mecklenburg was Thomas Polk, whose house stood on the northeastern corner of the courthouse square in Charlotte. "Polk's name appears throughout the deed records for the county, buying and selling tracts that would eventually amount to a personal holding of over 15,000 acres," writes historian H. Beau Bowers. Like most of Mecklenburg's elite, Polk also owned slaves. "In a backcountry not noted for large-scale agriculture or the presence of bonded labor," Bowers asserts, "the possession of slaves stood out, almost as noticeably as stone houses, as one indicator of an individual's wealth."

The members of Mecklenburg County's elite also dominated the political and cultural life of the community. This was true both before and after the American Revolution. As immigrants continued to flood into the Yadkin-Catawba territory, pushing the population of Mecklenburg County upward to 11,395 in 1790, the wealthier residents made sure that the social system they dominated remained intact. Hezekiah Alexander was an elder at Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church. His cousin Abraham Alexander, who was also a large slaveholder in the county, was a founder of [Steele Creek Presbyterian Church](#). Hezekiah's brother John McKnitt Alexander, whose copy of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence allegedly burned in 1800, was an elder at Hopewell Presbyterian Church and a member of the State legislature. Robert Irwin, an ally of the Alexanders and the Polks, was an elder at Steele Creek Presbyterian Church and a State senator from 1778 until 1784.



Grave of Thomas Polk

Old Settlers Cemetery

Mecklenburg did receive a famous visitor in 1791. He was General and former President George Washington. Arriving in the middle of the afternoon of May 28th, Washington was on an extended tour of the South. "During the late war, if my information be correct, the inhabitants were true to the cause of their country, and brave in its defense," the former President told a member of the party that was sent out to meet him. Lots of folks gathered in Charlotte to greet their illustrious guest. So many came that not a few had to sleep in their

covered wagons. Thomas Polk , the wealthiest man in town, hosted a big party in the yard of his Federal style house on the Square. Washington spent the night in an Inn on West Trade Street operated by a Captain Cook .

Washington departed from Charlotte the next morning and began his journey to Salisbury. The festivities of the previous day notwithstanding, the President was evidently not impressed with Charlotte. Writing in his diary, he called it "a trifling place." Maybe it was, but two events of the 1790s, one national in scope and the other regional, were to inaugurate a period of unprecedented economic growth in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. One was the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney in 1793. The other was the discovery of gold by a teenager named Conrad Reed in 1799.

Chapter Three

Cotton and Slaves

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The Stafford Plantation Slave Cabin is the only known domicile in Mecklenburg County in which slaves once lived.

Popular images of the Old South are clothed in romantic myths. Some people draw their inspiration from movies like "Gone With The Wind" or "Song Of The South." To their way of thinking, Dixie was a land filled with stately, white mansions, with luxuriant magnolia trees and manicured lawns, with chivalrous gentlemen wearing spiffy suits, with elegant damsels in sweeping gowns, with seemingly endless fields of cotton, and, of course, with obedient, content, devoted slaves.

Others see the Old South in darker hues. Largely because of its being intertwined with the institution of human bondage, the ante-bellum South for folks of this persuasion was a region filled almost exclusively with exploitation and unfairness. Images of cruel slave masters twirling their mustaches as they prepare to flog their bondsmen or take sexual advantage of their demure bondswomen are uppermost in the imaginations of the most vitriolic critics of the ante-bellum South. The

reality of the Old South, however, was more complex, subtler, and more muted than either of these caricatures suggests.

One fact is undeniable. Slavery was a fundamental component of the social hierarchy of pre-Civil War Mecklenburg County. In 1860, slaves composed approximately 40 percent of the local population (6800 of 17,000), making Mecklenburg County one of the highest in terms of the number of bondspeople in the North Carolina Piedmont. This writer encounters many individuals who wrongly believe that Mecklenburg County was never part of the Cotton Kingdom of the Old South. It most assuredly was. Indeed, some of the most imposing plantation houses in all of the North Carolina Piedmont are located in Mecklenburg County. Each bears incontestable testimony to the fundamental importance of slavery to this region's ante-bellum way of life.

Anyone who doubts the impact of the institution of human bondage upon Charlotte-Mecklenburg in the years before and during the Civil War need only examine the historical record. In Charlotte, for example, where 44 percent of the people were slaves in 1850, town officials passed ordinances that closely circumscribed the behavior of blacks. Bondspeople were not allowed to be out on the streets after 9:30 P.M. without written permission of their owners. They could not buy or sell alcohol or even smoke a pipe or a cigar in public. Slaves could not leave their plantations without a pass or assemble without the permission of their owners. Slaves could not hold worship services and were forced to go to the white man's churches. A town guard roamed the streets of Charlotte from 9:00 P.M. until dawn and had the authority to "visit all suspected Negro houses," including those occupied by free blacks, most of whom were artisans. Any black who defied these ordinances was harshly punished. "A severe lashing awaited blacks found guilty of breaking any of these ordinances," writes historian Janette Greenwood.



This is a slave collar. The inscription reads: "Levy M. Rankin, Dealer Of Fine Mules & Negroes. Charlotte, N.C. 1853."

There is no denying that the institution of human bondage rested ultimately upon coercion. The great majority of whites, who prided themselves on having been the first to declare themselves independent from British rule in 1775, had no qualms about enslaving their black brethren. Slavery was entirely legal and protected by the U.S. Constitution. The United States, despite outlawing the importation of slaves in 1808, witnessed a massive expansion of the institution of human bondage in the 75 years following the American Revolutionary War. There were 697,897 slaves in the United States in 1790. The number had increased to 3,953,760 in 1860.

Bondspeople represented a major financial investment on the part of their owners, so it is not surprising that their masters exerted great effort to capture runaways. In 1860, the average sales price for a healthy, young bondsmen was equivalent to the price of an average house. Admittedly with deflated Confederate dollars, slaves sold in Charlotte in August 1864 brought the following prices. "Boy 18 years old \$5,150, boy 11 years \$4,100, girl 16 years \$4,300, woman 35 years \$3,035, girl 16 years (very likely) \$5,000, boy 21 years \$5,200, man and wife and 2 children aged 2 and 4 years (the man with one eye) \$6,500."

Advertisements seeking assistance in capturing escapees appeared frequently in Charlotte newspapers during the Civil War.

\$300 Reward.

I will give the above reward to any person who will take up my boy SAM, if captured

without serious injury and delivered to me or confined in Jail so that I can get him. He has been lying out over twelve months ranging from near Charlotte to Reedy Creek. He is 22 years old, medium size, and has a scar on his forehead. Address me at Charlotte, N.C.

Feb. 24, 1863

Jno. Wolfe

\$20 REWARD

Runaway from my plantation, nine miles from Charlotte, on the Statesville Railroad, a negro boy named DANIEL. The boy is about 22 years old, five feet one or two inches high, right or left foot cut off by a railroad car, and walks with a stick. I will give the above reward if the boy is brought to my plantation or confined in any jail so that I can get him. The boy was raised in Petersburg, Va., and was purchased in Richmond last winter.

Aug. 24, 1863

R. P. Poindexter

One slave house, the Stafford Plantation Slave Cabin, survives in Mecklenburg County. The physical record of human bondage is also present in several slave cemeteries. Perhaps the most evocative is the McCoy Slave Burial Ground off McCoy Road just east of Beatties Ford Road. A rock monument, most likely erected in the 1920s, contains the following inscription.

ERECTED BY

ALBERT McCOY'S

CHILDREN TO HIS SLAVES

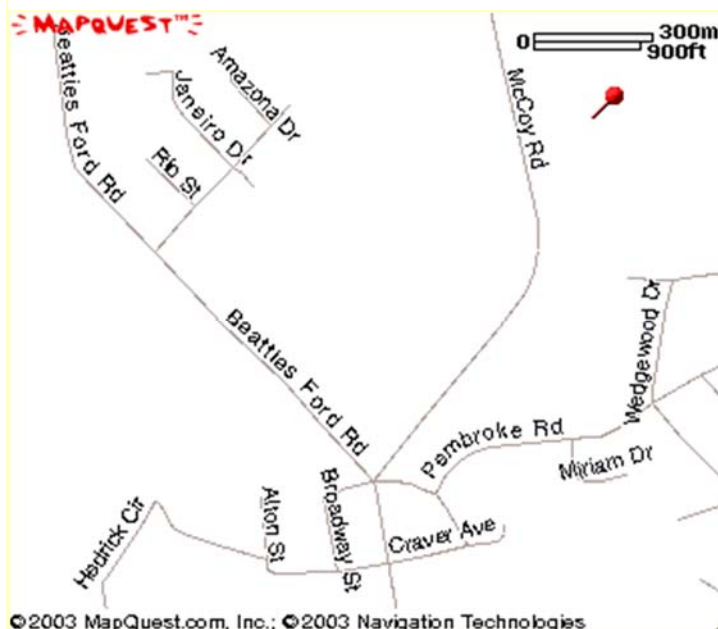
UNCLE JIM AND HIS WIFE

LIZZIE

UNCLE CHARLES & FAMILY



Some visitors to this site are offended by the marker's language. They consider it to be paternalistic and demeaning. Others are touched by what they regard as a gesture of gratitude on the part of the descendants of the slave owner. Regardless, there is certainly no question about the sincerity of the McCoy family's motives. They remember Jim and Lizzie with great affection and have even handed down one of the many stories Lizzie used to tell the McCoy children.



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Location of McCoy Slave Cemetery

Here is one of Lizzie's favorite tales. It's about a little boy who had three dogs -- Junga, German, and Ring. To entice the dogs to run to him, the boy would play this song on his horn: "Tu to, my Junga, Tu tu my German, Poor Ring, long time a comin', they want me to die, they want me to die. " One day the boy's mother told him to lock the dogs in the smokehouse and take two bags of wheat to the mill to get the contents ground into flour. After meeting and talking with a squirrel, a possum, and a coon, the boy encountered the "Old Bad Man," who grabbed the little boy and carried him into the

forest and chained his arms and legs to a wall in his house. "Human bones were scattered all around the room and a large stone sharpening wheel sat in the middle," Lizzie would tell her enthralled audience.

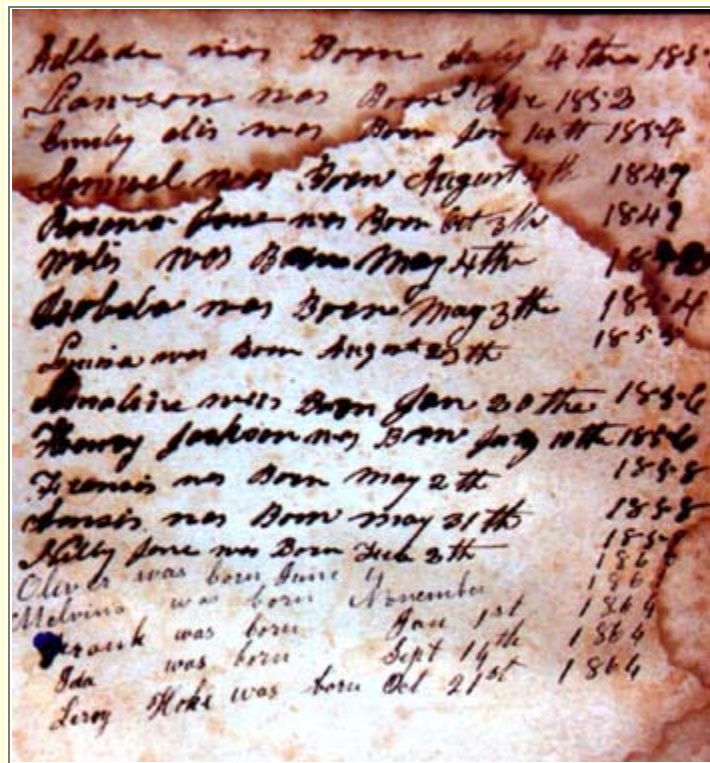
Then the "Old Bad Man" took out a knife and asked the little boy if he had one wish before he died. The little boy said that he wanted to play a tune on his horn. "Tu to, my Junga, Tu tu my German, Poor Ring, long time a comin', they want me to die, they want me to die. " The loyal canines, Lizzie explained, responded as expected. They dug their way out of the smokehouse, scampered to their master, and ate the "Old Bad Man."

The [Neely Slave Cemetery](#) is another poignant reminder of the days when human bondage held sway in Mecklenburg County. It is situated in a small grove of trees in an office park near Carowinds Amusement Park in the Steele Creek community. Thomas Neely , who had arrived in southwestern Mecklenburg in 1754 and who owned fewer than ten slaves at the time of his death in 1795, was a generous, kind-hearted, and compassionate master. He made special provisions in his will for the welfare of his chattel labor. He stipulated that "our negro Joe . . . to be taught to read" and wanted his son to give "our negro wench Susy two days every week for the purpose of providing herself in clothing." Neely ordered that the "negro child Dinah . . .to be learned to read," and even insisted that "none of my legatees may sell any of my negroes out of the family under penalty of losing their inheritance."

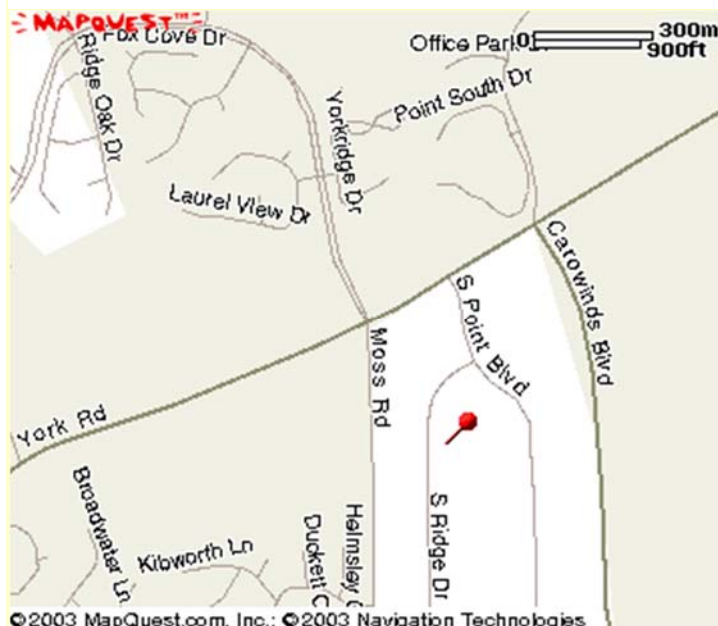
Sarah Frew Davidson , the mistress at The Grove Plantation, the home of her father William Davidson, encouraged some of her slaves to become literate. Her motive was religious. "After tea attended to the instruction of our young servants," Sarah recorded in her journal on February 7, 1837. "Being much troubled and perplexed relative to my duty on this subject and believing that religious instruction can not be well communicated without some knowledge of letters, about six weeks ago I commenced learning them to read."

Slaves in the South placed great emphasis upon performing "a good burial," because death was an act of liberation, a breaking of the chains of bondage. "The slave funeral was at once a 'religious ritual, a major social event, and a community pageant,' drawing upon a mixture of cherished traditions," explains historian Emily Ramsey. Customs brought from Africa mixed with habits learned on the plantation to produce a dramatic amalgam of funerary traditions. "After the death of a slave, a coffin would usually be made by a slave carpenter while the body was laid out on a cooling board" writes Ramsey. "Since a corpse would decay quickly in the stifling Southern heat, slaves adopted the practice of sitting up all night to guard the body from prowling animals, often 'singing and praying through the night.'"

Typically, the funeral began after sunset. A procession of mourners, carrying torches to light the pathway, would leave the slave houses and proceed across the fields and meadows toward the burial ground, which was usually located in a far corner of the plantation. The coffin and the pallbearers would go first, followed by the dead person's family, then the master and his family, and finally the members of the slave community. Mournful spirituals accompanied the entire proceedings, and sobbing and lamentations were acceptable behavior throughout the ceremony. Simple fieldstones mark the burial sites in the Neely Slave Cemetery . The ground is covered with periwinkle. Archeologists have identified 42 graves.



The Neely Family Bible reveals a lot about the nature of the personal relationship that existed between the Neely family and their bondsmen and bondswomen. John Starr Neely, the last member of the family to own chattel laborers, meticulously recorded the birth date of all his slaves who were born on the farm in the 1850s and 1860s. "Louisa was born August 25th, 1854," Neely inscribed. "Henry Jackson was born July 10th, 1856."



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Location of Neely Slave Cemetery

One of the most confounding aspects of the institution of human bondage was its capriciousness. Masters were in total control and could distribute rewards or punishments as they saw fit. Indeed, their influence extended even beyond death. George Elliot, a Mecklenburg County planter who died in 1804, stipulated in his will that two of his slaves would be set free. "For the many faithful, honest, and meritorious labors and services which I have received for near forty years from my honest slaves . . . Tom and Bet, I hereby liberate them and each of them from slavery." He gave Tom and Bet money and even the use of part of his plantation for their lifetimes. The same master, however, withheld freedom from his other slaves and gave them instead to members of his family. "I will give and bequeath to my son Richard Elliot one Negro boy named Zena, to him, his heirs and assigns forever," George's will proclaimed. "I will give and bequeath to my daughter Jane Dun, to her, her heirs and assigns one Negro girl named Patsey forever."



The largest known surviving slave cemetery in Mecklenburg County was once part of the Alexander Plantation on Mallard Creek Church Road. It contains more than seventy graves. Sadly, it is now situated in a gated apartment community and is not easily accessible. This writer first visited the [Alexander Slave Burial Ground](#) in the mid-

1970s with William Tasse Alexander , a direct descendant of the slave owners. We walked through bramble and thicket to reach the hallowed spot. Rows of rock-marked graves amid a lush blanket of periwinkle told us that we had arrived. Standing near the middle of the cemetery was an inscribed tombstone erected after the Civil War by the children of former slaves. "Our Father & Mother. Soloman Alexander . Died May 18, 1864. Aged 64 Years. Violet Alexander . Died Aug. 10, 1888. Aged 83 Years."



This marker is on the fence surrounding the W. T. Alexander Slave Burial Ground



Location of W. T. Alexander Slave Cemetery

The system of human bondage that held sway in the Old South is obviously repugnant from the perspective of the prevailing values of today. However, one should consider slavery within the context of the time in which it existed. While it is undeniable that some bondspeople were whipped and otherwise mistreated, others were treated quite well, such as those who belonged to John Starr Neely or William Tasse Alexander. The great grandparents of a descendant of some of the bondsmen and bondswomen buried in the Alexander Slave Burial Ground told William Tasse

Alexander that the Alexanders were kind and fostered close-knit slave-non-slave relationships. The Alexanders bought shoes for their slaves, allowed them to visit other plantations, and even permitted them to marry bondsmen and bondswomen who lived elsewhere. Do not forget that Sarah Frew Davidson taught the slave children on her plantation to read and write.



Sugar Creek Academy (1837)

It is also worth noting that slaves were not alone in being beaten in ante-bellum Mecklenburg County. Early nineteenth century disciplinary customs dictated that unruly white youngsters be whipped. White parents had no compunctions about beating their children. Indeed, their children expected to be whipped -- often and severely. "Spare the rod and spoil the child" was a popular dictum of the day. There is a small brick building near the intersection of Sugar Creek Road and North Tryon Street. It was once a school. The sons of slave owners started coming here in 1837 to prepare for higher education. The first full-time teacher was Robert I. McDowell, an honor graduate of Hampton-Sydney College. He would have readily whipped any student who deviated from accepted norms of behavior in the classroom.

The evidence is clear. As a labor system, slavery was fundamental to the operations of the economic system that brought great wealth to some residents of Mecklenburg County in the first half of the nineteenth century. The cotton gin, invented by Eli Whitney in 1793, enabled farmers to ship about twelve times as much cotton to market than they could before, and the world price decreased by approximately one half. This meant that industrious individuals who owned substantial amounts of land and the requisite labor supply could increase their annual income by 600 percent. "The machine allowed cotton to be cheaply cleaned so that it could be spun into thread. All over the South a plantation economy quickly developed to produce short-staple cotton to fill the new demand," historian Tom Hanchett explains. In 1790, the United States produced about 3,000 bales of cotton. The figure increased to 178,000 in 1810 and ballooned to more than 4 million bales on the eve of the Civil War.

The planters (anyone owning 20 or more slaves) and prosperous farmers had a virtual stranglehold on political influence in North Carolina. A white man had to own 50 acres of land to be able to vote for State senators and 100 acres of land to serve in the legislature. 85 percent of the members of the General Assembly were slave owners in

1860, while 72 percent of the white families in North Carolina owned no bondspeople. Free blacks were totally excluded from the electoral process after 1835.

Oligarchy held sway at the local level as well. The most powerful County officials, the Justices of the Peace, were recommended by the local delegation to the State legislature and appointed by the governor, not elected by the people. Justices of the Peace constituted a court that set the tax rate, decided where roads were to be built, made provisions for education and poor relief, settled boundary disputes, and rendered judgments in law suits. "It was a cozy system," writes historian Paul D. Escott in his book, *Many Excellent People. Power and Privilege in North Carolina 1850-1900*.

Not surprisingly, the most successful of Mecklenburg's cotton farmers made their enhanced economic status known by building fancy, new houses. These ante-bellum plantation mansions still adorn the Mecklenburg landscape. "The model for much of the architecture of the early nineteenth century was directly or indirectly that of ancient Greece and Rome," one scholar asserts. The Federal style was the most popular. Devised by the Adam brothers in Great Britain and sometimes called the Adam style, buildings of this genre most commonly have small entry porches, windows aligned horizontally and vertically in symmetrical rows, cornices decorated with tooth-like dentils, side-gabled roofs, and semi-circular or elliptical fanlights.



The **W. T. Alexander House**, most likely built between 1820 and 1825, is one of Mecklenburg County's finer Federal style plantation houses.

An excellent example of the Federal style is Rosedale, Sarah Frew Davidson's home at 3427 North Tryon Street in Charlotte. Built shortly after 1800 and for many years the centerpiece of the William Davidson Plantation, Rosedale has exquisite interior appointments. "Adamesque mantels, cornices, and ornamental blinds exhibit a correctness unique in Mecklenburg County, where vernacular interpretations of Adamesque interior detail were more usual in houses of the Federal period," writes Charlotte architect Jack O. Boyte. Other imposing Federal style houses in Mecklenburg

County include Latta Place , [Oak Lawn](#) , [White Oaks](#) , the W. T. Alexander House and Holly Bend .



Cedar Grove

The grandest Federal style house in Mecklenburg County is Cedar Grove . It is part of a series of structures on the Torance Plantation on Gilead Road near Huntersville. These buildings illustrate how the local built or man-made environment of the late 18th and early 19th centuries evolved in response to changing economic conditions and practices. Hugh Torance , a peddler originally from Salisbury, erected a humble log home on this land in 1779 but had to wait until Cornwallis's British and Tory army marched away from Mecklenburg County in 1781 before he could move in. Soon thereafter, Torance married Isabella Falls , whose first husband had been killed in the American Revolutionary War. Isabella and Hugh Torance had a single son, James, who was born in 1784.

Hugh Torance made his livelihood mainly from farming. He struggled during the early years to eke out an adequate living. After the invention of the cotton gin, however, Hugh began to prosper. His wealth enabled him to transform his home into an imposing two-story Federal style house in 1796. If you visit the Hugh Torance House, you will notice that it has two chimneys. One is built of rock and the other of brick. The rock chimney is the older and was on the western end of the original log cabin. The brick chimney dates from 1796, when the front of the house was reoriented to face west.

Hugh Torance and his family vacated his first abode on the Torance Plantation in 1800 and set up housekeeping in a larger brick home he built next door. James, his son, had been living with an uncle in Salisbury and attending school but returned to the plantation in 1805. He established a store in his father and mother's old house. Again, by visiting the Torance House you will see a one-story addition that extends eastward

from the main block of the structure. That is where James Torance operated his mercantile business.



Torance House and Store

The account books from James Torance's store have been passed down over the generations. They provide a fascinating glimpse into the lifestyles of the people of northern Mecklenburg County in the early 1800s. "Debts at the store were often settled in the fall with cotton, and some customers paid by freighting cotton and farm produce from the store to Camden and Charleston," says historian Christina Wright. "But Mecklenburg," Wright continues, "was still the frontier; settlers were still trading in fur and indigo, and buying powder and flints, as late as the 1820s." James did sell an impressive array of goods from his store, including farm implements, medicine, spinning wheels, looms, clothing, medicines, and even "little luxuries like coffee, tea, and spices."

Hugh and Isabella Torance died in 1816, leaving their son a sizeable estate that included 33 slaves. Like his father, James was an industrious and adroit businessman and made lots of money raising cotton for shipment chiefly to the South Carolina port cities of Charleston and Georgetown. Always looking for ways to enrich himself, James also erected a large watered-powered grist and saw mill on his plantation in 1824-

25. Soon thereafter, farmers began coming from the surrounding plantations to have their grain ground into flour and the timber sawn into lumber. Only the massive rock foundation walls of the Torance Mill have survived.

In 1831, James Torance decided to build a new home for him and his third wife, Margaret Allison, at the site of his mother and father's house. The massive red brick structure, named Cedar Grove, was the largest and grandest home in ante-bellum Mecklenburg County. James traveled to Charleston to buy the knocker for the front door. Tin, copper, sash cord, wood screws, and locks were shipped from New York City. Pipe arrived from Philadelphia. The lumber and brick were produced on the plantation. Cedar Grove survives virtually unchanged. "There are 5,000 feet of floor space, the first-floor ceilings are thirteen feet high, and the cellar walls are twenty-two inches thick," says Wright about Cedar Grove. An elegant spiral staircase ascends from the entry hall, down which Southern belles no doubt made their spectacular entrances at the gala festivities.

James Torance was a member of Hopewell Presbyterian Church, still an active congregation on Beatties Ford Road. Nowhere in Mecklenburg County does the aura of the Old South linger with greater impact than in the sanctuary of this venerable house of worship. Sometime before 1760 the Hopewell congregation erected its first meetinghouse. It was a simple log structure. During the Revolutionary War this log edifice gave way to a frame building, which served as the meetinghouse or church until the 1830's. In 1833, or shortly thereafter, Rev. John Thomson guided the Hopewell congregation through the rigors of building a brick meetinghouse that according to one estimate cost \$3000 to erect.



Hopewell Presbyterian Church

That the congregation selected the Federal Style for its new house of worship is not surprising. After all, this was the architectural motif that the plantation owners of the Hopewell community -- the Lattas, the Torances, and the Davidsons -- had selected for their imposing homes. The brick meetinghouse was altered in the late 1850's. The brick floor was removed, and a vestibule was added. The people of Hopewell Presbyterian

Church even installed a pulpit. Finally, an exterior door on the east side of the expanded house of worship led to the slave gallery.

Imagine what attending a service in Hopewell Presbyterian Church in the 1850s would have been like. The hierarchical social order of ante-bellum Mecklenburg would have been apparent to even the most casual observer. Seats were rented to raise money to pay the minister's salary and to meet other church expenses. Downstairs the slave owners and their families would have sat in their subscribed pews. The wealthiest planters would have sat near the front, and their less fortunate compatriots would have occupied pews toward the rear. The poorest whites would have had to sit in the balcony, their seats separated from those occupied by the slaves only by a wooden divider.

Juliana Margaret Conner, a Charleston belle who visited Hopewell Presbyterian Church in 1827, was not overly impressed by even the wealthiest and most politically powerful people she met. She called Charlotte a "place not offering anything worthy of note or interest" and remarked that none of the women at Hopewell was properly attired for church. "There were not two bonnets which differed in shape and color in the whole congregation," she exclaimed. Conner described the backcountry gentry as an essentially a boring lot who lived a humdrum, "almost primitive" existence of "no excitement." The Piedmont planters knew nothing of culinary delicacies, feasting instead upon foods like "ham and chickens, vegetables, tarts, custards and sweetmeats, . . . corn or wheat cakes and coffee."

The minister at Hopewell would have preached with great emotional fervor, his sermon emphasizing the depraved nature of mankind and the absolute necessity of God's grace for salvation. Each fall and spring Hopewell Presbyterian Church would have celebrated "Communion Season." All members, including the slaves, would have come forward to sit at a table where the minister or an elder would have served each individual bread and wine out of a common cup. To the leaders of the Hopewell community there was no conflict between slavery and the lessons of the Bible. To their way of thinking, most slaves lacked discipline and culture and had to be treated like children but always within a system of strictures based upon God's law. "For centuries, a wide range of social thinkers had seen the institution as fully compatible with human progress and felicity," writes Peter Kolchin in his book, *American Slavery 1619 - 1877*. Jeff Lowrance, the present minister at Hopewell Presbyterian Church, told this writer that he is "embarrassed" that the members of his congregation once followed this misguided line of thinking.



Sandifer House

Most slave owners in Mecklenburg County, like their counterparts elsewhere in the South, owned relatively small numbers of bondsmen and bondswomen. "In rough terms," states Peter Kolchin, "about one-quarter of Southern slaves lived on very small holdings of 1 to 9." The percentage in such peripheral cotton growing areas as Mecklenburg County was even higher. The majority of Mecklenburg farmers simply did not have enough money to compete with the likes of James Torance or W. T. Alexander. Representative of this sizeable group was Thomas T. Sandifer, a physician, whose house still stands on Moore's Chapel Road. In 1860, Sandifer's "personal estate was worth \$7,000.00, and he held three slaves," writes historian Frances P. Alexander. "Sandifer's slaves included two men, ages 33 and 20, and one woman age 31." The relationship of Sandifer and his slaves would have been personal and intimate. "On farms with fewer than ten slaves," says Kolchin, "masters could typically be found in the field, toiling alongside their slaves while bossing them and casually interacting with them."



Oehler House



Basement Kitchen

There were a few Mecklenburg farmers who eschewed slavery and refused to participate in it. Such was the case with George Martin Oehler, who along with many

of his relatives migrated from Germany to northern Mecklenburg County and neighboring Cabarrus County in the early 1840s. Oehler became an elder of Ramah Presbyterian Church in 1856 but was asked to leave at the outbreak of the Civil War because of his "Northern sympathies." Oehler's house is hidden deep in the woods just north of the intersection of Asbury Chapel Road and Huntersville-Concord Road east of Huntersville.

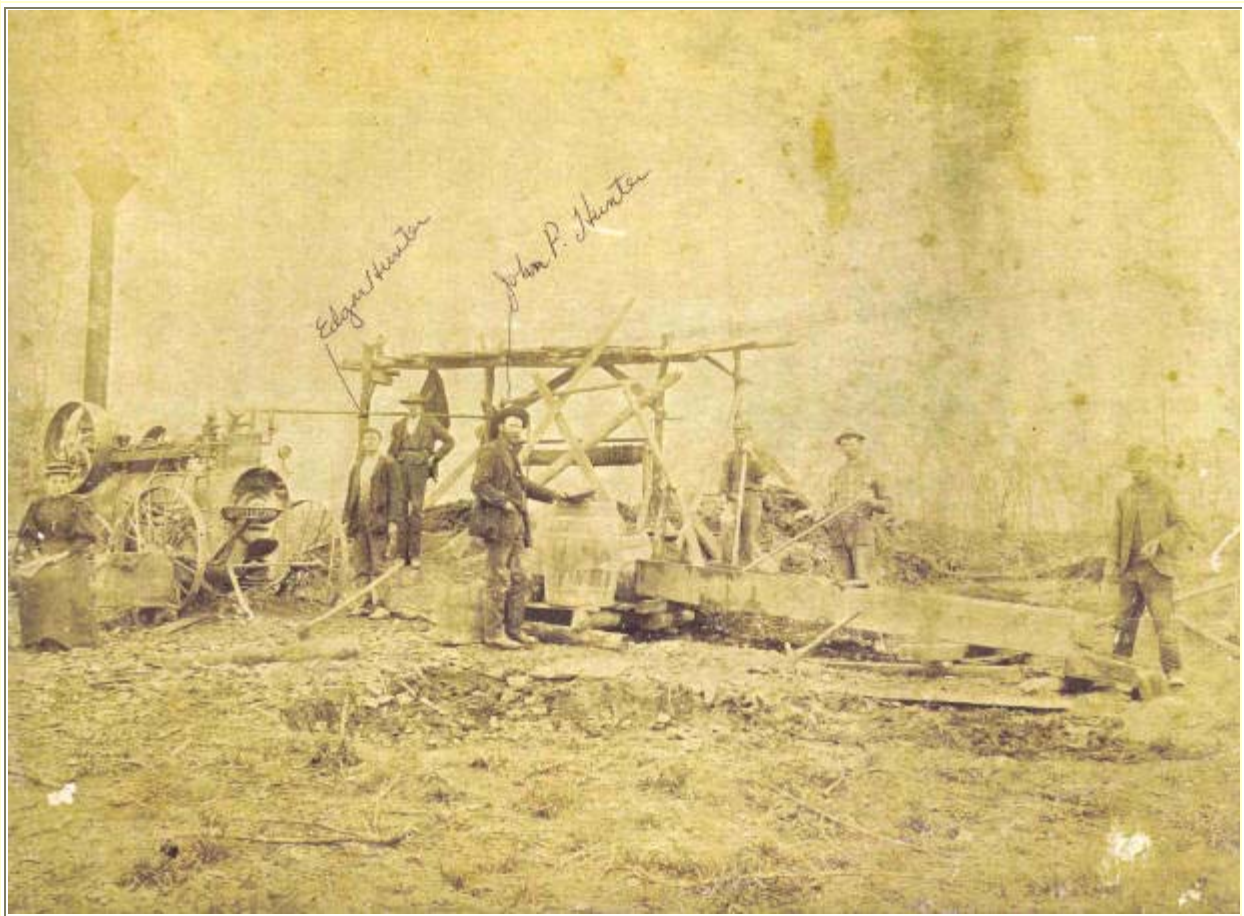
Chapter Four

Gold and Railroads

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Photograph made about 1910 of the John Porter "Squire" Hunter Gold Mine off Niven Road near Derita.

Cotton was not the only source of wealth in ante-bellum Mecklenburg County nor the only enterprise that depended heavily upon slave labor. Industrialized gold mining became serious business in the Carolina Piedmont in the first half of the nineteenth century and made Charlotte, as over against Mecklenburg County, an important economic center for the first

time in its history. Charlotte "was a quiet little village, and seemed to be kept up principally by the mining interest," declared an English geologist who visited here in October 1837.

In 1799, Conrad Reed, the twelve-year-old son of John Reed, a Hessian soldier who had fought for the British in the Revolutionary War, was fishing with a bow and arrow along Little Meadow Creek on the family farm in Carbarus County. Suddenly he saw a distinctive seventeen-pound rock and decided to take it home, where it was used as a doorstep for three years. A jeweler in Fayetteville identified it as gold in 1802. This was the opening event in the history of the gold mining industry of North Carolina, which extracted \$60 million of the precious ore between 1799 and 1860 and led the nation in gold production until the discovery of large deposits of the metal in California in 1848. [Click here to visit the Reed Gold Mine Historic Site.](#)

News traveled slowly in the sparsely settled agrarian society of the North Carolina Piedmont in the early 1800s. There was no immediate gold rush. Until the mid-1820s, farmers took a haphazard approach to mining for the precious ore. "It is laughable," wrote one visitor, "to see these tall, long-tail cotton-coat North Carolinians . . . poking about like snails, and picking up the quicksilver every now and then, and eagerly squeezing it in their hands, to see how much gold is in it." Few people laughed when a laborer at the Reed Gold Mine gathered fourteen pounds of gold before breakfast and five more pounds before sunset. One geologist reported that workers "dug the gold 'like potatoes.'" "Several individuals in North Carolina. . . have been eminently successful," reported the *Miners' & Farmers' Journal*, a promotional publication of the mining industry.



It did not require a lot of capital to become involved in gold mining in the early 1800s. All the equipment someone needed to get started was a pick, a shovel, a pan, and a strong back. After the fall harvest, when they had little else to do, families, including their slaves, would inspect creek beds or dig shallow holes, called placer pits, to see what they might find. A geologist who visited the Reed farm in 1825 observed that the ground bordering Little Meadow Creek "has been nearly all dug over, and exhibits at present numerous small pits for the distance of one fourth of a mile on both sides of the stream." Mecklenburg County still has hundreds of placer pits. A good place to see a few examples is the McIntyre Historic Site on Beatties Ford Road.



Typical Attire Of Early Shaft Miners

The unsystematic, low cost approach to gold mining began to subside in 1825. Matthias Barringer , a farmer living in what is now Stanly County, noticed that gold was especially prevalent in veins of white quartz rock. The implications of this discovery were revolutionary. Miners who heretofore had dug placer pits on the surface of the earth suddenly realized that they would extract a lot more gold by sinking shafts deep into the red hills of the Piedmont. Shaft mining, however, was costly. It took a great deal of money to establish mines of this sort, and North Carolina farmers had little expertise in such enterprises.

The solution was to attract foreign capital and labor. Charlotte, like many other tiny villages in the Piedmont, became a boomtown almost overnight in the early 1830s. After sizeable deposits of gold were discovered at Sam McComb's St. Catherine Mine , hundreds of laborers began arriving from places like Great Britain, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. "The discovery, near Charlotte in 1831, of a nest or bed of gold containing pieces weighing five, seven and eight pounds . . . produced a frenzy of excitement," writes historian Fletcher Green.

Nine gold mining companies doing business in Mecklenburg County had received their charters of incorporation by 1834. The largest was the London Mining Company, which leased the St. Catherine Mine and the Rudisill Mine in the vicinity of what is now Bank of America Stadium and Summit Avenue in Charlotte. It brought Italian mining expert Count Chevalier Vincent de Rivafinoli to oversee its local operations. A flamboyant, elegant dresser, Rivafinoli made a strong impression upon the Scots Irish residents of Charlotte. According to one observer, the Count was "a gentleman of science and practical experience, having been acquainted with the mines in Mexico and Germany."



Work Crew At A Gold Mine

Most of the new arrivals in Charlotte possessed none of Rivafinoli's refinements. They were the type of individuals one usually finds in towns on the mining frontier. A correspondent for the *New York Observer* toured the North Carolina gold fields in 1831 and was appalled by what he saw. "I can hardly conceive of a more immoral community than exists around these mines," he exclaimed. "Drunkenness, gambling, fighting, lewdness, and every other vice exists (sic.) here to an unlawful extent." A reporter from Charleston, South Carolina expressed similar dismay, noting that "business is (sic.) neglected through the week, and even the churches deserted on the Sabbath, to search for the *corrupting treasure!*"

Some local citizens fell victim to the shameful influences of gold and the sudden wealth it could provide. One such person was James Capps. A poor farmer residing on a tract of "sterile & apparently valueless land" off Beatties Ford Road about five miles north of Charlotte, Capps discovered gold on his impoverished farm and leased it to foreign investors in 1827. The Capps Mine became the "most productive gold mine in Mecklenburg County, and perhaps in the state," declared the *Western Carolinian*. Suddenly affluent, Capps began carrying portable scales with him wherever he went, so he could weigh the gold dust he needed to purchase whatever he wanted. Unfortunately, Capps used most of his precious ore to buy whiskey. He died from alcoholism in 1828. A newspaper reporter declared that "the BOTTLE, that too common resort of those whom affliction has cast down, or some freak of fortune has suddenly elevated to a condition for which nature had unsuited them, cut short the days of this *miserably fortunate* old man!"



Workers Descending Into A Mine

Gold mines were not pretty places. They were noisy, smelly, grimy, and dangerous. The first step in establishing a shaft mine was to erect housing for the work force that included emigrants, poor farmers, women, children, and slaves whom local slave owners rented out to mining enterprises or whom the companies owned outright. "Taken collectively, southern companies owned directly eighty percent of the total slaves engaged in industry," writes Jeffry Paul Forret in his U.N.C.C. Masters Thesis. The remaining twenty percent were nothing more than rental property.



**Looking Up The Morgan Shaft At
The Reed Gold Mine**

Leasing bondsmen and bondswomen was a widespread practice in the ante-bellum South. According to one estimate, 6 percent of rural slaves and 31 percent of urban slaves were on lease from their masters in 1860. Mining companies preferred renting slaves to buying them outright because it cost them less money. A mining agent placed the following advertisement in a Charlotte newspaper in 1835.

I wish to hire from 15 to 25 NEGROES, to be employed in the Gold Mines near Charlotte. The highest price will be given for good hands; and those having some experience in the business will be preferred. Gentlemen having slaves whom they wish to hire advantageously, will please call on me.

It was not uncommon for slaves to flee from their masters in hopes of finding work in the North Carolina gold mines. The pitiless blacks, aspiring to find enough gold to purchase their freedom, were generally assigned such menial tasks as cutting timber, building fences and dams, and growing hay, corn, and oats for the miners and for the company's mules and horses. One Cabarrus County slave owner complained in 1831 that "his boy Lewis" had left home to "skulk (sic.) about the gold mines in this county and Mecklenburg." Slaves could sneak off in their spare time and search for deposits of the precious ore and were allowed to keep a certain percentage of the gold they discovered. The Capps Mine had 38 slaves on its workforce in 1831, including 10 women.

The majority of the workers in the gold mines of North Carolina were foreigners. "In 1830 alone, Charlotte's population of 717 included sixty-one unnaturalized foreigners," writes historian Jeffrey Forret. The largest number had come from Cornwall in southeastern England, where they had learned the techniques of underground mining by extracting tin and copper for centuries. Illustrative of this truth are the words of a favorite Cornish toast, "fish, tin, and copper." The home of one Cornishman, Richard Wearn, who came to Mecklenburg County in 1831, still stands on Tuckaseegee Road. He bought this land in 1837 and erected the oldest portion of his house in 1846.



Richard Wearn House

Another native of Cornwall who emigrated to the North Carolina gold mines was John Gluyas. The Mecklenburg Gold Mining Company persuaded Gluyas to move from New York City to Charlotte in 1838 by paying him a salary of \$84 per month and by providing him lodging and covering his traveling expenses. Gluyas's first job was to oversee the steam-powered machinery at the Capps Mine. He would eventually become superintendent of mines in Mecklenburg, Cabarrus, Davidson, and Montgomery counties. His son's house, the [Thomas](#)

and Latitia Gluyas House, is a designated historic landmark on the Mt. Holly Huntersville Road.



Gluyas House

Picture what you would have seen and heard if you had visited the St. Catherine Mine at Charlotte sometime during the mid-1830s. An awe-struck itinerant preacher called one Mecklenburg mine "the greatest sight that I ever saw." Another visitor called the St. Catherine "the greatest establishment" he had ever encountered. Even from a distance you would have known that a gold mine was nearby. The unmistakable thud of the stamp mill's weights would have told you that rock was being pounded into small bits. The hissing of the steam engines that powered the pumps that removed water from the underground tunnels would also have pricked your ears. As you got nearer, a cluster of buildings would have come into view on the ridgeline just outside Charlotte. Simple, utilitarian wooden structures, they would have included a large windlass over the main vertical shaft, where a blind horse or a blind mule would have been circling endlessly to provide power for the cumbersome device that continuously lifted buckets of white quartz rock to the surface.



Rudisill Gold Mine In Charlotte

A newspaper reporter from Charleston, South Carolina toured the St. Catherine Mine in 1831. "I went down a ladder about one hundred feet, perpendicular, and thence along galleries well braced on the sides, and roofed with boards overhead, for some hundred feet further," he declared. "I then followed, in a slanting direction, the vein to the spot where the miners were taking the ore from the earth, and sending it aloft by means of buckets, which

are drawn up by mules." The underground workers wore short-sleeved coats and white overalls. "A round-topped, wide-brimmed hat of indurated felt protected the head like a helmet," wrote a reporter for *Harper's Magazine*. "In lieu of crest or plume each wore a lighted candle in front, stuck upon the hat with a wad of clay."

The pace of gold mining in North Carolina began to wane in the late 1830s and early 1840s. The national economic downturn known as the Panic of 1837 hastened the ruin of many unwise speculative investors. "Led on by bankrupt merchants, broken-down lawyers, quack doctors, clergymen whose political fanaticism had robbed them of their churches -- in short, officered by men who had failed in every pursuit they had undertaken -- how could it be otherwise than that the operations, conducted by them in this new field of enterprise, would have been attended with the same failures which had marked all their former doings?", commented one observer. Even more significant in prompting miners to abandon their operations in North Carolina was the discovery of huge gold deposits in California in 1848. Southern miners simply packed up their belongings and departed individually and in groups for California, many taking their slaves with them. "One stream in McDowell County which had 3,000 miners at work in 1848," writes historian Fletcher Green, "was practically deserted in 1850." All that remained were abandoned wooden buildings and piles of white quartz rock. Some gold mines did continue to operate in the North Carolina Piedmont, some as late as the Great Depression of the 1930s, but never even close to the level of activity of ante-bellum days.

The most significant building that survives from the gold mining era in North Carolina is the former United States Branch Mint in Charlotte. It was dismantled and moved from its original location on West Trade Street in 1936 and now serves as the Mint Museum of Art. Designed by renowned Philadelphia architect William Strickland, the facility opened for business on December 4, 1837, under the direction of Superintendent John H. Wheeler. The need for a branch mint in the North Carolina gold region arose because of the tendency of many private assayers and minters to produce counterfeit coins. A Congressional committee reported that a lot of "imperfect currency" was circulating in and around Charlotte and the other boomtowns of the Piedmont. The imposing new edifice, which cost \$29,700 to build, operated until Confederate authorities took it over in May 1861.



The Mint Museum of Art

Grand buildings were also erected on the campus of Davidson College in the 1830s and 1840s. The leaders of the Concord Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church, not wanting their sons to continue having to go to Princeton College in New Jersey to receive a Calvinistic education, voted on March 12, 1835, to establish an institution of higher learning in western

North Carolina. William Lee Davidson, II was a member of the committee charged with selecting a site for the "Manual Labour School." He was also the son of General William Lee Davidson , who had died on February 1, 1780 in the Battle of Cowan's Ford . At a meeting held at Davidson's home, Beaver Dam , on May 13, 1835, "at candlelight after solemn and special prayer to Almighty God for the aid of his grace," the committee decided to recommend purchase of 469 acres of Davidson's land for \$1521 for the college's campus. At a later meeting, on August 26, 1835, it was decided to name the institution "Davidson College"

... as a tribute to the memory of that distinguished and excellent man, General William Davidson , who in the ardor of patriotism, fearlessly contending for the liberty of his country, fell (universally lamented) in the Battle of Cowan's Ford .



Beaver Dam

Davidson College opened in 1837. The original curriculum included moral and natural philosophy, evidences of Christianity, classical languages, logic, and mathematics. There were three professors, including Robert Hall Morrison , who was also the college's first president, and approximately sixty-four students. The oldest extant structures on the campus are Elm Row and Oak Row . Both were originally dormitories and date from the first year of the institution's operations. The style and placement of the buildings suggest that the Presbyterian elders who founded Davidson College were hoping to duplicate the feel of Thomas Jefferson 's famous "Lawn" at the University of Virginia. The exteriors of the buildings retain their original Jeffersonian Classical features. The most elegant of the early college structures are Eumenean Hall and Philanthropic Hall . Both were built in 1848, and each served as the home of a debating society, secret and formal in nature.



Philanthropic Hall



Eumenean Hall

The rules of the debating societies were very strict about the behavior of members. Fines were imposed for fighting, swearing, intoxication, or "lying to the faculty." There were even "vigilance committees" for reporting offenses. Since nearly all students were members of one society or the other, "student government really dates from the beginning," with the regulation of behavior coming from the two societies. It is said "around the two halls centered college loyalty and affection." The societies provided excellent libraries and financed almost all the annual commencement activities. Despite their good intentions, the two literary societies were not always successful in controlling the deportment of their members.

On August 10, 1853, the Board of Trustees of Davidson College voted to invite Daniel Harvey Hill to become a Professor of Mathematics at their fledgling institution of higher education. A graduate of West Point and veteran of the Mexican War, D. H. Hill was thoroughly familiar with Davidson. His father-in-law was Robert Hall Morrison. Even though he was quite content to remain on the faculty of Washington College in Lexington, Virginia, where he had "received not a single mark of discourtesy, or disrespect," Hill accepted the position at Davidson, largely because of his "desire to labor in a College, founded in the prayers, and by the liberality of Presbyterians." Also, the Board of Trustees had agreed to support his "views . . . in regard to the standard of education, and system of government of the College." C. D. Fishburne, a former student at Washington College and a colleague of Hill's on the Davidson faculty, explained that Hill "entered on his duties with the assurance that he would be heartily sustained by a large majority of the Trustees in every effort he might make to completely change the College, in the standards of scholarship and behavior."

What happened over the next five years at Davidson College illustrates just how tenacious and persistent "Harvey" Hill could be. Nothing could seemingly dissuade this man from trying to attain an objective once he had decided to pursue it. To put matters bluntly, the Board of Trustees wanted Hill to take charge and subdue the violence that was threatening to destroy the college. "Major Hill was . . . induced to accept the place by the urgent request of prominent friends of the College who were dissatisfied with its condition," said Fishburne. The 33-year-old South Carolinian was eager to meet the challenge.

The behavior of Davidson's students, like that on many other college campuses in the South, was raucous and unsettling. Many of the approximately 90 students were virtually out of control. Riots were common. Drinking and carousing were widespread. If suspended, troublemakers would not go home, largely because they did not have enough money to pay their way. Waiting to be readmitted, they would walk around campus or sleep all day in the town's boarding houses. Even worse, at night, under the cover of darkness, they would entertain themselves by making mischief, much of it mean spirited.

On Thursday, December 22, 1853, for example, students attacked the houses of two professors with rocks and eggs and set off several bombs on the campus, "the report being heard some four or five miles around the College." On Friday, April 21, 1854, a "wooden building was demolished" during a campus riot. One student even put gunpowder into a candle snuffer, which exploded when it was used. The unsuspecting owner suffered serious damage to one eye.

After fulfilling his obligations at Washington College, Hill arrived in Davidson on May 28, 1854, and almost immediately began implementing major changes in the academic program. Uppermost on his agenda was the installation of the same military grading system of merits and demerits used at many colleges during the 1850's, including Washington College and West Point. Not a few students, Hill insisted, had been "allowed to trample upon all laws, human and divine." These surly youngsters had an "undisciplined mind, an uncultivated heart,

yet with exalted ideas of personal dignity, and a scowling contempt for lawful authority, and wholesome restraint," he lamented.



Daniel Harvey Hill

Hill insisted the he knew how to end such fractious behavior. Never one to mince words, especially when he believed that somebody in authority was incompetent, Hill lashed out at Samuel Williamson , the College's president. "The character of a College depends mainly upon the character of its President," Hill told the Board of Trustees. In August, 1854, Williamson resigned when it became clear that the combative new mathematics professor was going to prevail. Hill also offered to quit, but the Board of Trustees insisted that he stay. As promised, the Board of Trustees approved Hill's new grading system of merits and demerits, on August 8, 1854. The most severe punishment was bestowed upon those students guilty of "profanity, fighting, disorderly conduct in recitation rooms, in Chapel, or on the Campus." There were also severe penalties for students "being improperly dressed." Clearly, a restrictive new regime was taking control at Davidson College , and Daniel Harvey Hill was its indomitable leader. The days of lax discipline were over.

The minutes of the Davidson College Faculty are replete with examples of professors, especially D. H. Hill, subjecting students to exacting regulations. These included unannounced inspections of dormitory rooms to make sure that students were studying, informing parents when their children were "too frequently absent from College duties," and reading each Monday in Chapel a "list of the delinquencies and offenses" that had occurred the pervious week. ". . . on account of noise on the campus, Profs. Hill and Fishburn (sic.) inspected the College Buildings and found that Messrs. Bailey, and R. B. Caldwell were absent from their rooms," the Faculty minutes declared on one occasion. D. H. Hill was particularly concerned about students drinking whiskey. The minutes of one meeting stated:

Faculty met, and after the usual business, some conversation was had about certain students being addicted to drinking, and it was reported that a citizen of the village had informed a member of the Faculty that there was a good deal of drinking this term among the students. Where-upon, it was agreed, on motion of Major Hill, that the Faculty visit the students' rooms one night of this week.

There was also anxiety about the presence of firearms on campus. The Faculty stipulated that "no student be allowed to use fire-arms (sic.), except on Saturday, and at no time on the College premises." The new instruments of control even extended to visitors to the campus. In May, 1855, the Faculty hired policemen and directed them "to disperse negroes who may collect about the College on Sundays."

It was against the background of these developments that a large number of students rioted with particular ferocity on the night of December 21, 1854. No doubt harboring deep resentments over the enforcement of Hill's restrictive measures, the participants in this uprising expressed their anger by lighting fires and throwing rocks and eggs at two professors' houses, including the home of J. R. Gilland, the president of the Faculty. Rocks flew through the air. One struck Hill in the forehead. Undismayed, blood dripping down his face, the feisty mathematics professor pressed the attack, just as he had done in the Mexican War and as he would do later in battle after battle with the Yankees during the Civil War. Gradually the students retreated and began to slip away into the darkness. Hill ordered the Faculty -- there were only four members -- to enter the dormitories to make sure which students had stayed in their rooms.

All the students were either at their desks studying or asleep in their beds when the faculty entered. One room was locked. Hill smashed in the door with an ax, rushed in and found D. Newton, a known mischief-maker, feigning sleep but still wearing his boots. The repercussions of this student uprising were dramatic and profound, at least for Davidson College. An inquisition of sorts occurred the next day, when the entire student body was ordered to appear before the Faculty and explain their whereabouts the night before. Not surprisingly, everybody insisted that they had not taken part in the recent disturbance. On December 26th, the Faculty suspended D. Newton for three months for "his inattention to his studies, . . . his having used in a written essay disrespectful language to a Professor, and from the strong circumstantial evidence to convict him of participating in a riot on the night of the 21st." Forty-two students, more than 50 percent of those attending Davidson College, signed a petition requesting that Newton be allowed to remain. The document contended that convicting Newton on mere circumstantial evidence was "inconsistent with the principles of justice, and contrary to the dictates of reason." When D. H. Hill and his colleagues refused to adhere to their wishes, the protesting students left school, many never to return.

Daniel Harvey Hill did not seek to be popular. In his opinion, neither should colleges. Too many colleges and universities, he insisted, had become little more than "polishing and varnishing" institutions, because they did everything necessary to maintain their enrollment, including sacrificing academic standards. And what kind of graduates did such places produce? "An occasional scholar is sent out from their walls, whilst thousands of conceited ignoramuses are spawned forth with not enough Algebra to equate their minds with zero," Hill proclaimed in his official inaugural address to the Board of Trustees on February 28, 1855. ". . . ninnies take degrees," the acerbic major continued, "and blockheads bear away the title of Bachelor of Arts; though the only art they acquired in College was the art of yelling, ringing of bells, and blowing horns in nocturnal rows."

D. H. Hill believed that human beings are by nature wretched and sinful creatures. "Self-abasement and self-abhorrence must lie at the very foundation of the Christian character," Hill wrote in 1858. Regardless of its origins, this predilection to emphasize the negative aspects of human deportment brought a certain harshness to Hill's rhetoric. Indeed, his inaugural address at Davidson was full of vituperative language. Without rewards for good behavior, the majority of students would "speedily acquire idle habits, and learn to drone away their time between lounging, cards, cigars, and whiskey punch," Hill maintained. And

as for those miscreants who had no desire to improve their behavior, they would "congregate together around their filthy whiskey bottle, like ill-omened vultures around a rotten carcass." It was this tendency toward invective and pointing out the faults in others that caused many people to dislike Daniel Harvey Hill. But Hal Bridges, his biographer, reminds us that Hill was a man of many facets. "At every stage of his career, the attractive qualities . . . were liberally intermingled with his prickly traits of character," says Bridges.

Davidson College derived enormous benefits from having "Harvey" Hill on its faculty. In addition to leading the effort to restore discipline, he labored tirelessly to strengthen the academic program. He persuaded the Board of Trustees to purchase new equipment for the Mathematics Department. He brought C. D. Fishburne to Davidson and agreed to pay Fishburne's salary for two years if the money could not be raised to meet this obligation -- no small commitment when his own annual salary was just \$1705. Salisbury, North Carolina merchant Maxwell Chambers bequeathed \$300,000 to the college in 1852. Ratchford insisted that Chambers was most pleased with the improvements that Hill brought about. "This I presume is the largest Legacy ever left to one College in the Southern States," said Robert Hall Morrison, D. H. Hill's father-in-law. Anyone doubting the importance of his contributions to the overall improvement of Davidson College need only read what the Board of Trustees said about D. H. Hill when he resigned from the faculty on July 11, 1859.

That whilst we, as a Board of Trustees, accede to the wishes of Major D. H. Hill, we accept his resignation with very great reluctance, much regretting to lose from our Institution such a pure and high minded Christian gentleman, diligent and untiring student; thorough and ripe scholar, and able faithful, and successful Instructor -- especially in his Department -- as Major Hill as ever proved himself to be since he came amongst us.

In 1859, no doubt at D. H. Hill's urging, the General Assembly of North Carolina enacted legislation which assured that Hill's impact upon campus life at Davidson College would endure. The law stipulated that no person could "erect, keep, maintain or have at Davidson College, or within three miles thereof, any tippling house, establishment or place for the sale of wines, cordials, spirituous or malt liquors." It prohibited "any billiard table, or other public table of any kind, at which games of chance or skill (by whatever name called) may be played." The punishments for violating these prohibitions were severe, especially for slaves. They were "to receive thirty-nine lashes on his or her bare back." The departure of Daniel Harvey Hill from Davidson College came as no surprise. It was widely known that he was about to become the Superintendent of the North Carolina Military Institute in Charlotte.

The decade of the 1850s was a time of propitious happenings in Charlotte. Indeed, those ten years witnessed to a substantial degree the birth of the community that we inhabit today, at least in terms of civic spirit. Unlike the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney in 1793 or the discovery of gold by Conrad Reed in 1799, both of which had profoundly impacted life in Mecklenburg County, local residents, not outside forces or good fortune, brought this new change about. "With our citizens, the tide and the spirit of improvements are still as high as ever," declared a Charlotte newspaper in 1853.

There was considerable apprehension about the future economic health of the county after the Panic of 1837 and the discovery of gold in California in 1848. Physician Charles J. Fox and lawyers James W. Osborne and William Johnston led the effort to boost local development by bringing a railroad to Charlotte. By doing so, they elevated resolute and imaginative leadership to the pinnacle of importance it has occupied in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County

ever since. There was nothing inevitable about Charlotte's becoming the leading city of the Piedmont. It took hard work, foresight, and imagination to achieve that objective.

Mecklenburg planters like James Torrance and W. T. Alexander produced bounteous crops of cotton throughout the 1830s and 1840s, but markets were far removed and difficult to reach. Teamsters had to traverse nearly impassable roads to Fayetteville, Cheraw or Camden, where the "White Gold" of the South was loaded onto flat-bottomed scows for shipment to Wilmington, Georgetown or Charleston. "The difficulties faced by farmers in marketing their crop led many to abandon the Carolina Piedmont for greener pastures in the west," writes historian Janette Greenwood.

Having experienced vigorous growth in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the population of Mecklenburg County declined from 20,073 in 1830 to 13,914 in 1850. Although a substantial number of those no longer living in Mecklenburg had become residents of new neighboring counties, such as Union County, Mecklenburg County was unquestionably experiencing economic stagnation. Real estate values fell by about half during the same years. Clearly, dramatic action was needed if Charlotte-Mecklenburg was to continue to compete with other communities for economic prominence.

In 1847, Johnston, Fox, and Osborne began sponsoring public meetings in Charlotte and its environs to champion a rail line that would link Charlotte to Charleston by way of Columbia, South Carolina. The railroad boosters contended that only the laying of track and the arrival of locomotives would allow the County's farmers to enjoy "the improvements and advantages of the age in which we live." They named the proposed line the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad and insisted it would save Mecklenburg County and its neighbors "from poverty and from ruin."

Fundraisers were held in towns throughout the region, including Lincolnton, Salisbury, Concord, Monroe, and as far away as Rutherfordton. Typically, Fox, Johnston or Osborne would travel by wagon to an evening banquet, frequently held out of doors or in a tent, where they would preach the wonders of the railroad as an instrument of progress and call upon the members of the audience to come forward and buy stock. The atmosphere was not unlike that at a religious revival, but in this instance the message was entirely secular.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. The farmers of the Providence community organized a barbecue and pledged \$14,000. A sizeable home could be bought at that time for \$3000! By August 1847, the astounding sum of \$300,000 had been raised for the road. The dream of connecting Charlotte to Columbia and Charleston by rail was going to become a reality.

On October 28, 1852, a crowd of about 20,000 people – more than 15 times the population of the town -- gathered along the tracks that still parallel South College Street and waited for the arrival of the first train. For weeks the people of Charlotte had heard the whistle atop the approaching locomotive announce at the end of each day how far the work crews had come. All was anticipation and excitement. Then it happened. Hissing and screeching its way north from Rock Hill, its plumes of smoke signaling the opening of a new era, the train finally lumbered into the Charlotte station, which was situated about where the Charlotte Convention Center now stands.

More than any other event, the arrival of the railroad in 1852 set Charlotte on its way to being the largest city in the Carolinas," contends historian Thomas W. Hanchett. Heretofore, nothing had distinguished Charlotte economically from other towns in the southern

Piedmont. There had been no greater reason for farmers to congregate for business here than in Lincolnton or Monroe or Concord. The efforts of Fox, Osborne, Johnston, and their supporters made Charlotte the railhead of the region and its transportation and distribution center, a position it has never relinquished.

"Our people seem to be inspired with new life and new energies amounting almost to intoxication," proclaimed a local newspaper. Investors even began building commercial structures in anticipation of the railroad. Thomas Trotter, William Treloar and other local merchants began constructing a row of brick commercial buildings, known as "Granite Row" or "Granite Range," on the southwestern corner of the Square in July 1850 and completed them in September 1851. Probably the first brick store buildings in Charlotte, Granite Row was torn down in the 1980s to make the center city "more attractive." Happily, William Treloar's post-Civil War home survives at 328 North Brevard Street.

With Charlotte having the only rail connection from the southern Piedmont into neighboring South Carolina, it was only logical that the largely State-financed North Carolina Railroad, extending from Goldsboro on the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad westward through Raleigh to Greensboro and Salisbury, would terminate in Charlotte. The first train traveled the entire route from Goldsboro to Charlotte on January 31, 1856. "We now have a railroad connection with Raleigh, Petersburg, Richmond, and with all the cities of the North, on to the lines of Canada," the *Western Democrat* proclaimed.

In 1858, the Wilmington, Charlotte and Rutherfordton Railroad Company erected a passenger station on North Tryon Street to serve as the eastern terminus of a thirty-one mile line from Charlotte to Lincolnton, which was completed by April 1861. Dr. Charles Fox headed the campaign to establish Charlotte's fourth railroad of the 1850s, the Atlantic, Tennessee and Ohio Railroad or AT&O, which despite its boastful name only ran from Charlotte to Statesville. The Atlantic, Tennessee & Ohio Railroad reached from Charlotte to Davidson in 1861 and to Statesville in March 1863, where it connected with the Western North Carolina Railroad.

Dr. Paul B. Barringer of Concord rode the AT&O as a child. His remarks provide a fascinating glimpse into the early days of railroading in Mecklenburg County. It took 8 hours to travel 40 miles. "These engines burned nothing but wood, rich resinous pine wood, and the sparks from the smokestack often set fields afire unless the sparks were controlled by a sifter of fine mesh set in the upper part of the smokestack," he reported. Barringer explained that second-class passengers sometimes and third-class passengers always had to "get out at every woodyard to supply the tender, their only notification being a peculiar blow of the whistle."

Riding the train was an exciting experience, partly because it was so perilous. The base of the track of the AT&O was wooden. A flat-iron rail three-quarters of an inch thick and four inches wide was attached by spikes to an oak beam. "This was all very well for a five to ten-ton load," Barringer observed, "but in time the spikes sunk through the rails ceased to hold, particularly at the ends." "The ultimate was reached," said Barringer, "when the end spikes were thrown out, and the ends of the iron rail stood up, perhaps on a cold day as much as eight to ten inches."



Locomotives Of The Mid-1800s

The primitiveness of railroad technology of the 1850s notwithstanding, the daily arrival of passenger and freight trains meant that Charlotte was no longer an isolated courthouse town. Merchants, including Jews, began to arrive and establish mercantile houses during that decade. Among them were two German Jews, Samuel Wittkowsky and Jacob Rintels. They met as co-workers for storeowner Levi Drucker, a leader of the local Jewish community and owner of a mercantile establishment. Rintels and Wittkowsky soon became partners in a large wholesale store and prospered. Rintels, the more flamboyant of the two, would eventually erect an imposing Victorian style mansion on West Trade Street. The house, which has been moved and altered, is now located at 1700 Queens Road in the Myers Park neighborhood of Charlotte.



Jacob Rintels Built This Home On West Trade St.

Dr. Fox and his associates, not satisfied with just enhancing Charlotte's economic status, also wanted to make the town an important cultural place. A group headed by Fox provided the impetus for establishing the North Carolina Military Institute . "Those gentlemen who originated and pushed forward the scheme are entitled to much credit for energy and zeal," proclaimed the *Western Democrat* . Fox and his friends raised \$15,000 by selling stock to individuals and received \$10,000 from the City of Charlotte, also to purchase stock. The voters of Charlotte had approved this financial outlay in a special referendum held on March 27, 1858. Dr. Fox and his fellow boosters bought a tract of land about one-half mile south of Charlotte beside the tracks of the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad and hired Sydney Reading , a contractor, to oversee the construction of Steward's Hall , a massive, castle-like, three and four-story brick edifice designed to look like the buildings at West Point.



Steward's Hall

A festive ceremony was held on the grounds on Saturday, July 31, 1858, when the cornerstone was laid. North Carolina Governor William A. Graham spoke to a "large assemblage of ladies and gentlemen." Classes began at the North Carolina Military Institute on October 1, 1859. The institute had two departments. A Primary Department for boys from 12 to 15 and a Scientific Department for young men from 15 to 21. Chartered by the North Carolina Legislature to award degrees, the Scientific Department, which had 60 cadets enrolled during the first year, patterned its curriculum after the courses taught at West Point, which meant that it emphasized such technical and scientific skills as engineering, surveying, mathematics and chemistry, plus the art of warfare.

The superintendent of the North Carolina Military Institute was Daniel Harvey Hill . "As a teacher I have never seen his superior," one of his students exclaimed. "He had the rare capacity of interesting his pupils and of compelling them to use their faculties, often it seems unconsciously, in a manner that surprised themselves." "In clearness of interpretation, in relevant and apposite illustration, he has never been excelled," proclaimed Henry E. Shepherd , another student of Hill's at the North Carolina Military Institute.

D. H. Hill's influence over the educational philosophy of the North Carolina Military Institute was paramount. In keeping with his gloomy appraisal of human nature, Hill insisted that discipline must be rigorously enforced. Just as at Davidson College , he held firmly to the belief that young men, unless closely supervised, would inevitably go astray. "The great sin of the age," he told the Education Committee of the North Carolina Legislature in January, 1861, "is resistance to established authority." Cadets had to attend chapel twice daily -- in the morning to listen to a sermon and in the afternoon to hear Biblical instruction -- as well as go to church on Sunday. Henry Shepherd remembered Superintendent Hill's lectures in the chapel with fondness. "I listened eagerly to the comments of the 'Major' as he read the Scriptures in chapel and at times revealed their infinite stylistic power," he wrote many years later.

Chapter Five

The Civil War In Charlotte-Mecklenburg

Dr. Dan L. Morrill

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Charlotte-Mecklenburg was important strategically to the South. The most important local facility was the Confederate Naval Yard.

J. W. Ratchford , a student who had left Davidson College to follow D. H. Hill to the North Carolina Military Institute , remembered attending chapel and listening to his mentor speak. Hill spoke about politics. When word arrived that South Carolina had seceded from the United States on December 20, 1860, many of the cadets from South Carolina, including Ratchford, considered withdrawing from school and going home to support their native state. "Gen. Hill made us a talk . . . one morning, telling us that if we did have a war he expected to go, and advised us to stay at school until it was certain," Ratchford reported.

One comes away from examining the fateful weeks in the first half of 1861 with the distinct feeling that Hill, in keeping with his long-held convictions, was willing to fight to protect the Southern way of life but that he sincerely hoped that war would not occur. D. H. Hill had no illusions about the horrible realities of military combat. "Recruiting sergeants, with their drums and fifes, try to allure by 'the pride, pomp, and circumstance of war;' they never allude to the hot, weary marches, the dreary night-watches, the mangled limbs, and crushed carcasses of the battle-field (sic.)," he proclaimed. Hill was proud of the South's military tradition. "The armies of the Revolution were commanded by Washington, a Southern General," he told an

audience in Wilmington, N.C. But he knew that a struggle with the North would be long and arduous.

Rumor and suspicion were rampant in Charlotte-Mecklenburg in the spring of 1861. The *Western Democrat* reported that "several strangers" were prowling about different sections of Mecklenburg County pretending to be peddlers "but acting in such manner as to cause the belief that this was not the real object." The newspaper went on to state that these sneaky fellows were asking all sorts of questions about the status of people's property. One was even discovered "talking with Negroes at a distance from any road or path." The article applauded the determination of local farmers to arrest these troublemakers and turn them over to the sheriff for questioning. "In these times of peril," declared the *Western Democrat*, "it behooves every man to be on the alert, and we verily believe no class of persons needs watching more than these strolling traders."

After Confederate troops opened fire on the Federal garrison at Fort Sumter in the harbor at Charleston, South Carolina on April 12, 1861, D. H. Hill summoned the young cadets to the chapel in Steward's Hall on the outskirts of Charlotte and told them what to expect in the weeks, months and years ahead. His words were tragically prophetic. Ratchford recalled what the Superintendent said:

He warned us that it would be no child's play, and the chances were that it would last as long as the Revolutionary war, and we would all get enough of it. He mentioned the contrast between the resources of the North and the South, both in men and means. . . .

The second half of April 1861 witnessed a flurry of activity at the North Carolina Military Institute. A particularly dramatic scene occurred when the cadets raised a secession flag, made by the ladies of Charlotte, over Steward's Hall so the passengers on the trains moving north out of South Carolina could see it. James H. Lane, a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute and a member of Hill's faculty, described what happened when the next locomotive passed by the campus. ". . . the artillery thundered its greetings to South Carolina as the train passed slowly by; the male passengers yelled themselves hoarse; the ladies waved their handkerchiefs and threw kisses to these brave boys." One prominent North Carolinian called Charlotte a "young Charleston" because of the firmness with which the majority of white citizens supported secession.

North Carolina Governor John W. Ellis summoned D. H. Hill to Raleigh to organize the State's first military instruction camp. The cadets followed soon thereafter. They marched as a body into Charlotte and boarded trains headed for the State capital on April 26th. Crowds lined the platform as the locomotive pulled away from the station. Among the passengers headed for Raleigh was L. Leon, a private in the Charlotte Greys, a local Confederate unit that had been ordered the day before to wrest control of the Charlotte Mint from Federal authorities. "Our trip was full of joy and pleasure, for at every station where our train stopped the ladies showered us with flowers and Godspeed," he recorded in his diary.

It was Friday night. Steward's Hall was turned over to the State as a place for volunteers to rendezvous. The halls were silent. The classrooms were empty. The chapel was still. Unknowingly, the Old South was entering its death agony. Two members of the faculty of the North Carolina Military Institute would perish in the Peninsular Campaign, and James H. Lane would be wounded twice. Daniel Harvey Hill, called "Harvey" by his friends, was to see "about as much combat as any general on either side" in the Civil War, writes historian Shelby Foote.



Confederate troops, some very young, went off the war with considerable bravado and enthusiasm as the outset of the war. This father and son served together. They are William and John Howey of Mecklenburg County.

The mood of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County was hopeful and resolute at the beginning of the Civil War. Just as they had done for the cadets at the North Carolina Military Institute, the "young ladies" of Charlotte presented a flag to the "Charlotte Greys." Lizzie Alexander, a Confederate supporter, gave a stirring speech on April 21st when she addressed the Sharon Riflemen on the occasion of their receiving a "handsome flag" from the local ladies. "Permit me in the name of the ladies of Sharon to present you this Flag bearing the Lone Star as an emblem of North Carolina, to whom alone we now owe allegiance," she began. "Together with this token of our esteem and confidence," she exclaimed, "we also entrust to you, brave sons of Mecklenburg, our dearest interests and hopes of security." Eight companies of troops from Mecklenburg County had left for the front by September 1861.

Charlotte's small community of free African Americans also demonstrated their commitment to the Confederate cause. No doubt motivated mostly by desires to appease their white neighbors, black leaders like barber Jerry Pethel, who owned \$2300 of real property in 1860, and household laborer Nancy Jenkins led a successful campaign to raise \$55 for the Soldiers' Aid Society, an organization headed by prominent white women. "Our country's cause is a common one with master and servant alike," proclaimed an official of the Soldiers' Aid Society, "and it behooves us all to . . . to show the fanatics of the North that we of the South, regardless of colour, stand as a unit to sustain and strengthen the arm of the soldier of our glorious Confederacy."

"Let our people plant corn," proclaimed the *Western Democrat*. "Let them wear jeans and homespuns as their ancestors did before them, when they threw off British rule." It became commonplace for supporters of secession to compare the actions of patriots during the War for American Independence with the exploits of Confederates soldiers during the Civil War. Many advocates of secession believed that defense of liberty stood at the heart of both conflicts. In his provocative study of the political culture of the ante-bellum South, Masters and Statesmen. The Political Culture of American Slavery, Kenneth S. Greenberg asserts that "Southern anxieties about England, inherited from the republican ideology of the revolutionary period and reinforced by later events, underwent a slow transformation into a

fear of New England and the North." According to Greenberg, "Northerners just seemed to copy everything that England had done -- encourage slave revolts, fail to return fugitive slaves, prevent the extension of slavery, develop an abolitionist movement, exploit labor, and threaten liberty with power."

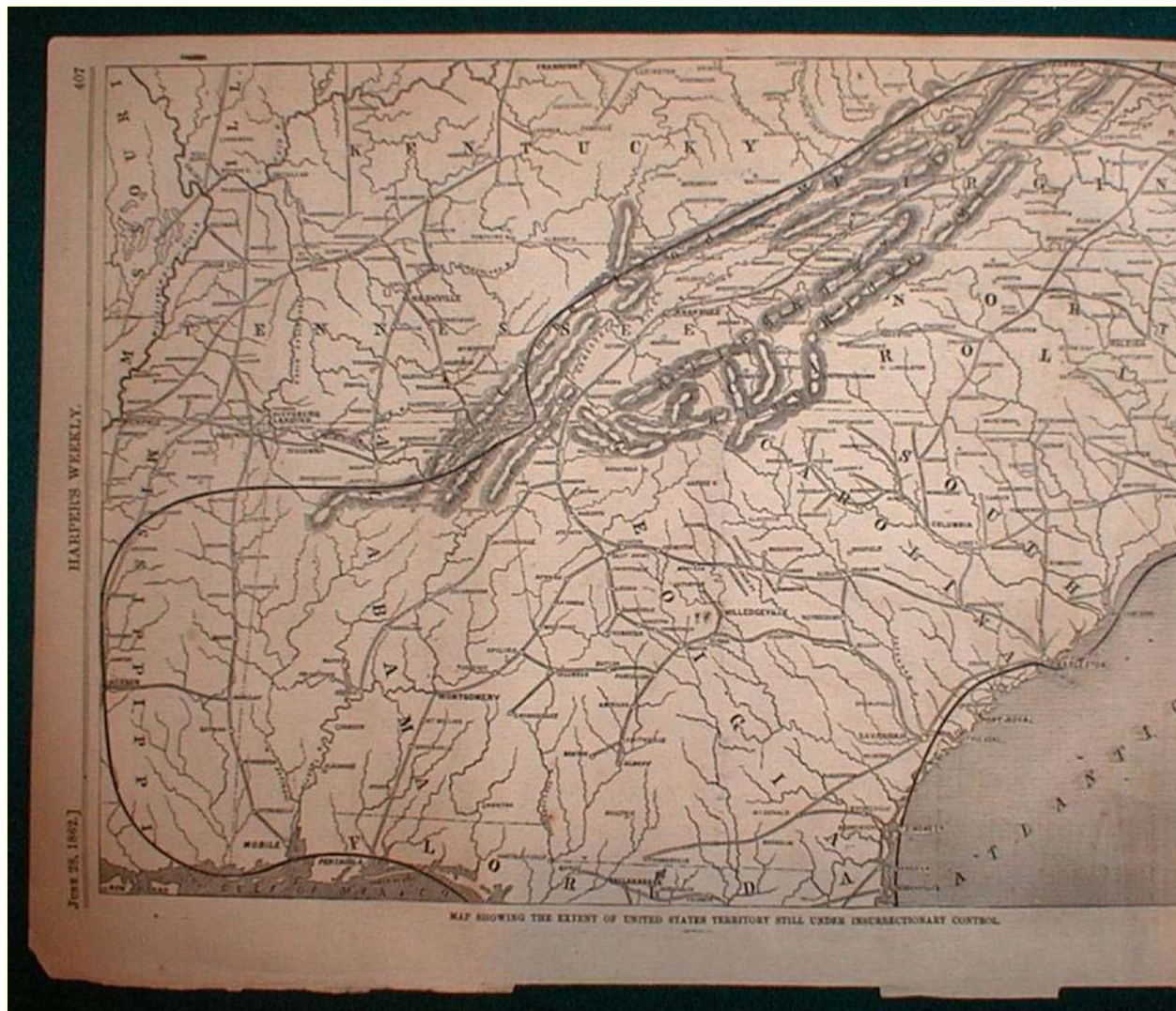
President Jefferson Davis drew upon the same theme of the supposed similarities between the American Revolutionary War and the Civil War when he addressed a large crowd in Charlotte in September 1864. Not the first or last visiting politician to make note of the alleged Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, the Confederate chief executive said he was aware that the "people of this section were the first to defy British authority and declare themselves free." Davis encouraged the citizens of Charlotte-Mecklenburg to continue to back the war effort even in the face of mounting hardships and adversities. By doing so, he contended, local folks would prove that the "spirit of the sires of '75 and '76 still actuated their descendants."

No battles of consequence occurred in Charlotte-Mecklenburg during the Civil War. There was to be no repetition of what had happened in this region during the American Revolutionary War. The closest Union troops came was Rozzelle's Ferry in western Mecklenburg County in April 1865, when Yankee troops marched from Lincolnton to destroy the bridge that carried a plank road over the Catawba River. Ironically, that same month Confederate President Jefferson Davis and his Cabinet traveled through Charlotte on their flight southward from Richmond.

On learning that Federal troops were approaching, Richard Rozzelle, whose home stood on the eastern bank of the Catawba River and who had already lost two sons in the war, one at Gettysburg and another in the Battle of the Wilderness, scampered to the bridge and removed the boards from the roadbed. The Yankees, after setting the bridge ablaze and skirmishing with a cavalry unit, fired at a Confederate officer who had ridden into Richard Rozzelle's yard. Their aim was high, and the bullets supposedly hit the house. These were the only bullets fired in anger by the enemy into Mecklenburg County during the Civil War.

The absence of fighting did not make Charlotte-Mecklenburg an unimportant place during the so-called Great Rebellion. Because it remained in Confederate hands until the very closing days of the conflict and because it was a major railroad junction, this community was of great strategic value to the South. Trains left Charlotte laden with strategic supplies, transforming Charlotte-Mecklenburg into a major manufacturing and distribution center during the Civil War. So busy did the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad become that it announced in February 1863 that it had "purchased 40 slaves to be used in working the road."

In the spring of 1862, the Confederates had to abandon the Gosport Naval Yard in Norfolk because of the likelihood of its imminent capture by the North. Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory, an ingenuous and bold innovator, chose Charlotte as one of the principal locations to which to transport the invaluable machinery and irreplaceable workmen. Laborers occupied the Mecklenburg Iron Works and erected a series of new wooden buildings along the tracks of the North Carolina Railroad in what is now First Ward in the summer of 1862 to house the Charlotte branch of the Confederate Naval Yard.



Charlotte's strategic importance resulted largely from its position on a vital railroad link in the Confederacy.

About 300 machinists and foundry men moved to Charlotte, so many that the surrounding neighborhood became known as "Mechanicsville." The smoke stacks of the naval yard were spewing smoke and soot into the Carolina blue sky by the summer of 1862. Among the products of the factories were mines, anchors, gun carriages, and even marine engines. The propellers and shafting for the famous Confederate ironclad C.S.S. Albemarle, which attacked and sank a Union gunboat at Plymouth, North Carolina in April 1864, were manufactured at the Confederate Naval Yard in Charlotte.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg had other important industrial facilities that served the Confederacy. These included the Confederate State Acid Works that produced sulfuric acid and nitric acid that were necessary to make fulminate of mercury, an essential component of percussion caps. Sulfuric acid was also needed for wet cell batteries that provided electric power for the telegraph system of the South, including that used by the Confederate military. W. F. Phifer and J. M. Springs and other local residents established the

Mecklenburg Gun Factory "for the manufacture of ordnance and small arms." J. M. Howie of Charlotte made belt buckles and wire, and the New Manufacturing Company produced wooden canteens for the army.

Industrial life was fraught with danger. This was especially true in the case of the North Carolina Powder Manufacturing Company near the Tuckasseegee Ford on the Catawba River. Disaster struck the plant on May 23, 1863. 700 pounds of powder exploded, killing 5 people, destroying most of the factory, and rattling windows in Charlotte almost ten miles away. "It is said there were about 700 pounds of powder in the mill at the time of the explosion," reported the *Western Democrat*. Rebuilt, the plant was destroyed again by an accidental explosion in August 1864 that killed "one white man and two mulattoes." The mill never reopened. Remains of the North Carolina Powder Manufacturing Company survive in what will become a public park.

The biggest calamity that occurred in Charlotte during the Civil War was the destruction by accidental fire in January 1865 of the Confederate storage warehouses and depots and platforms of the North Carolina Railroad and the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad. "The loss to the Confederate Government is severe," reported the *Western Democrat*. Large quantities of foodstuffs went up in flames, as did "blankets, soldiers clothing, leather, and various other articles." To witness the obliteration of such vast amounts of food and supplies in this "terrible conflagration" must have pained the people of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, because they were experiencing firsthand the deprivations caused by the lack of essential commodities. Local newspapers complained about the paucity of paper. "Within the past month three of the four or five Paper Mills in this State have stopped by the advance of the enemy," proclaimed the *Western Democrat* in the final weeks of the war. Factories found it increasingly difficult to obtain lubricating oils. Charlotte fell into "almost complete darkness" in March 1864 when gas supplies ran out.

Charlotte newspapers were full of articles encouraging the people to provide greater support to the men in uniform. "All person wishing to render the Confederacy essential service, can do so by cultivating the common GARDEN POPPY," declared the *Western Democrat* on May 12, 1863. Confederate officials proceeded to explain how one should go about extracting the "exuding juice" from the plant. ". . . let it be collected and forwarded to the nearest Medical Purveyor." Farmers were told to plant "large corn crops, not only corn but everything that will sustain life." On January 12, 1863, Confederate officials in Charlotte issued an urgent plea for soap. "The inability of the Government to procure Manufactured Soap will, it is hoped, induce the people of this section to engage in making an article so indispensable to the health and comfort of their relatives in the army."

The people of Mecklenburg County had to endure increasingly grim news as the war dragged on. "We have not room to publish a list of the casualties in all of the N. C. Regiments reported, and therefore select the companies from this and the surrounding counties," announced the *Western Democrat* on May 19, 1863. The newspaper proceeded to list the names of those who had fallen in the Battle of Fredericksburg. Imagine the dread and apprehension with which mothers and daughters must have scanned the pages. "Company A -- Killed: Lieuts E. M. Campbell, R. A. Bolick; Privates W. S. Deal, F. T. Clodfelter, A. P. Parker, Smith Price, E. B. Austin." Hands trembling, family members would have continued to read. "Wounded: Lieut P. C. Carlton breast slight, Searg'ts G. W. Condroy two fingers off, . . . H. L. Miller mouth seriously." Such were the harsh realities of the Civil War in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

Unlike some sections of North Carolina, especially the Albemarle Sound and Pamlico Sound region, the Quaker settlements in and around Randolph County, and some parts of the mountains, Charlotte-Mecklenburg remained steadfast in its commitment to the Confederate cause. "If the whole South was imbued with the same spirit of resistance to Yankee tyranny and oppression as that which characterizes the people of good old Mecklenburg," commented one soldier who visited Charlotte in 1863, "no one need fear the result of the mighty struggle which is now going on." The *Western Democrat* exhorted its readers to persevere no matter how great the obstacles. "There must be no despondency among a people who are struggling for liberty, for property, for honor, for existence, and for the future welfare of their posterity," the newspaper declared on September 20, 1864. There were some instances of defiance of Confederate authority. Silas Davis tells a wonderful story of how his ancestors built a trap door in a horse stall in the barn on their farm. Whenever a Confederate official would show up in the neighborhood, the Davis boys would run to the barn and hide beneath the trap door that was covered with horse manure. "Horse manure never hurt nobody," Silas Davis told this writer.

The Charlotte press lashed out with special vengeance against so-called "croakers" – those who unduly criticized the Confederate government and who sought to make peace with the North. Chief among its targets was William Woods Holden, the editor of the *North Carolina Standard* of Raleigh. Born a bastard in Orange County in 1818, Holden had led a successful campaign against the Whig Party in the 1850s that had made the Democrat Party the dominant political organization in the State. After secession, however, he broke with the Democrats and became increasingly hostile to continuing the war. Holden encouraged like-minded citizens to establish committees throughout North Carolina and to speak out against the Confederacy and its policies. "The man who instigates another to commit a crime is just as bad as if he had committed it himself," announced the *Western Democrat*. One anti-war group, headed by Thomas Gluyas, did meet at Whitley's Mill in the Long Creek community of Mecklenburg County in 1863 but was never able to gain broad support locally.

Even the optimism of the *Western Democrat* began to wane during the last year of the Civil War when the prospect of ultimate defeat loomed ever larger. "Let us be ready to bear reverses as well as victories," the newspaper proclaimed. The possibility that Union troops would raid Charlotte was becoming more of a distinct possibility. "There is a good deal of Government property and stores, workshops, &c at this point," wrote one reporter, "and the Yankees know it as well as we do."

The *Western Democrat* announced that increasing numbers of unruly deserters from Confederate ranks were finding their way into Mecklenburg County. Famished and half-naked, these desperate men were further diminishing public morale by engaging in criminal activities. "On Wednesday night last, two armed men (supposed to be deserters) went to the house of Mr. Sam Davis, who lives on Potter road about 12 miles from this place, and demanded his money," the *Western Democrat* declared on December 22, 1863. The newspaper noted that several deserters "who had been for a long time skulking in the upper end" of Mecklenburg County were captured in October 1864.

Its relatively secure location made Charlotte an ideal place to treat the Confederate sick and wounded. The *Western Democrat* reported as early as June 1861 that "large numbers of wounded will be passing through." In July 1863, officials erected "extensive hospital buildings on the Fair Grounds, about 1 mile from the Public Square" or about where South Boulevard and East Boulevard now intersect. Steward's Hall at the nearby North Carolina Military Institute housed a medical laboratory, where surgeons and doctors devised compounds to help make the infirm soldiers well. The women of Charlotte were indefatigable

in gathering provisions for the military hospitals of Charlotte. They brought bedding, bandages, blankets, towels and rags. They brought what food they could spare, including "butter, eggs, fowls, dried fruit, vegetables, milk, etc." Mayor S. A. Harris implored the "people of Mecklenburg County to send to Charlotte meat, flour, meal and all kinds of vegetables, to be prepared here for the large number of our wounded soldiers who are arriving daily."

By 1865, when the ability of the South to hold off the Yankees was approaching the breaking point, hordes of wounded were transported by rail to Charlotte from such cities as Raleigh and Columbia. Refugees came too. Local residents had to open up their churches and even their homes to the suffering soldiers. It was a pathetic scene. So desperate did the situation become that local officials urged refugees to stay at home or seek shelter elsewhere. "The citizens of town are doing what they can towards supplying the wants of the sick soldier, but they have not the means to do much," lamented the *Western Democrat* on March 28, 1865.

Southern society was collapsing under the unrelenting pressure the North was bringing to bear against it. On February 21, 1865, the *Western Democrat* warned its readers that it did not know how long the newspaper could continue to appear. Expecting William Tecumseh Sherman's army to arrive any day, the editors declared that they would keep the presses rolling "until the enemy prevents us from publishing." Union troops did destroy the bridge that carried the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad over the Catawba River but then turned eastward toward Goldsboro.

Mail service, the only way in those days to communicate with loved ones on faraway battlefields, was no longer available in the spring of 1865. People on the home front therefore could not continue sending boxes of special items, such as food and clothing, to their relatives in uniform. Everywhere there was hunger. Everywhere fear. Everywhere suffering. "In addition to the demands of the hospitals, thousands of soldiers are passing through our town, requiring something to eat," reported the *Western Democrat*. President Jefferson Davis delivered a somber speech when he arrived by horseback in April 1865 on his flight southward from Richmond. "I am conscious of having committed errors," he declared, "... but in all that I have done, in all that I have tried to do, I can lay my hand upon my heart and appeal to God that I have had but one purpose to serve, but one mission to fulfill, the preservation of the true principles of Constitutional freedom, which are as dear to me today as they were four years ago."



The Confederate Battle Flag flies over the Confederate marker and burial markers in Elmwood Cemetery in Charlotte.

Then it was over. The Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad had much of its infrastructure destroyed. As civil authority collapsed, looters began moving unmolested through the streets of Charlotte, smashing storefronts and stealing whatever they could find. Drunks staggered from one street corner to another, oblivious to the throngs of anguished soldiers who were lying virtually unattended in makeshift hospitals all over town. Town leaders welcomed union troops who took control of Charlotte without a struggle in May 1865. The first order of business for the Yankee commander, Colonel Willard Warner of the 180th Ohio Volunteers, was the restoration of order and the imposition of a loyalty oath. ". . . all persons who wish to engage or are engaged in any business, are required to take the oath of allegiance to the United States," announced Colonel Warner.

Days of great uncertainty were in the offing. "When our soldiers returned to their former homes," wrote J. B. Alexander , a prominent Charlotte physician, "they felt the bitterness of defeat, and were stared in the face by poverty." Paul B. Barringer , then a young boy living in nearby Concord, remembered what his uncle said to the family slaves. "My uncle called all of them in and told them that they were now free and from henceforth could go where they willed, Mr. Lincoln's proclamation having been made good on the field of battle."

Confederate soldiers returned without fanfare to their homes in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County during the weeks and months that followed the Civil War. There were no crowds waiting to greet them as before. No bands played patriotic tunes, and no ladies unfurled ceremonial flags to welcome them back. These beleaguered veterans, many mud-splattered and shoeless, faced the awesome task of picking up the pieces of their shattered lives and starting over again. Some troops arrived by train. "A friend calls our attention to the fact

that numbers of Confederate soldiers, who have recently been released, are daily arriving at Charlotte, many of them sick," reported the *Western Democrat* on July 3, 1865. Others, like John Starr Neely, had to walk home. Imprisoned by the Yankees after serving as a guard in the Confederate prison in Salisbury, Neely did not get back to Mecklenburg County until 1866.

Also among the returnees was Daniel Harvey Hill. One cannot help but wonder whether the redoubtable warrior cast a nostalgic glance toward Steward's Hall on the former campus of the North Carolina Military Institute where only four years earlier he had taught enthusiastic young men the art of warfare. Surely he must have lamented the death of so many of his beloved students in the horrific conflict that had just ended. Writing in the first issue of *The Land We Love*, a monthly magazine he founded in 1866, Hill gave full vent to the agony he felt over the South's defeat. "All the rivers of plenty have been dried up! The grass sprouts and grows from blood only; the rains of peace can not wash it away! Want, want, want, cries! Suffering groans!"

The *Western Democrat* shared Hill's dreary assessment of the local economy. "Everybody is complaining of the scarcity of money, and nobody seems to have any," the newspaper complained on June 13th. There was plenty of crime, especially theft. A small minority of Union troops made unauthorized visits to plantations and hauled off whatever they wanted. Gangs of robbers traveled to Charlotte by train and proceeded to plunder the countryside. One farmer had two mules stolen. Another lost a "thousand pounds of bacon." One unfortunate fellow drove his horse and buggy into town only to have them purloined by a "Negro man."

A major reason for economic hardship in Mecklenburg County and its environs was the departure of large numbers of former slaves from the plantations where they had traditionally resided. Blacks swarmed into Charlotte from the surrounding countryside. "We know of instances where Negro men, having good homes and plenty to eat and wear, have left the crop just at the time it needed working and come here to town and lie about the suburbs in idleness," complained the *Western Democrat*. "... the first result of the war," wrote Paul Barringer, "was the leaving of almost all our servants."



First United Presbyterian Church

Bondspeople left the plantations to give expression to their new status as free people. The same impulse caused African Americans to establish their own churches. "The unifying theme underlying the diverse efforts of the freed people remained the drive for autonomy and independence," explains historian Peter Kolchin. Kathleen Hayes of Charlotte summoned the black members of First Presbyterian Church to "come down out of the gallery and worship God on the main floor." Rev. Samuel C. Alexander, a white Presbyterian missionary from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, came to Charlotte soon after the war and purchased property at Davidson and Third Sts., where Hayes and her small band commenced to worship. The Seventh Street Presbyterian Church, now First United Presbyterian Church, stands today at North College and East Seventh Streets.

Blacks in rural areas also departed from the white man's churches. Beginning in 1865, the Providence Presbyterian Church Session minutes reported the elders' concern about the "irregularities with the Colored people" which seemed in some way connected with their new freedom. In May of that year, many African American members formed a Sunday School under the supervision of William Rea. They met for one hour starting at 10:00 a.m., devoting one-half hour to teaching letters, spelling, and reading. The other half hour was devoted to catechism lessons. By October 1867, the Rev. Willis L Miller of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. intervened to advise the black members of Providence to form their own church. Now the Matthews-Murkland Presbyterian Church, the congregation meets in a modern building on Old Providence Road. The African American members of Sharon Presbyterian Church also withdrew to form Lloyd Presbyterian Church. Only the cemetery remains, near the intersection of Sharon Road and Colony Road.

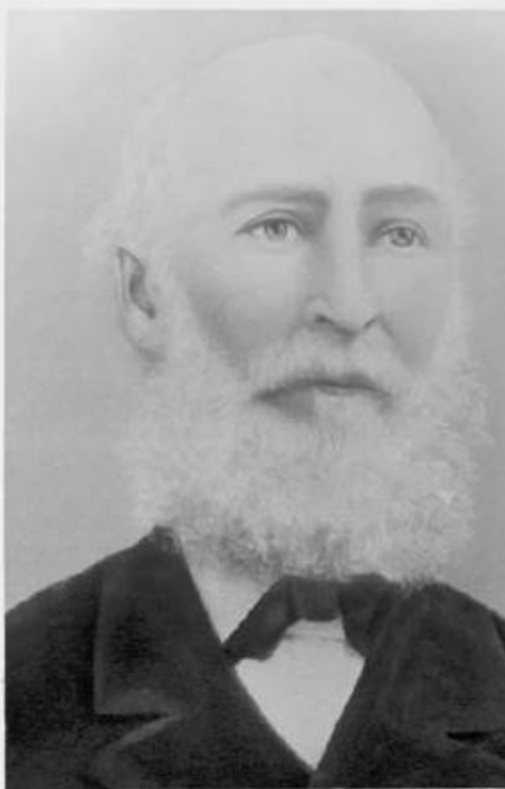


The Lloyd Presbyterian Church Cemetery

Missionaries for the A. M. E. Zion Church arrived in Charlotte in May 1865 and quickly moved to establish new houses of worship. Edward H. Hill arrived and founded Clinton Chapel, the first black church in the city. It stood on South Mint Street between First and Second Streets. Reverend Hill licensed Bird Hampton Taylor, put him in charge of Clinton Chapel, and continued his organizing activities in the area. Before he died later that year, Hill had laid the groundwork for nearly twenty new churches within a fifty-mile radius of Charlotte. Thomas Henry Lomax, a native of Cumberland County, came to Charlotte about 1873 and soon thereafter founded [Little Rock A.M.E. Zion Church](#). [Grace A M.E. Zion Church](#) was established in 1887 by dissident members of Clinton Chapel.

African Americans residing in Mecklenburg County also witnessed the founding of Biddle Memorial Institute, now Johnson C. Smith University. Three white Presbyterian ministers, Samuel C. Alexander, Sidney S. Murkland, and Willis L. Miller, were eager to impart Christianity and such middle class values as punctuality and frugality to the newly freed black men of the region. "It seemed an unreasonable thing to do," wrote Alexander's wife many years later, "when scarcely a dozen colored people in the County could read and fewer still could write." Excluded from the Concord Presbytery and vilified by many of their white neighbors, the three courageous preachers became agents of the Freedmen's Committee of the Presbyterian Church of the North. "Any man from the North doing what I did would have been killed," said Miller. "But I had been the associate of the pastors of the white churches and they kept 'the lewd fellows' from me."

Willis Miller traveled to Missouri in May 1867 to meet with denominational leaders. He "urged the favorable consideration of the grave need for an educational center in the midst of the suffering field," explains historian Inez Moore Parker. Miller was successful in winning the support of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. He and his associates came to Charlotte, purchased a lot, and moved a building formerly used as a hospital for Union troops to the Charlotte site and opened the school soon thereafter. Mrs. Henry J. Biddle of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania made a generous donation to the college and requested that it be named "Henry J. Biddle Memorial Institute" in honor of her husband who had been killed in the Civil War. This was done.



Rev. Willis L. Miller



CLASS OF 1911 (Theology)

Rev. Hercules Wilson on the far right. He served Lloyd Presbyterian Church.

Chapter Six

Many whites were appalled over what was happening in Charlotte and its environs in terms of the advancement of African Americans in the years immediately following the Civil War. The traditional white elite of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County joined their compatriots throughout North Carolina and the South in opposing the creation of greater social and economic equality for the rank-and-file citizenry, black and white. "The Negro is a good thing for fanatics, demagogues and hypocritical philanthropists to prate about," proclaimed the *Western Democrat*. "We are in favor of treating colored people kindly, fairly and justly," the newspaper declared in 1868, "but at the same time we warn them, as a friend, against thrusting themselves forward as the rulers of the white race." D. H. Hill minced no words about how he felt. "As children need parents, so do Negroes need masters," declared a newspaper editorial that Hill reprinted in *The Land We Love*.

Historian Paul D. Escott contends that "continuity in power relationships and in the elite's undemocratic attitudes" spanned the Civil War. "The men who benefited from the aristocratic customs and laws of 1850," he asserts, "fought tenaciously to protect their power and privilege during the Civil War and Reconstruction." Such influential whites as railroad promoter William Johnston and physician J. B. Alexander believed that blacks and lower class whites were incapable of exercising prudent political judgments. Consequently, Johnston, Alexander, and other men of their elitist persuasion worked tirelessly to maintain the social hierarchy of ante-bellum Charlotte and Mecklenburg County after the Civil War.



J. B. Alexander

Most wealthy and middle class whites in the South reacted angrily when the United States Congress wrested control of Reconstruction policies from President Andrew Johnson and passed a series of laws in 1867 that established what many Southerners regarded as onerous requirements for being accepted back into the Union. "The white people of the former Confederacy were masters in their own states for a period of one to three years when no compulsion was put upon them to enfranchise the Black," explains historian Samuel Eliot Morison. The Radical Republicans, upset by the refusal of Southern white politicians to let blacks vote and exercise full civil rights, divided the South into five military districts and

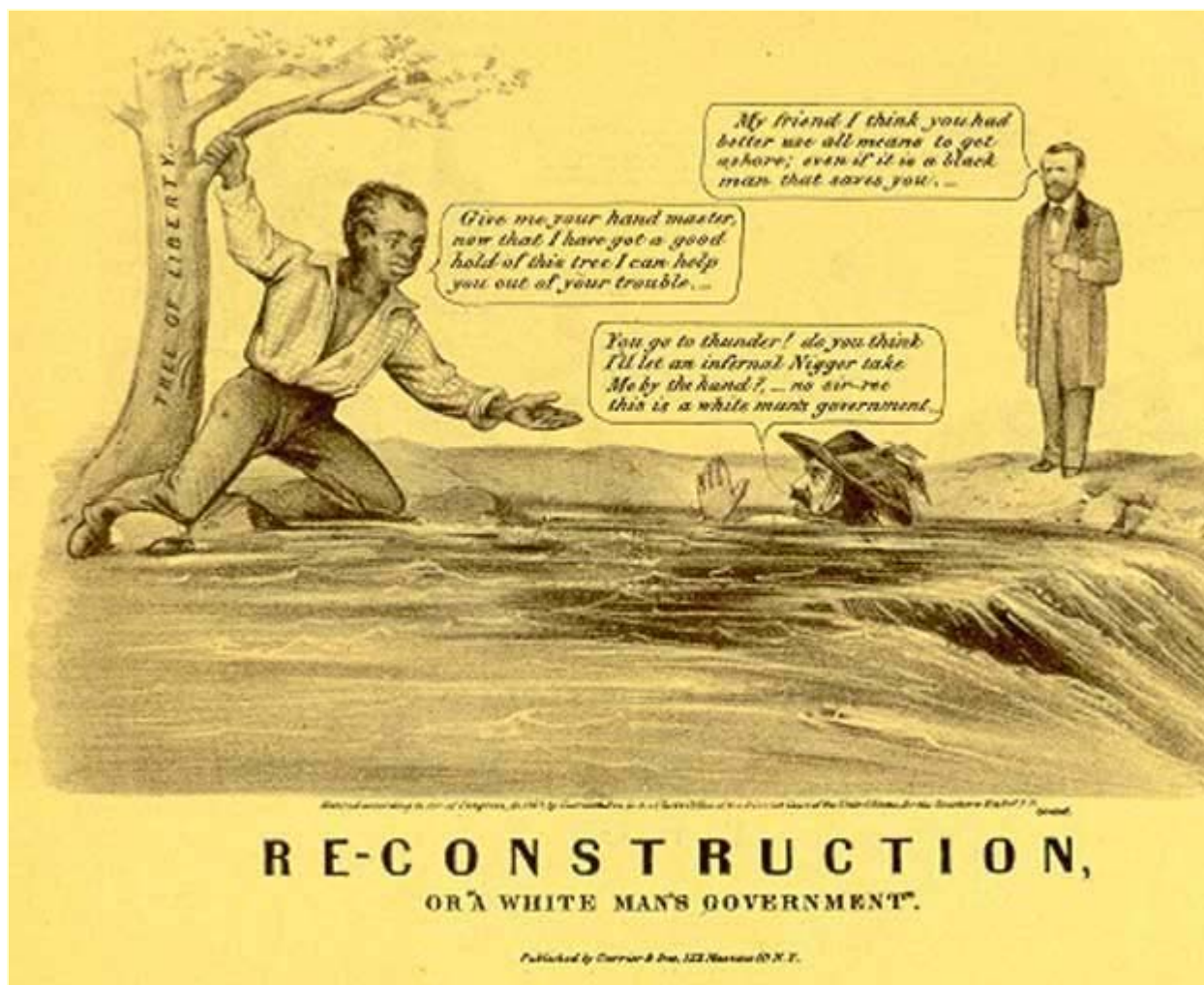
stipulated that all states in the former Confederacy had to enact universal manhood suffrage and approve new constitutions consistent with the Constitution of the United States. This meant that free blacks would be able to vote in North Carolina for the first time since 1835 and that their ranks would now include hordes of former bondspeople.

Elections for a constitutional convention were held under duress in North Carolina in November 1867. Blacks and poor whites flocked to the polls. Controlled by African Americans and pro-Unionist whites, despairingly known as "Carpetbaggers" and "Scalawags," the convention completed its work in March 1868; and soon thereafter North Carolina was readmitted to the Union. The new constitution eliminated all property qualifications for voting or holding office and provided for a "general and uniform system of Public Schools." Even more ominously for elitist and middle class whites, it eliminated the system of county Justices of the Peace and created elected county commissions as the governing body of local government. "The traditional aristocratic structure of local government was destroyed," writes Paul Escott, "and the opportunity for full local democracy rose in its place."



Governor William H. Holden

Newspaperman William W. Holden, who had served briefly as Provisional Governor in 1865 and who had brought about the establishment of the Republican Party in North Carolina two years later, was elected Governor in April 1868. Large numbers of whites were convinced that they had no chance of winning the election and refused to vote. Republicans carried 58 of North Carolina's 89 counties. "Prominent men of the old elite saw their worst nightmare – an alliance among the lower classes of both races – materializing under the protection of the federal government," says Escott.



The mood in Mecklenburg County was tense. Mecklenburg did not give Holden a majority and voted against ratification of the new constitution. When Holden came to Charlotte during the campaign, local whites, who called themselves Conservatives, burned him in effigy and hurled insults at him when he stepped off the train. Holden spoke to a large crowd of supporters, mostly African Americans, waved a bloody shirt in the air, reminded the crowd of the secessionist sentiments of Mecklenburg County, and accused his opponents of "enacting the scenes of 1860-61." Thomas McAlpine, Charlotte agent for the Freedmen's Bureau, a Federal agency established in 1865 to assist Southern refugees, was concerned about the retribution that embittered whites were meting out against African Americans who had voted with the Republicans. Deliveryman Allen Cruse fired five black employees who supported Holden. One black voter in Mecklenburg County had his mule killed on the night of the election.

The most ominous form of white payback against "unruly" blacks was political terror and physical intimidation. In 1866, six Confederate veterans met in Pulaski, Tennessee and founded the Ku Klux Klan. Its membership quickly spread into other states, including North Carolina. "The immediate and primary goal of the Klan was to wrest political power away from the Republicans," Escott explains. Although there is no evidence that it operated in Mecklenburg County, the Klan had its local admirers, especially among affluent and middle

class whites. "The Ku Klux Klan was all that saved our country, our women, children and old men," proclaimed J. B. Alexander. "Our condition was desperate," he insisted. "The best blood on earth was subject to the will of the lowest and basest creatures that ever walked on earth."

Affluent and middle class whites were determined to reverse the political tide and undermine white support for the Republican Party "by attacking racial equality as the weakest point in the Republican program." In addition to brutalizing blacks when necessary, the Conservatives sought to use the doctrines of White Supremacy to solidify their electoral base. D. A. Tompkins, a South Carolinian trained in the North as an engineer and a resident of Charlotte beginning in 1883, stated in his two-volume history of Mecklenburg County that the "white man will survive and will continue to be the controlling factor in all matters of advancing civilization."

The scheme was simple and ultimately successful. Poor whites would be weaned from forming alliances with African Americans on the basis of their shared economic interests and would be made to understand they should stand shoulder to shoulder with members of their own race. "Instead of letting Republicans define the issue as democracy -- universal manhood suffrage, local democracy, free public schools for all, and expanded economic opportunity," Escott contends, "Conservatives set out to make white supremacy the central question." In return, affluent and middle class whites promised to create jobs for impoverished whites and for cooperative blacks by advancing the economic recovery of the South. In short, they would fashion a "New South." "To consolidate past victories, the Democrats built shibboleths of party, defining themselves as the agents of reform, white unity, and deliverance from the 'horrors' of black rule," Escott argues. "To strengthen themselves in the future, they supported visions of a New South of progress, improvement, and prosperity."

The Conservatives, who would soon begin calling themselves Democrats again, gained large majorities in both chambers of the legislature in 1870. Interestingly, two out of every three North Carolina counties that moved from the Republican to the Democratic camp had experienced substantial Klan activity since 1868. Also undermining popular support for the Republicans were exaggerated allegations of governmental corruption. "Although some illiterate blacks were elected to state conventions and legislatures," contends Samuel Eliot Morison, "many of the colored leaders were men of education who showed ability equal to the ordinary run of state legislators anywhere."

Bolstered by their victory at the ballot box, the Democrats called for another constitutional convention in 1875. The voters approved thirty amendments the following year, the general effect of which was to concentrate greater power in the legislature now that the Democrats controlled it. The most important of the amendments gave the general assembly "full power by statute to modify, change, or abrogate" the existing rules of county government. This meant that the Democrats could nullify the election of county officials, most notably African Americans in the eastern part of North Carolina, where blacks were most numerous. "It is easy to see why the Democratic offensive was aimed so directly at local government," Escott asserts. "Control of county affairs had been the foundation of North Carolina's aristocratic social order." \



Zebulon Vance

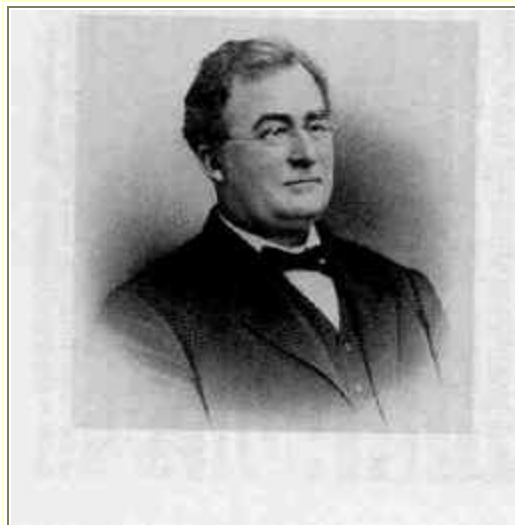
Two events in 1876 signaled the end of Reconstruction in the Tar Heel State. Zebulon Vance , North Carolina's popular Civil War governor, was elected chief executive again, thereby demonstrating that the ante-bellum elite was predominant once more. Also, Rutherford B. Hayes became President of the United States and withdrew the last Federal troops from the South, thereby removing the North's indispensable instrument for enforcing its will. "Thus, by 1877, all former Confederate states were back in the Union and in charge of their domestic affairs, subject only to the requirements of two constitutional amendments to protect the freedmen's civil rights," says Morison.

African Americans continued to run for political office in Mecklenburg County until the end of the nineteenth century, and several routinely served on the Charlotte Board of Aldermen. John T. Schenck , a mulatto carpenter, represented Second Ward for four terms, and blacks were consistently elected from Third Ward. But white Democrats invariably held the majority on the twelve-member Board of Aldermen, and Republicans never succeeded in electing a mayor. "While accommodating new economic growth, new business leaders, a vigorous Republican party, and black political participation, the town continued to be dominated by the secessionists of the Civil War," asserts historian Janette Greenwood.

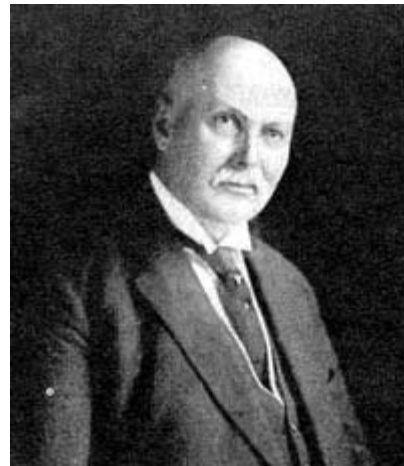
Chapter Seven

Cotton Mills In New South Charlotte

The Democrats delivered on their promise of improving the economy of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. The 1870s and 1880s witnessed vigorous commercial and industrial growth in Charlotte, so much so that the town began to eclipse the rest of Mecklenburg County in terms of economic importance. "Everything about Charlotte seems to be on a big boom," observed a visitor in the 1880s, "and everybody seems to be in good spirits at the prospects." Charlotte became known as the "Queen City," a nickname more in keeping with its aspirations for economic prowess than its earlier monikers of "Hornet's Nest" or "Cradle of Independence." As in the 1850s, effective leadership was fundamental to this process. During the final quarter of the nineteenth century a talented assortment of ambitious entrepreneurs moved to Charlotte to join local businesspeople in taking advantage of the town's strategic location and its excellent railroad connections.



Daniel Augustus Tompkins



Edward Dilworth Latta

Two South Carolinians were paramount in making Charlotte the major commercial and industrial center of the two Carolinas. They were Edward Dilworth Latta and Daniel Augustus Tompkins. David Ovens, a native of Kingston, Ontario who came to Charlotte in 1903 as manager of the local shop operated by the S. H. Kress Co., singled out New South industrialist D. A. Tompkins as the principal reason for Charlotte's impressive rate of growth in the late 1800s, calling him a "brilliant engineer." "It was he," Ovens insisted, "who led the way in persuading people from distant points to come here and invest capital in the establishment of factories and mills." "Then there was Mr. E. D. Latta," Ovens continued, "who gave us our first electric street railway, gas and electric lights."

Edward Dilworth Latta moved from New York City to Charlotte and established E. D. Latta and Brothers, a men's clothing store, in October 1876. No doubt the enterprising haberdasher was attracted by the vigorous economic climate in Charlotte and the prospects for making money. Latta's impact on this community, however, was to go far beyond that engendered by his clothing business. Until his departure in May 1923, when he moved to

Asheville, Latta played a pivotal role in the transformation of the city from a modest commercial center of 7,094 inhabitants in 1880 into an industrial and financial metropolis of the Piedmont in 1920, boasting a population of 46,338. In large measure, Latta was typical of the new class of investors, industrialists, and businessmen who arose in North Carolina and the South following the Civil War. As exponents of a "New South," such men became convinced that future wealth in the region lay not in traditional farming methods but in industrialization, urbanization, and scientific agriculture; and they took advantage of the new economic opportunities afforded by the growth of manufacturing and the rise of sizable urban areas.

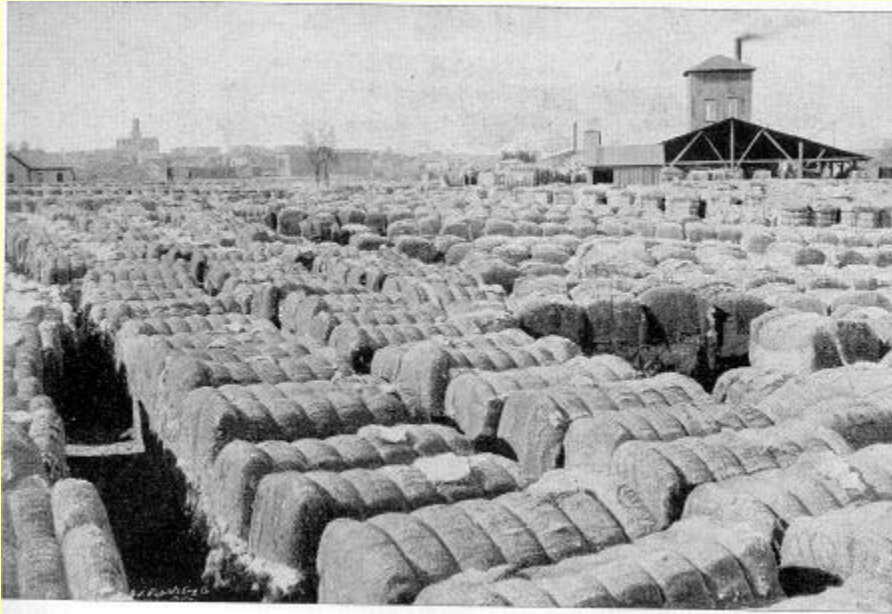
Daniel Augustus Tompkins was an ardent participant in the New South movement of the post-bellum era. He arrived in Charlotte in March 1883. A native of Edgefield County, South Carolina, Tompkins had earned a degree in civil engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York in 1873, had been a chief machinist for the Bethlehem Iron Works in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and had decided to return to his native region so that he might encourage and assist the development of industry and the diversification of agriculture.

Having secured a franchise from the Westinghouse Machine Company of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania for the selling and installing of steam engines and other machinery, Tompkins selected Charlotte as the location of his enterprise, which opened on March 27, 1883. He considered moving to Columbia, South Carolina, but chose Charlotte instead because of its central location in the two Carolinas and because of its superior railroad connections.

On May 17, 1873, the Carolina Central Railroad Company had acquired the right of way and had undertaken the task of completing a continuous track from Wilmington to Rutherfordton. This job had been completed on December 15, 1874. By 1873, the Atlanta and Charlotte Airline Railroad had finished laying track between Charlotte and Spartanburg, South Carolina and on to Atlanta. In 1884, Tompkins established the D. A. Tompkins Company. This enterprise was "at the forefront" of machinery manufacturing for the southern textile mills, offering mills "a local alternative to their dependence upon northern suppliers," writes historian Brent Glass. The *Augusta Chronicle* described Tompkins as "the man that put Charlotte on the map for cotton mill machinery."

D. A. Tompkins remained in Charlotte until his death in 1914 and helped build a virtual cotton mill empire in the Tar Heel State. He became a director of A. and M. College (now North Carolina State University) at Raleigh and was instrumental in establishing the textile department there. He was the author of a number of works on cotton mills and textiles, most notably *Cotton Mill: Commercial Features*, as well as a two-volume history of Mecklenburg County. He also owned three North Carolina newspapers, including the *Charlotte Observer*, which he purchased in 1892. "The one thing I wanted the paper for was to preach the doctrines of industrial development," said Tompkins. In July 1894, Tompkins joined with other wealthy businessmen in Charlotte in establishing the Southern Manufacturers' Club. Puffing on cigars and drinking fine brandy whiskey, he and the other members of the town's privileged elite would gather in their opulent headquarters building on West Trade Street and "do business." As were the other powerful industrialists of his type and time, Tompkins was committed to laissez-faire capitalism and opposed public reforms for better industrial working conditions including the regulation of child

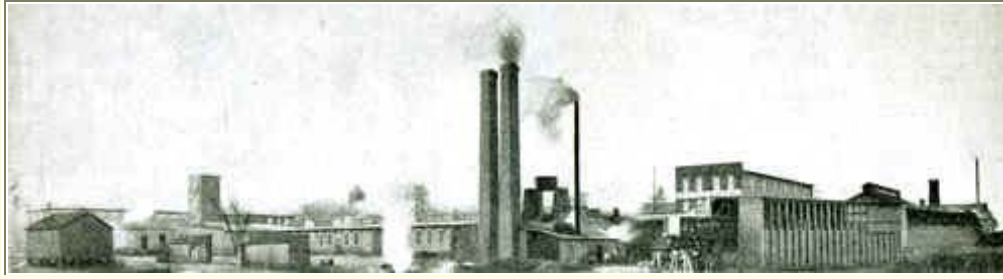
labor. He was also a devoted defender of what he called "Anglo Saxon values," a code name for White Supremacy.



Cotton was brought to the Charlotte Cotton Platform for shipment to others cities.

In keeping with cotton being its principal cash crop, Mecklenburg County did become a major center of textile manufacturing in the second half of the nineteenth century. "New ideas of life have taken firm hold of the South," Tompkins proclaimed, "and to succeed and prosper, we must spin cotton." Mecklenburg County had two cotton mills before the Civil War. The Catawba Manufacturing Company opened in 1848 in the Steele Creek community of southwestern Mecklenburg. Its owner, William Henry Neel, was a prominent citizen, having been a County Commissioner, a member of the Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, an officer in the local militia, and a successful cotton farmer. Neel's imposing Federal style home still sits atop a hillside just west of Shopton Road. Neel operated a grist mill near what is now Withers Cove on Lake Wylie and placed some spindles in this facility and produced yarn. The output was modest. The plant closed before the end of the Civil War. No physical remains survive. The other and more important ante-bellum textile mill was the Rock Island Mill, established in 1848 by Charlotte businessmen R. C. Carson, John A. Young, and Z. A. Grier. It too is gone.

The first facility in Mecklenburg County devoted exclusively to the spinning of cotton fiber was the Glenroy Cotton Mill. Founded by E. C. Grier and his son, G. S. Grier, the mill was located about half way between Matthews and Providence Presbyterian Church, in southeastern Mecklenburg County. It contained 350 spindles and produced bale yarn. It was established in 1874 and operated for approximately eighteen months. The building was demolished in 1899.



The Charlotte Cotton Mills covered an entire block.

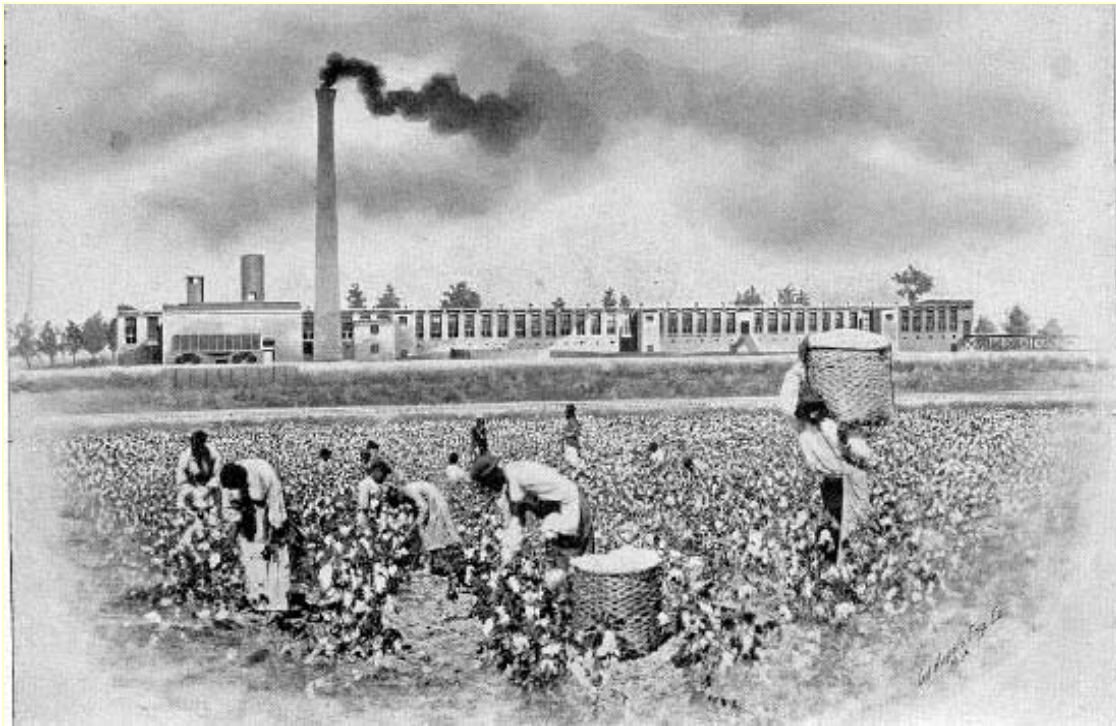
The founder of the initial cotton mill in Charlotte was Robert Marcus Oates , a native of Cleveland County and a Confederate veteran who also served on both the County Commission and the Charlotte Board of Aldermen. "He was strong in his convictions, conservative in his ideas, and these two characteristics together with his mental ability and correctness of life made him a tower of strength to the community," declared a Charlotte newspaper. Named the Charlotte Cotton Mills, the plant opened in December 1880 and went into full operation the next year. The *Charlotte Observer* , an ardent backer of industrialization even before Tompkins bought it, anticipated that the mill would "add much to Charlotte's material prosperity . . . and some predict that it will be the means of bringing similar enterprises into operation." Most of the workers were women. "The opening of the Charlotte Cotton Mill represented the beginning of a new industrial era in Charlotte's history," writes historian Janette Greenwood. Parts of the Charlotte Cotton Mills still stand at West Fifth and North Graham Streets.



John Cross, a Mecklenburg County farmer, takes his cotton to market in 1907.

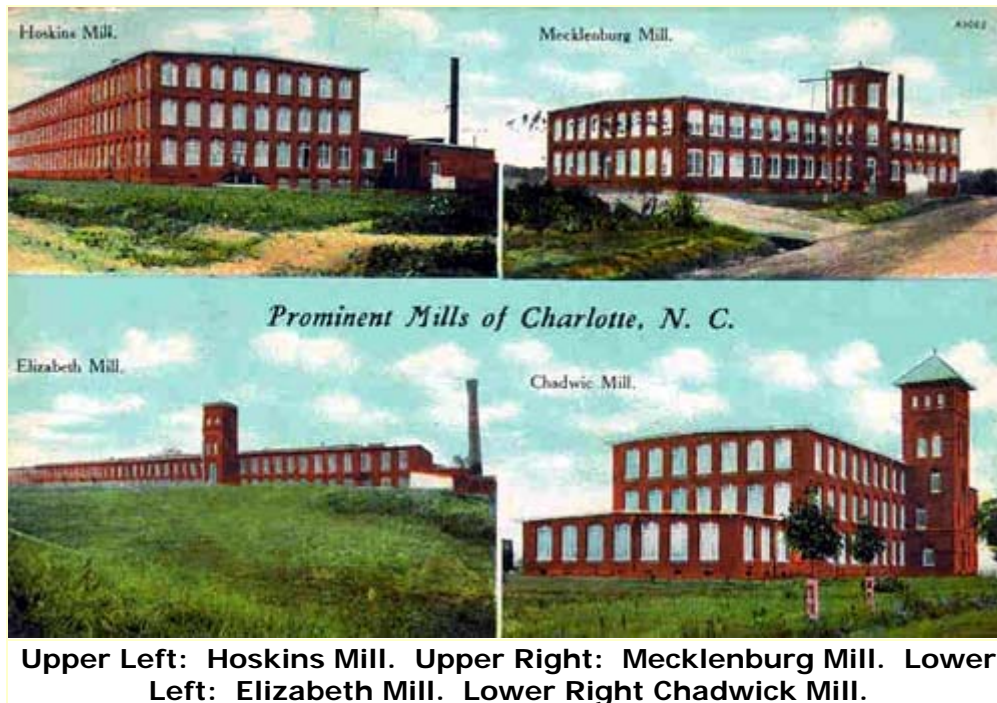
D. A. Tompkins built and equipped three cotton mills in Charlotte in 1889 – the Victor , the Ada , and the Alpha . Two of the three buildings survive, the Ada and the Alpha. Called "hummers" because of the noise produced by the spinning and weaving machines, the new mills appeared at the edges of town along railroad lines. Tompkins did not like sites in the hearts of cities. "The proximity of lawyers . . . promotes law suits," he declared, and a "mill in the country can operate its own store and thereby get back some of money paid for wages." It is important to note

that Northern capital played no role in financing the great majority of Charlotte's first cotton mills. They were home-owned and home-operated.



The Atherton Mill is in the background.

In 1892, Tompkins joined with three other local industrialists, R. M. Miller , R. M. Miller, Jr ., and E. A. Smith , in picking the southern end of Dilworth , Charlotte's first trolley suburb, as the place to erect the only cotton mill in Mecklenburg County that he owned and ran, although he did operate a cottonseed oil plant nearby. The Atherton Mills began operations in January 1893, with 5,000 spindles manufacturing yarn goods. "There's no doubt about it, things are 'humming' in the Queen City, and 'humming' to the tune of lively progress," declared Tompkins's *Charlotte Observer* .



Upper Left: Hoskins Mill. Upper Right: Mecklenburg Mill. Lower Left: Elizabeth Mill. Lower Right Chadwick Mill.

After 1900, entire mill villages containing more than one factory began to appear on the outskirts of Charlotte. E. A. Smith, a native of Baltimore and part owner of the Atherton Mills, organized the Chadwick and Hoskins mills in Charlotte near Rozzelles Ferry Road, and by 1907, was head of the Chadwick, Hoskins, Calvine (formerly Alpha), and Louise mills, and the Dover Cotton Mill in nearby Pineville. When these factories consolidated into the Chadwick-Hoskins Company in 1908, it was the largest textile firm in North Carolina. "The new Hoskins Mills, at Chadwick, a western suburb of the city, is nearing completion, and when completed will be one of the best and handsomest manufacturing plants in the South," reported the "boosterish" *Charlotte Observer* in November 1903.

Charlotte's largest textile mill village was North Charlotte, the centerpiece of which was the Highland Park Manufacturing Company Plant No 3, designed by Stuart W. Cramer, who had first come to Charlotte as an engineer for the D. A. Tompkins Company. Erected at the former site of the municipal water works, the imposing brick, electric-powered mill, containing 30,000 spindles, 1000 looms, and employing 800 workers, opened in 1904. The Mecklenburg Mill (1904) and the Johnston Manufacturing Company (1913) were also located in North Charlotte, as were houses for the workers. All three mill buildings are still standing.

Textile employees, mostly white yeomen farmers and their families who had migrated to the city in search of jobs, typically labored ten to twelve hours a day Monday to Friday and five hours on Saturday. One mill worker recalled a routine day's work for her mother.

After a hard shift of breathing in cotton lint, her ears ringing from the constant "banging" and "slapping" of the motor belts, and the eternal never ending "swishin" of the bobbins and thread, she often worked late into the night hours at our own home. Still tired from the previous day's work, she would crawl out of bed at 4:30 a.m. the next morning, cook breakfast and head out to the mill to begin another shift.

When asked about books, one Mecklenburg mill hand answered that he had no time to read. "We have to go to work at fifteen minutes to six and work till seven in the evening," he explained. A worker in neighboring Gaston County complained bitterly about the impact of mill life upon the laboring people. "In a few years, unless we get shorter hours in cotton mills, you will see a State full of dwarfs and invalids," he warned.

New South industrialists vigorously opposed any efforts by outside groups to improve the lot of textile workers. A particularly dramatic encounter arose between Tompkins and Methodist minister J. A. Baldwin. Baldwin visited the Atherton Mill Village in 1898 and was appalled by the disease, malnutrition, and overall poverty that he insisted existed there. Tompkins responded by telling the preacher that the plight of textile workers was of their own making. They are "of roving dispositions, are shiftless, and improvident," he insisted.

D. A. Tompkins used the so-called "rough rule" in assigning families to his mill houses, meaning that a mill worker was to be supplied for every room in the house. Rent ranged from 75 cents to one dollar per day. In a letter he wrote to a textile official in Patterson, New Jersey, Tompkins defended his practice of not placing closets, bathrooms or hot water in his mill houses. He explained that the majority of his workers had grown up in rural areas, where such "modern improvements" were unknown. "Sometimes they would object to ordinary clothes closets," he reported, "on the pleas that they were receptacles for worn out shoes and skirts that ought to be thrown away and destroyed."

On balance, the evidence suggests that the D. A. Tompkins Company administered its workforce with a tight fist. "I heartily approve discipline and good order in my organization," Tompkins declared. Although examples of paternalism did exist, such as awarding a prize of five hundred dollars annually for the best flower and vegetable gardens, the overall impression is that the mill families followed a daily routine dominated by hard work and long hours. "Tompkins' philosophy," a biographer wrote, "was blind to the needs of humanity in a society which was being increasingly industrialized."



Atherton Lyceum

D. A. Tompkins took advantage of the fact that it was not until 1903 that the General Assembly of North Carolina enacted a child labor law, prohibiting the employment of children

less than twelve years of age. He did build a school, the Atherton Lyceum , and imported his sister from Edgefield, South Carolina to teach fundamental quantitative and verbal skills to the mill children and their parents. Despite his patriotic pronouncements, Tompkins compelled his workers to labor on the Fourth of July, at least until July 4, 1907, when he acquiesced to the suggestion advanced by the superintendent of the Atherton Mills and sponsored a picnic at the Catawba River , where his employees were served sandwiches and lemonade.

A series of momentous developments in the physical evolution of Charlotte occurred in 1890-91. Edward Dilworth Latta , native of Pendleton, South Carolina, former student at Princeton University, and owner of a clothing manufacturing plant in Charlotte since the early 1880s, joined with five associates on July 8, 1890, to create the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company , locally known as the Four C's . Like Tompkins, Latta was an enthusiastic advocate of what historian Paul M. Gaston has termed "the New South Creed." Accordingly, like many Southern leaders who attained adulthood during the decade of intense poverty that followed the Civil War, Latta insisted that his native region must discard the past and seek to emulate much of the industrial and urban society of the North. Grounded philosophically in the tenets of Social Darwinism, Latta believed that the South should marshal its talents and resources and beat the Yankees at their own game. "We must go forward or retrograde – there is no resting place with progress," he contended.



The Central Hotel on the Square was a favorite spot for New South leaders to meet and eat.

As president of the Four C's , Latta superintended the activities preparatory to the opening of Dilworth , a suburb containing 1635 lots and located on the former fairgrounds and adjacent parcels to the immediate south of the city. Uppermost on his agenda was the installation of an electric streetcar or trolley system. Charlotte had obtained a horse-drawn or mule-drawn streetcar system in January 1887, but Latta became convinced that only the new-fangled electric streetcar could provide the kind of reliable service Dilworth would require. Thomas Edison , who had established a laboratory in the former United States Branch Mint to investigate how electricity might be used to extract gold from low-grade ore, visited in Latta's

home and probably played a part in persuading his host that Charlotte needed a trolley system.

Not surprisingly, the Edison Electric Company was awarded the contract to construct the electric streetcar system for the Four C's on February 11, 1891. Soon thereafter, C. E. Collins, an Edison official, arrived in Charlotte to oversee the job. Work began in March and terminated on May 18, 1891, when the first trolley departed from the intersection of Trade and Tryon Streets and headed toward Dilworth. The *Charlotte News* reported that a "great and jolly crowd" assembled to witness the event. The *Morning Star* of Wilmington described the reaction of the public to the placement of the entire system into operation on May 20, 1891, the opening day of the land sale in Dilworth. "The streets and yards fairly swarmed with people, each hurrahing and waving as the car passed along. Bouquets were sent to adorn the cars with," the newspaper continued, "and every one was wild with joy."

On March 14, 1891, the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company began a series of daily advertisements that appeared for a year in the *Charlotte News*. They provide a fascinating insight into the mindset of Edward Dilworth Latta and his associates. These men, who congratulated themselves on being visionaries "before whose eyes the future hangs no veil," looked upon Dilworth as a symbol of urban maturity that would galvanize local support for a program of unceasing growth and expansion. Above all else, they wanted their streetcar suburb to serve as a beacon that would guide and direct the citizenry in a crusade to transform Charlotte into a commercial and industrial center of the New South.



Convinced that Charlotte stood "on the threshold of a big boom," Latta and his associates characterized their undertaking as the "inaugural movement in the march of improvement" that would enable Charlotte to become "aglow with the spirit of enterprise." Dilworth and its attendant trolley system, they insisted, would place "the monument of progress where once stood lethargy and rot." "Ere long," they predicted, "the pick, the hammer and the trowel will join the chorus of the spinner and the loom and the sweet music of enterprise will be heard all around." Latta and his associates stated that they had "no doubts about the possibilities of Charlotte. We have anticipated her doubling, yea trebling her population in the near future," they proclaimed. "If we all follow unitedly in the wake of the 4C's, we will build a city where we now have a town," said one enthusiastic supporter.

One cannot discount the significant and beneficent impact that New South leaders like D. A. Tompkins and Edward Dilworth Latta had upon the economy of Charlotte and its environs. Certainly, both men had their admirers. One biographer, George Winston, calls Tompkins "a Southern Franklin, growing in poor soil and enriching the soil he grew in." He was, says Winston, "full of zeal to help mankind by teaching men to help themselves, he was a rare combination of worker and philosopher, of student and teacher, of economist and philanthropist." The drive, foresight and ambition of Latta and the men like him changed forever the nature of the South. The *Charlotte Observer* was correct in its 1925 eulogy when it characterized Latta as the "builder of a city. . . . He gave the town its first impetus, and he kept it going until the day it went forward on its own accord."

Although former yeoman farmers often had to endure severe working conditions in the textile mills of the late nineteenth century, nobody held a gun to their heads and forced them to accept positions in the plants. Workers migrated to the mill villages because life was often better for them there than on the impoverished farms they left behind. Undoubtedly, there was a need for social and political cohesion if the South was to recover from the ravages of the Civil War. "The rebuilding of the Southern States after the Civil War was an achievement of no less magnitude than the War itself," declares Winston. Admittedly by means that would be unacceptable by today's standards of public behavior, the Democratic Party did provide essential leadership in North Carolina and throughout the South in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Still, at least in this writer's opinion, some aspects of the legacy that men such as Tompkins and Latta left behind is troubling, especially with respect to racial attitudes. That truth was to become painfully obvious in the 1890s. More about that later.

Chapter Eight

Jim Crow and The Defeat of Populism



This photo was taken in the Baumgarten Studio presumably on June 6, 1881---the date of the marriage of John Rattley to Sarah Butler. Stephen Mattoon of Biddle Univ performed the ceremony in Clinton Chapel.

The 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century were tragic years for African Americans and for working class whites in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County and throughout the entire South. Events occurred during those years that intensified racial and class antipathies that persist until the present day. There are some who think that the sad story of the rise of Jim Crow or racial segregation laws and the defeat of Populism should be left untold. This writer does not agree. The truth is the truth, however disturbing and troubling it might be.

"If the psychologists are correct in their hypothesis that aggression is always the result of frustration, then the South toward the end of the 'nineties was the perfect cultural seedbed for aggression against the minority race," asserts historian C. Vann Woodward. Woodward contends that prejudice, hatred, and fanaticism have always existed in America, as they have in practically any human society. What allowed feelings of "extreme racism" to become dominant in the South at the end of the nineteenth century, he argues, "was not so much cleverness or ingenuity as it was a general weakening and discrediting of the numerous forces that had hitherto kept them in check."

According to Woodward, Northern liberals became more interested in the late 1800s in fostering sectional reconciliation than in continuing to champion the civil rights of African

Americans. "Just as the Negro gained his emancipation and new rights through a falling out between white men, he now stood to lose his rights through the reconciliation of white men," explains Woodward. The most obvious example of this shift in Northern attitudes about civil rights was the United States Supreme Court's ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). This seminal judgment allowed states to establish "separate but equal" facilities for whites and blacks and opened the floodgates for legal racial segregation in the South.

Furthering weakening the North's opposition to racial equality was the country's adoption of imperialistic ambitions during and after the Spanish American War of 1898, especially in the Philippines. How could the Yankees defend the rights of the minority race in the South when they were at the same time exploiting people of color on far distant islands? "The North had a bloody shirt of its own," says Woodward. Finally, and most importantly, moderate, wealthy Southerners abandoned their accommodating stance on race when they came to believe that fanning the flames of racial bigotry once more would be useful in holding onto white support for a continuation of the elite's political dominance of the South and for the New South agenda of unending economic growth.

Many educated African Americans were still hopeful about the future in the 1870s and 1880s. It was certainly not a golden age of racial harmony. Fraud was rampant in elections, and registrars were often capricious in performing their official duties. But affluent whites did not hold a monopoly on political power in North Carolina in those years. "It is perfectly true that Negroes were often coerced, defrauded, or intimidated," writes Woodward, "but they continued to vote in large numbers in most parts of the South for more than two decades after Reconstruction." Tar Heel voters, for example, elected 52 African Americans to the North Carolina House of Representatives between 1876 and 1894.



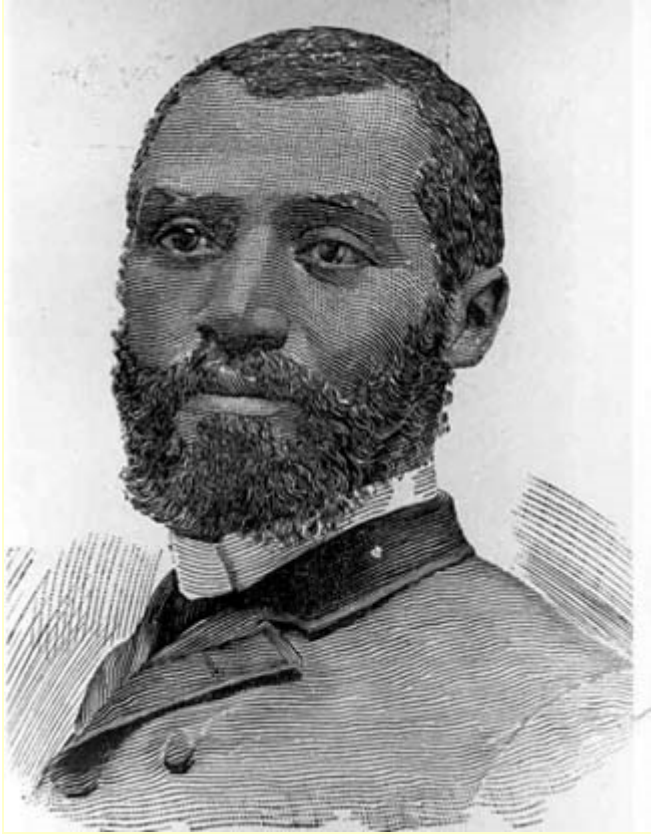
Sarah Hutson Butler (1860-1895)
belonged to Charlotte's "finer" African
American community.

It is true that Charlotte, like most Southern cities, was largely segregated along racial lines except for housing, but blacks and whites commingled during the routine acts of daily living in much the same way as people did in the North. Nobody can deny that there were blatant examples of discrimination, such as at the Charlotte Opera House, where African Americans had to sit in the balcony. But whites routinely attended concerts in black churches and listened to guest lecturers at Biddle Institute. Black camp meetings in Dilworth 's Latta Park attracted "the best white and colored people." Visitors from outside the region often commented on the convivial atmosphere of race relations in the South. "I think the whites of the South are really less afraid to have contact with colored people than the whites of the North," commented one African American traveler in 1885. "I feel about as safe here as in Providence, R.I.," he said while riding on a train in South Carolina. "I can ride in first-class cars on the railroads and in the streets. I can go into saloons and get refreshments even as in New York."



These are the sons of a prominent white family posing with their "Mammy," who had been born into slavery. The former brick slave house was behind the main house on South Tryon St.

William C. Smith , editor of Charlotte's first African American newspaper, the *Charlotte Messenger* , shared the belief of many citizens that blacks could gain acceptance by the majority community if they demonstrated their commitment to such values as good manners, self-discipline, hard work, and financial responsibility. African Americans, he declared, must "stop smoking cigars, drinking whiskey, pleasure riding" and joining in other ungentlemanly activities. Henry Clinton , an A.M.E. Zion preacher and bishop, expressed similar sentiments. "Be quiet, gentlemanly, attentive to your own business and you will find that you will get along much better than if you laugh loud, swagger, smoke cheap cigars and drink cheap whiskey," he told his congregation. "Colored people must remember that this is a white man's country."



W. C. Smith, editor of the *Charlotte Messenger*.

In her engrossing book Bittersweet Legacy, Janette Greenwood describes how affluent whites and upper class blacks in Charlotte did cooperate in the 1880s in a concerted effort to close saloons and other venues for obtaining alcoholic beverages. It was a formidable task. According to some residents, Charlotte was "awash in booze." A.M.E. Zion Bishop Henry Lomax reported that in 1881 "Charlotte was haunted with more drunken men, in proportion of the population, than he had ever seen and he had traveled in every State of the Union except three." A town of only some 7000 residents in 1880, Charlotte had seventeen saloons and a beer garden, and drug stores also sold liquor. On Christmas Day 1880 groups of young men roamed through the town like participants in a "carnival of intemperance." Charlotte was "filled with reeling, drunken youth," complained one outraged observer.



These are the students in 1887 at Myers Street School, the first public school for blacks in Charlotte.

Prohibition was particularly well suited as a political issue that could bridge the racial divide in New South Charlotte. Wealthy whites, who were becoming increasingly disgusted with the reckless and flagrant disregard for common decency exhibited by many drunks, were willing to form alliances with supporters wherever they could find them, even if they were black. African Americans, especially those who had been educated in freedmen's schools or taught by Northern missionaries, were likewise eager to join hands with the majority community. C. C. Pettey, a minister and graduate of Biddle Institute, described liquor as "the accursed brutalizer and destroyer of humanity."

In 1881, white prohibitionists in Charlotte established the Prohibition Association to lobby the State legislature to pass a law outlawing whiskey anywhere and everywhere. Women, including Jane Renwick Smedburg Wilkes, were the backbone of the organization. During anti-whiskey municipal election campaigns in April, and again in State-wide elections held later that year and in 1886 and 1888, the Prohibition Association invited blacks to share the rostrum and platform with whites at public rallies. Not to be outdone, the pro-liquor crowd was also biracial.

Although the "wets" eventually succeeded in keeping the saloons open, prohibitionists like W. C. Smith and white lawyer E. K. P. Osborne had demonstrated that both sides of the color line could cooperate politically in Charlotte during the 1880s. "Exploitation there was in that period," says Woodward. "Subordination there was also, unmistakable subordination; but it was not yet an accepted corollary that the subordinates had to be totally segregated and needlessly humiliated by a thousand daily reminders of their subordination."

It was in the 1890s that extreme racism gained the upper hand again in Charlotte and throughout the South. New South boosters like D. A. Tompkins and Edward Dilworth Latta became deeply concerned about the course of political events and feared that their influence over governmental affairs in Mecklenburg County and North Carolina might diminish or even end. They and their compatriots therefore decided to marshal their considerable resources and destroy this threat to their privileged positions, thereby setting into motion a series of reforms that would transform the nature of public affairs in this community and in the South as a whole for more than 60 years.

There were three groups involved in attacking the political status quo in the 1890s -- impoverished farmers, disgruntled mill workers, and unhappy blacks. They formed a political alliance that sought to topple the political dominance of the Democrat Party and its affluent leaders. The issues were essentially power and money. "Small farmers felt themselves losing power to the upstart railroad towns," says historian Thomas Hanchett. Factory workers, mostly tenant farmers who had been forced off the land, grieved over their loss of status and the diminution of their sense of personal independence. Blacks, explains Hanchett, "looked for a way to finally attain the respect and influence due them as free citizens."



John Edward Rattley (1855-1946)
was a graduate of Biddle Institute
and the first principal of Myers
Street School.

The impetus for this bold political initiative of the 1890s arose in the countryside. Times were hard for farmers. Cotton prices plummeted in the 1870s and 1880s, putting many Mecklenburg County farmers in dire economic straits. By 1880, 43 percent of the agriculturists in Mecklenburg County were tenant farmers. Country people were angry and felt impotent. They blamed townspeople, especially bankers, storekeepers, and industrialists like D. A. Tompkins and Edward Dilworth Latta, for their plight. "... when we farmers are in the fields working hard in the summer, with the drops of sweat falling from our brow," complained one rural resident, "the merchants are sitting around the store doors with their linen shirts and black neckties on, waiting for us to bring in our first bale of cotton." Rural residents insisted that railroads were getting wealthy by charging exorbitant shipping fees and banks were prospering by levying excessive interest rates. "Owing to legislation in favor of monopolies our lands are gradually slipping from the hands of the wealth-producing classes and going into the hands of the few," lamented J. A. Wilson, a Mecklenburg County farmer.



White children stand atop a "Joggling Board," a favorite toy of the day. Two black servants watch the children. This picture was made in Charlotte.

Believing that collective action was their only means for relief, Mecklenburg farmers established a local branch of the Farmers' Alliance in 1888. The Alliance sponsored picnics where rural families gathered to eat such "rural delicacies" as collard greens, cornbread, black-eyed peas, and pork chops while listening to speakers who would rail against the "enemies of the countryside." One "suspender-popping" orator warned his audience that time for resolute action was at hand, "for if we fail this time, the farmer's doom is fixed, the merchants will have us where they will hold us forever." One wonders whether the children playing in the barnyards paid any attention to what the impassioned speakers were saying. Their mothers and fathers certainly did.

In 1892, disgruntled farmers gave up on their efforts to gain control of the Democrat Party and decided to establish a separate People's or Populist Party to advance their agenda. Country folks were further embittered by the Panic of 1893, the most severe economic downturn the country had experienced up until that time. Determined to sweep the Democrats aside and take command in North Carolina and other agricultural states, the Populists set out to unite rank-and-file whites, including those who worked in the factories and the mills of the cities, with the Republican Party, which was overwhelmingly black, to achieve a majority coalition in upcoming elections.

The prospects that the Populists could win broad support among industrial workers looked promising, because they too were dissatisfied with their station in life. Textile mills were dangerous places. Accidents at D. A. Tompkins's Atherton Mills were frequent, such as the mangling of a worker's hands in June 1893, or the death of an overseer who became entangled in a belting apparatus in October 1902. Having come to town in hopes of finding steady work, the millhands soon learned that they could be let go at the whim of the owners. "Last week night work shut down at the mill on account of a dullness in the market," reported the *Charlotte Observer* in March 1896. "It throws about 15 families out of work."

The Knights of Labor did organize a local union in 1886, but it was largely ineffectual in its efforts to protect blue-collar workers from the actions of their employers. According to historian Thomas Hanchett, skilled millhands in Charlotte earned between \$1.00 and \$1.40 per day in 1890, while unskilled men made between 65 cents and 75 cents. Women and children made even less – 40 cents to 65 cents per day. Usually having no relatives in Charlotte who could provide emergency relief, families often had no choice but to walk the streets looking for jobs at other textile mills or in the local construction industry. Laborers would frequently resort to begging if no work was to be had. In October 1896, the *Charlotte Democrat* complained about “the unusually large number of beggars and tramps investing this place.”

As already noted, the 1870s and 1880s had been a time of “tremendous hope” for African Americans in Charlotte, but by the early 1890s blacks were becoming increasingly frustrated by the lack of on-going progress in race relations. J. C. Price, president of Livingstone College in Salisbury, spoke to a biracial audience at the Charlotte City Hall in April 1893. He described “the Southern race problem from the Negro’s point of view.” African Americans, said Price, were “denied equal accommodation for the money on the railroad trains; he cannot get justice in the courts; he is lynched on slight provocation; he is denied equal participation with the white man in the affairs of government.”



Some of Charlotte "finest" African Americans belonged to Grace A.M.E. Zion Church, which is in the background.

A particularly unsettling event occurred at the Richmond and Danville Railroad Station on West Trade Street in October 1893. A group of students from Biddle Institute went there to assist some young black female friends in gathering their luggage and getting on the train. Even though they broke no laws and were not arrested, several of the young men were boisterous and exuberant in their behavior. Whites at the station became upset and angry. “There is a disposition among them,” said the *Charlotte Observer* about blacks in general, “when they are superfluous numbers in public places – as railroad stations and cars, streetcars, etc. – particularly on gala occasions, to make themselves offensive to the whites about them by loud talking and such characters of misbehaving – good natured as it may be.” The newspaper went on to suggest that the railroad provide “separate accommodations for whites and blacks at the depot.” It was not long before the Richmond and Danville Railroad complied. Although alarmed, Charlotte’s African American community did not openly oppose

this move. The *Star of Zion*, the newspaper of the A.M.E. Zion Church, did express its "regret . . . of the proposed action of the Richmond and Danville Railroad authorities."

"The pent-up frustrations of farmers, blacks, and ordinary North Carolinians whose interests had been ignored by the Democrat party exploded in the 1894 state elections," writes historian Paul Escott. The so-called "Fusionists" elected 74 members to the North Carolina legislature and sent two of their backers to the United States Senate. The insurgents controlled 62 percent of the seats in the General Assembly in 1894 and 78 percent in 1896.

It did not take long for the defenders of the status quo to realize that the Populists and their Republican allies represented a grave threat to the economic and political hegemony traditionally held by the New South elite. The Fusionists passed legislation that put elected county commissions back in charge of local government. They capped the interest rate banks and merchants could charge at 6 percent. They increased funding for public schools in hopes that education would improve the economic standing of the masses. They made it easier for rank-and-file citizens to vote by reducing the discretionary power of local registrars to exclude them from the polls. They distributed ballots that even the illiterate could understand. Most ominously for the likes of D. A. Tompkins and his pro-business cohorts, the Fusionists elected Daniel L. Russell as governor in 1896 and backed his attacks against corporate privilege. The first Republican governor since Reconstruction, Russell lashed out at the "railroad kings, bank barons, and money princes" and called for much higher taxes on business. The people were not "the serfs and slaves of the bond-holding and gold hoarding classes," the governor proclaimed.

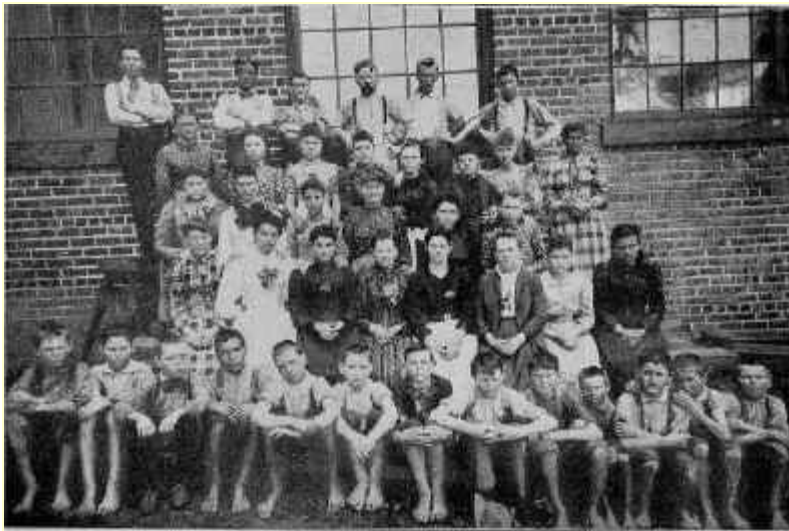
The New South elite decided it had to fight back and regain control of the State legislature in 1898. What they needed to succeed was a way to convince rank-and-file whites, mainly tenant farmers and mill workers, to quit cooperating with the Republicans, the majority of whom were black. The answer was for wealthy whites to "play the race card" again just as they had in the late 1860s and early 1870s. "They persuaded themselves that the crisis of the 'nineties was as desperate as that of the 'seventies had been," explains C. Vann Woodward. "The South must be redeemed again, and the political ethics of redemption – which justified any means to achieve the end – were pressed into service against the Populists as they had been against the carpetbaggers." Woodward continues: "The same means of fraud, intimidation, bribery, violence, and terror were used against the one that had been used against the other."

Most of the local leaders of the campaign to intimidate and disenfranchise African Americans were members of the Young Democrats Club. Composed mainly of middle class professionals in their thirties or early forties, such as attorneys Heriot Clarkson and Charles W. Tillett, the "Young Democrats" organized torchlight parades and held mass rallies to demonstrate their "bare-knuckle style" of determination to subdue the Populists and terrorize black voters. As many as 1500 "Young Democrats," bedecked in flamboyant red shirts, rode periodically down Tryon Street at night on horseback, brandishing their weapons, thrusting their chests defiantly toward onlookers, and proclaiming the superiority of the white race.

The *Charlotte Observer* enthusiastically endorsed the campaign to wrest the vote away from blacks and accordingly called upon the people of Charlotte-Mecklenburg to cast their ballots for the Democrats. "No Northern State or community would permit itself to be governed by its ignorance and poverty and no more can Southern states or communities afford this," the newspaper declared on January 14, 1898. The ballot, wrote a reporter several days later, "becomes in the hands of the ignorant and the vicious classes a most

destructive and dangerous element." The *Charlotte Observer* claimed that the Populists and their Republican allies had established a regime in Raleigh "as corrupt as the crypt of Hades" and predicted that on Election Day, November 8, 1898, the people would "bury its corrupters beneath an avalanche of ballots." Click [here](#) to see racial illustrations from D. A. Tompkins's [History of Mecklenburg County](#).

The Democrats understood that the support of factory workers would be crucial in the upcoming election. Consequently, they established the Workingmen's Democratic Club and dispatched speakers to preach the mantra of white racial unity. John D. Bellamy, a Democrat candidate for Congress, spoke to the laborers at Highland Park Manufacturing Plant No. 1 on September 27th. He told the mill hands that the election would determine whether the affairs of North Carolina would "be controlled by the vicious, or whether they shall be put in the hands of the intelligent people of the State – the white people." The Republicans, Bellamy proclaimed, had "put the counties and towns of eastern North Carolina in the hands of the Negroes, who compose 95 percent of the Republican Party."



Textile works would become supporters of Jim Crow Laws.

The Populists and the Republicans attempted in vain to stem the tidal wave of white racial antipathy that was running against African Americans. On March 31, 1898, a lecturer at Biddle Institute told his audience that politicians "should guard and protect" the interests of black citizens. "Negro colonization, expatriation and similar schemes should be repudiated," he insisted, "and the issues confronting the race should be met in a manly way." Oliver H. Dockery, a Republican candidate for Congress, speaking at a political meeting at the old courthouse on West Trade Street, was even more direct in his denunciation of what he believed the Democrats were attempting to accomplish. According to a newspaper reporter who covered the event, Dockery insisted that his opponents "tried to narrow the issues down to one – the miserable cry of n.....! n.....!"

It is important to emphasize that the leaders of the Democratic Party did not consider themselves to be enemies of African Americans. Indeed, to their way of thinking, all citizens, including blacks, would benefit from orderly government. What historian Paul Escott derisively calls the privileged "better half" claimed that it alone was fit to rule. "Be it our work, the work of all of us, to hasten the day when the dream of Southern supremacy through

Southern prosperity shall be realized in all its fullness," declared the *Charlotte Observer* on March 6, 1898.

Heriot Clarkson discussed the issue of race while addressing a large Democratic rally held in Dilworth's Latta Park on October 14th. According to the local press, Clarkson contended that the "white people had done much for the Negroes." They had built schools for African Americans. They had founded hospitals for African Americans. They had established charitable institutions for African Americans. But African Americans, Clarkson reportedly said, "had always allied themselves most solidly against the whites, and hence the white voters were bound, in self defense, to stand together."

The *Charlotte Observer* appealed ever more directly to the racial prejudices of white voters as Election Day neared. On October 22, 1898, the newspaper claimed that "the eyes of the nation" were upon North Carolina. ". . . unless the State rights itself at the coming election we are likely to fall under that contempt which is always visited upon cravens," the editors proclaimed. "These lines are being printed just a little more than forty-eight hours before the opening of the polls," the *Charlotte Observer* declared on November 6th. Calling Governor Russell "vicious and vindictive beyond any man in the State, the newspaper went on to assert that the governor had "appointed rascals to office, knowing them to be rascals." "No one has written or told what momentous consequences are involved in the result of the balloting of Tuesday," the editor wrote, "because no one can."

The Democratic Party emerged victorious from the balloting on November 8th. Predictably, the *Charlotte Observer* was overjoyed by the outcome. "The people of North Carolina were true to themselves yesterday," the newspaper declared on November 9th. "The white people got together and won the election." The shift in votes by precinct was actually relatively small, but Democrat totals did rise in every box in Charlotte Township, including the two mill boxes and the three rural boxes. Just enough whites had abandoned the Populists and the Republicans to produce a Democrat victory. Statewide, the balloting put 134 Democrats in the General Assembly and only 36 Fusionists. "Being in power again," said the *Charlotte Observer* about the Democrats, "the real people of North Carolina will proceed to enact laws which will be for the well being of all of our people, and we know that hereafter there will be peace and good government in our borders."

The consequences of putting Democrats in control of both houses of the General Assembly were not long in coming. Beholden to its elitist, anti-democratic constituencies, the majority party moved quickly to change the election laws so that most African Americans, hence Republicans, would not be able to continue to cast ballots. Specifically, on February 18, 1899, the General Assembly proposed a constitutional amendment, modeled on a Louisiana statute, that would establish literacy requirements for voting except for those whites whose grandfathers had been able to vote. Clearly, if approved by a referendum of the people, these new requirements for exercising the franchise would render the Republican Party politically impotent. Charles B. Aycock, who would become the Democrat candidate for governor in 1900, knew exactly what was going on. The amendment, he maintained, would be "the final settlement of the Negro problem as related to the politics of the state."

The Democratic Party mounted another aggressive White Supremacy campaign during the months preceding August 2, 1900, which was the day set aside for the referendum on the disenfranchisement amendment. Red Shirts rode the streets again, and huge rallies were held to embolden whites and to intimidate blacks. Thousands of Democrats gathered on July 31st to witness a parade that wound through the streets of Charlotte and eventually ended at Latta Park, where "leaders of the community" addressed the crowd. Charlotte lawyer

Hamilton C. Jones was the first speaker. "Another and the last great crisis to the State is reached," he proclaimed. "North Carolina proposes to lift up the cloud that has rested upon her for 30 years, and it is determined that North Carolinians shall take their rightful place in the world -- freemen among freemen, Anglo-Saxon among Anglo-Saxon." The *Charlotte Observer* understood what the referendum was about. "The white man or the Negro -- that is the proposition that will be settled rightfully by night," said the newspaper on Election Day. The constitutional amendment was approved by a margin of 59 percent to 41 percent Statewide.

The future electoral impact of the disenfranchisement amendment of August 1900 was profound. "North Carolina had returned to an undemocratic political system that guaranteed the powerful in society effective means of protecting their power," writes Paul Escott. "The state's elite minority was secure against democratic challenges once more." The Republican Party was divested of its largest group of supporters, and the Populists faded into obscurity. With African Americans no longer able to win seats on elected bodies, the Democrats were able to superintend a one-party political system in the South. Indeed, despite substantial growth and development over the next sixty years, Charlotte did not fundamentally change in the years from 1900 until the mid-1950s, at least in terms of the locale of political authority. Rich white men and their minions were in charge. An early consequence of this circumstance, especially since racial prejudice against blacks had been a fundamental component of elite's campaign to regain power, was the enactment by the Democrats of so-called "Jim Crow Laws."

The origin of the term "Jim Crow " is obscure. It most likely appeared in 1832, when Thomas D. Rice composed a song and dance routine called "Jim Crow" for a minstrel show. Regardless, by 1900 it had become a derogatory nickname for African Americans. Mostly enacted by city ordinances and other local regulations, Jim Crow laws appeared across the South in the early 1900s as a principal means to guarantee racial separation. "The extremes to which caste penalties and separation were carried in parts of the South could hardly find a counterpart short of the latitudes of India and South African," writes C. Vann Woodward.

Charlotte was no exception. Imagine how the black citizens felt when the all-white Board of Aldermen passed an ordinance in 1907 instituting racial segregation on Charlotte's streetcars. Fancy how they reacted emotionally to the announcement that the owners of Lakewood Park , a popular amusement complex, would not extend the fall season for a week in 1910, so the black residents of Charlotte could visit the facility, because the "fear existed that such a course might injure the resort in some manner, or might lessen the prestige."



Bishop George Wiley Clinton of Little Rock A.M.E. Zion Church would host leading members of his congregation at an annual Christmas celebration.

At almost every turn, the black men and black women of Charlotte encountered developments that threatened their sense of self-esteem. In November 1911, the Board of School Commissioners announced that it was abandoning plans to construct a black school in Third Ward because of the "objections which have been forthcoming from the citizens." In April 1911, black Sunday School teachers were invited to the Mecklenburg County Sunday School Association, but they had to sit in the balcony. Even a play entitled "The N...." was performed on the stage of the elegant Academy of Music on South Tryon Street. Within this cultural milieu, the black church served as a haven from the white man; there black men could exhort their congregations to persevere in the face of adversity and scorn.

Clearly, the behavior of elite whites toward the black citizens of Charlotte at the turn of the last century was in direct opposition to today's sense of equity and fairness. Nothing can mitigate the essential wrongness of White Supremacy. However, just as in the case of apologists for slavery, the defenders of "Jim Crow" laws believed that disenfranchisement and racial segregation would work ultimately for the benefit of society as a whole. Fundamental to the thinking of New South leaders like D. A. Tompkins and Heriot Clarkson was the belief that blacks should focus their attention upon educational and economic advancement, not the attainment of political prerogatives.



**Carnegie Library at Biddle Memorial Institute, now
Johnson C. Smith University.**

On November 15, 1911, Tompkins and Clarkson attended the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the new Carnegie Library at Biddle Memorial Institute . Happily the building still stands. Dr. Henry L. McCrorey , the college president, was master of ceremonies. McCrorey lauded Tompkins for the latter's unselfish interest in the prosperity of Biddle Institute. Tompkins thanked McCrorey and told the crowd that Biddle was a "model school" that contributed mightily to "the solution of the race questions existing throughout the world" by promulgating "conservative influences." Heriot Clarkson also praised the school and its graduates.

The message of the White Supremacists was unmistakable. They contended that what they called Anglo Saxon values must rein supreme because in their minds such beliefs alone would assure the advancement of all Southerners. Tompkins maintained that any man, black or white, could succeed in achieving the American Dream if he worked hard enough. By practicing self-discipline and becoming educated, African Americans might one day demonstrate their worthiness to participate on an equal footing with whites in the political realm; but for now they must be subservient to whites in governmental affairs.

A.M.E. Zion Bishop Henry Lomax , who died on March 31, 1908, was the type of individual whom the New South leaders thought African Americans should aspire to become. Lomax invested heavily in real estate in Charlotte, especially in Second Ward, and possessed an estate of approximately \$70,000 at the time of his death. "He had remarkable business talent," the *Charlotte News* proclaimed, "and set an example to his people of how power and respect come to a man from thrift and industry." The *Charlotte Observer* also commented editorially upon Lomax's death. "In the death of T. H. Lomax of this city, the colored race and the community lose a valuable member and the A.M.E. Zion Church a shining light," the newspaper asserted. "His example and counsels always made for good and by all colors and classes his death is to be regretted."

Factory workers also suffered discrimination at the hands of the New South leaders in the opening decades of the twentieth century. Unlike most of Charlotte's earlier manufacturing establishments, which had had relatively few workers, factories like Latta's Charlotte Trouser Company (1883) and the Alpha , Ada , and Victor Cotton Mills (1889) attracted hundreds of laborers to town. Most were newcomers who had little, if any, loyalties to local elites. It

became increasingly difficult within this cultural milieu to maintain the feelings of cordiality that had characterized social relationships between classes in pre-industrial Charlotte. For the first time residential enclaves filled exclusively with cottages for mill workers began to appear on the outskirts of Charlotte. To quote Hanchett, "The close-knit relationships of the small workplace were giving way to less personal interactions between the factory owner and his numerous and interchangeable employees."

The disenfranchisement amendment approved in 1900 stipulated that the infamous "Grandfather Clause" would last for only seven years and that thereafter illiterate whites would also be prevented from voting unless they had already registered. This provision resulted from the elite's skepticism concerning the likelihood that industrial workers would remain loyal to the Democrat Party. Strikes reinforced these feelings of distrust. In 1905, typographical workers struck the local newspapers, machinists walked off their jobs at D. A. Tompkins Company, and messengers vacated Western Union. It was not uncommon for prosperous Charlotteans to refer to millhands and their families as "white trash" or the "ignorant factory set," says Hanchett.

The most dramatic incident of labor unrest in Charlotte at the turn of the last century occurred in 1903. Serious trouble began on December 2nd. On that day forty-eight streetcar conductors and motormen who worked for the Charlotte Street Railway Company walked off the job and marched from the car barn on South Boulevard in Dilworth to the Square, where they milled about, explained their grievances, and sought public support.

The ostensible reason for the walkout was a dispute regarding the company's refusal to turn on electric heaters in the trolleys. The strikers generally received public support for their refusal to continue to operate unheated streetcars. "The people here in Charlotte are with the strikers and they are sure to win if they are orderly and well behaved," the *Charlotte Observer* predicted. The *Charlotte News* also supported the action of the motormen and conductors, insisting that the citizens were "overwhelmingly with the men on the main question that the cars ought to be heated." Edward Dilworth Latta, who was in New York City when the strike broke out, arrived in Charlotte on December 3rd to find many townspeople wearing buttons that boldly proclaimed, "I walk."

Latta responded to the labor crisis with characteristic firmness and dispatch. Indeed, he had already sent a telegram to his elder son, Nisbet Latta, who was becoming increasingly active in his father's businesses, instructing him to announce that the conductors and motormen no longer worked for the Charlotte Street Railway Company and that replacements for the entire work force would be hired immediately. In response, the mood of the strikers turned ugly as they gathered at the Square and hurled insults at the "scabs" who were taking their jobs. A rally was held on the night of December 3rd in Typographical Hall, where the leaders of the labor unions in Charlotte pledged their support for the employees of the trolley system and contributed funds for their struggle. Cheers erupted when the audience learned that the majority of the businessmen of the city had signed a petition requesting that the Four Cs turn on the electric heaters and reinstate the men. F. C. Abbott, an influential realtor, headed a citizens' committee that met with Latta and attempted to resolve the dispute. The motormen and conductors agreed to return to work when the company activated the heaters.

Latta, however, remained adamant in a letter to the *Charlotte News* published on December 5, 1903:

I regret, beyond expression, the exigency of the situation, causing me to part with a body of men for many of whom I hold a personal attachment; but it could scarcely be expected by any thoughtful fair-minded person that on my return I would dismiss those who had graciously rallied to our interests and reinstate others who, without provocation during my absence, elected to abandon their position with no other expectation than that the company and the public would be without service.

The situation worsened on December 8th, when Latta announced that the Four Cs was turning on the heaters in the cars but that the former motormen and conductors would not be reinstated. The *Charlotte News* proclaimed in a blistering editorial that the "only honest and manly thing to do under God's heaven" was for the company to admit that it was wrong and restore the men to their jobs. The newspaper challenged Latta directly, questioning the status of the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company as a reputable corporate citizen and suggesting that the Charlotte Board of Aldermen might want to review carefully the gas, electric, and trolley franchises it had awarded in the 1890s to the Four Cs. The editorial writer minced no words in his conclusion: "The company has already given the strongest impetus to municipal ownership of the public utilities of this city that could have been given. And if the company wins, it will be a dear victory in the end."

Violence exploded on December 10, 1903, when a rowdy mob gathered on South Boulevard in Dilworth after dark and fired pistols in the air as the streetcars passed. That same night rocks pummeled through the windshield of a trolley in Piedmont Park, a streetcar suburb bordering Central Avenue, one hitting the conductor's ankle. Although strikers were not implicated, their public support began to evaporate. The *Charlotte News*, attempting to reverse the tide, sponsored a benefit performance on December 21st featuring Gilbert Warren, a humorist. But the situation was irredeemable. Edward Dilworth Latta and the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company triumphed, and the former motormen and conductors were forced to seek other employment.

In his refusal to negotiate with or reinstate the striking streetcar workers, Latta behaved with the traditional hostility to labor organization that was characteristic of most capitalists who came to the forefront in the New South. Such men, for the most part, were committed to laissez-faire capitalism; they viewed actions on the part of workers to organize or to strike or to bargain collectively as a conspiracy to restrain natural and productive economic activity. Latta's approach to labor relations was at worst self-serving and at best only paternalistic.

Chapter Nine

The Sorted Out City



There is a certain monotony to the history of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County in the first half of the twentieth century. There were consequential developments, not the least being an increase in Charlotte's population from 18,091 in 1900 to 134,052 in 1950 and Mecklenburg County's from 55,268 to 197,052. Just as in the Civil War, Charlotte-Mecklenburg was the site of important military bases during World War One and World War Two. Skyscrapers soared over the old center city, beginning with the already mentioned Realty or Independence Building in 1909 and continuing with the First National Bank Building and the Johnston Building in the 1920s. Exquisite suburbs like Eastover appeared on the edges of Charlotte. Banks gradually replaced textile mills as the main component of Charlotte's economy. In 1917, the City abandoned voting by wards for elections to municipal governing boards, thereby increasing the influence of the wealthy white elite upon governmental decisions. The city acquired a municipal airport and endured the Great Depression of the 1930s. Finally, James B. Duke provided the capital necessary to make the Catawba River a generator of hydroelectric power. But these years nonetheless lacked the drama and passion of the decades that preceded them and that followed them.



This picture of newly-elected Mayor Douglas and the Charlotte City Council appeared in the *Charlotte Observer* in May 1935. Seated left to right on the front row are Claude L. Albea, W. N. Hovis, Mayor Ben E. Douglas, L. R. Sides, and John F. Boyd. Standing left to right on the back row are J. S. Nance, Herbert H. Baxter, J. H. Huntley, Mayor Pro-Tem John L. Wilkinson, J. S. Tipton, W. Roy Hudson, and John F. Durham. All are white males. That's the way it was in Charlotte-Mecklenburg for over 60 years.

The essential dullness of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's history during these years arises from the fact that wealthy white businessmen were in virtual control of all public affairs. "Most major urban decisions in the early twentieth century," writes historian Blaine A. Brownell, "and the conceptual context within which these decisions were made, can be traced directly to the socio-economic elite group." Men like David Ovens, James B. Duke, Cameron Morrison, and Ben Douglas succeeded in suppressing all alternatives to their program of continuous economic growth. "Watch Charlotte Grow" became the catch phrase of the chieftains of local industry and commerce. In this writer's opinion, the clash of ideas and viewpoints is the very lifeblood of democracy. The first half of the twentieth century in Charlotte-Mecklenburg was the very antithesis of the encouragement of such intellectual ferment. Especially after a bloody streetcar strike in 1919, which threatened to bring class warfare to Charlotte, the moguls of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County sought to exclude all competing viewpoints from the marketplace of ideas.

Seeing themselves as defenders of order against unruly blacks and unreliable mill workers, the "commercial civic-elite," says historian Thomas Hanchett, used their political preeminence to reshape the physical form of Charlotte into a network of homogenous districts, including immaculate neighborhoods like Myers Park, Eastover, and the curvilinear section of [Dilworth](#). In 1875, Charlotte, like most Southern urban centers, "looked like a scattering of salt and pepper." Rich and poor, black and white, storeowner and day laborer frequently lived side by side in the same block. Homes, craft shops, stores, and livery stables were all mixed in together. The idea that Charlotte would have one district exclusively devoted to business, another to manufacturing, another for laborers, and another for blacks would have been unthinkable in 1875. "The landscape of Charlotte expressed confidence in tradition," explains Hanchett. "Well into the 1870s,

Charlotteans organized their city in ways that would have seemed familiar to a time traveler from colonial days or even from Medieval Europe."

"By the end of the 1920s," Hanchett contends, "Charlotteans had undergone a conceptual shift in their definition of a desirable urban landscape." Hanchett continues: "Now Charlotteans resided in a patch-work pattern of self-contained neighborhoods, each distinct in its developer-devised street system and each largely homogeneous in its racial and economic makeup."

Hanchett singles out Piedmont Park , which opened soon after 1900, as the suburb that led the way in showing how to keep "undesirable" elements away. Situated on both sides of Central Avenue between Kings Drive and Louise Avenue, Piedmont Park was the brainchild of two of Charlotte's most influential developers , F. C. Abbott and George Stephens . The pastor of Second Presbyterian Church called the location of the proposed residential district "an old hillside farm covered with sage grass and inhabited by nothing but jackrabbits." Piedmont Park, however, was to become the first neighborhood in Charlotte to abandon the city's grid street pattern. This helped make it feel like a realm set apart.



Rev. George H. Detwiler House



Jake Newell House

A striking example of an early Piedmont Park residence is the Reverend [George H. Detwiler House](#) at 801 Sunnyside Avenue. Built in 1903 as the home of a Methodist minister and lovingly restored in recent years, the Queen Anne style abode bespeaks of the tranquility and repose that white suburbanites were seeking to find in Charlotte's peripheral neighborhoods. Also on Sunnyside Avenue is the. Newell, a prominent Republican lawyer, hired architect Fred Bonfoey in 1911 to design his Rectilinear Four Square style home. Bonfoey had come to Charlotte from Connecticut about 1908. "By May, 1911," writes historian William H. Huffman, "Bonfoey had designed over fifty bungalows, a style in which he specialized, and these and others were built in various parts of the city, including Dilworth , [Belmont Villa Heights](#), [Elizabeth](#), and, of course, Piedmont Park."

Deed covenants were the most innovative tools that Abbott and Stephens introduced to exclude people of the "wrong" race or poor whites from Piedmont Park . " . . . the covenants provided a bulwark against a society that seemed to be growing more and more topsy-turvy," Hanchett contends. "In such a district the 'best population' would suffer no intrusions from people who did not 'know their place.'" Deed covenants, explains Hanchett,

"hammered home three essentials of the sorted-out city." First, Piedmont Park would be exclusively residential, meaning that workplace and domicile could no longer exist side by side. Second, deed covenants stipulated that African Americans could not own or rent homes in Piedmont Park. The era of racially segregated neighborhoods mandated by law was at hand. Finally, houses had to cost at least \$1500, a substantial sum in that day. This meant that poor whites could not afford to own homes in Piedmont Park.

The same principles of exclusion governed the character of Charlotte's other streetcar suburbs, including Elizabeth , Chatham Estates , Wilmore , Dilworth , and Myers Park , and its first automobile suburb, Eastover . Clearly, the underlying desire of the New South leaders was to seal themselves off in homogenous, secure enclaves to which they could retreat after working hard all day to advance the economy of Charlotte and its environs and thereby justify their control of local politics. Edward Dilworth Latta , for example, built an elegant Neo Colonial Revival style mansion on East Boulevard in Dilworth. Cotton broker Ralph VanLandingham and his rich wife Susie had architect [C. C. Hook](#) design a Bungalow style residence for them on The Plaza in Chatham Estates.



VanLandingham Estate

In summary, knowing that racial and class tensions were an inevitable consequence of their actions, people like the Lattas and the VanLandinghams, unlike Charlotte leaders of early generations, were apprehensive about residing in close proximity to those of lesser economic or social standing. Consequently, wealthy whites migrated to the edges of town in increasing numbers after the advent of the electric streetcar and the automobile made suburban life more feasible.



McManaway House



Withers-Efird House

Sometimes owners went as far as to take their houses with them. In 1916, Dr. Charles R. McManaway had his elegant Italianate style mansion moved from West Trade Street to Queens Road in Myers Park. Ten years later Benjamin Withers, founder of a building supply business, moved his imposing home from East Trade Street to Selwyn Avenue, also in Myers Park. Joseph Efird became Withers's son-in-law when he married Elizabeth Withers in 1917. A native of Anson County, Efird eventually acquired the family home on Selwyn Avenue, and from 1909 until his retirement in 1956 he headed a department store empire that at its height contained over 50 stores.



William Henry Belk

Merchants played a significant role in Charlotte's economic growth in the early 1900s. Known to be hospitable to enterprising businessmen and still benefiting from its excellent railroad connections, Charlotte continued to be a mecca of sorts for ambitious young men who sought to make more money. William Henry Belk, a South Carolinian, established a store here on September 25, 1895, in a rented building just off the Square on East Trade Street. A talented retailer, Belk acquired his own building in

1905 and by the time of his death in 1952 headed the largest and most successful chain of department stores in the two Carolinas. "He enjoyed the very scent of quality merchandise freshly unpacked and shelved and stacked," says Belk's biographer.

Another of Charlotte's major turn-of-the-century merchants was Joseph Ivey. Joseph Benjamin Ivey, the handsome son of a Methodist preacher, opened a small storeroom in rented space near the Square on February 18, 1900. Ivey's first day's sales totaled \$33.18. "We had to study carefully and push the lines that the other merchants did not make a specialty," the enterprising merchant explained many years later. "For instance, at one time brass buttons were quite the rage. I was careful to keep in a supply all of the time while the other merchants were not noticing and allowed their stock to get low." Among Ivey's early employees was David Ovens, who joined J. B. Ivey & Company in 1904. "I would probably have been satisfied with a moderate business that would make something over a living," said Ivey, "but Mr. Ovens was ambitious to make J. B. Ivey & Company a big store and the business grew rapidly under our combined efforts."



J. B. Ivey

A devout Methodist, Ivey insisted that the curtains be drawn in his store windows on Sundays, so that the pedestrians would not be tempted to consider matters of *this* world on the Lord's day. Can you imagine a merchant doing such a thing today? Hardly. Our cultural values have undergone radical change since Ivey's day.

J. B. Ivey had a wide range of interests. He was an avid traveler. He also devoted great amounts of time and energy to growing flowers, especially tulips, dahlias, and gladiolas at his home in Myers Park, near the intersection of Queens Road and East Morehead Street. Many people remember that the restaurant in Ivey's Department Store was named the Tulip Terrace. Gorgeous tulip beds surrounded Ivey's home in Myers Park. There was even a miniature Dutch windmill in the yard.



This 1939 photograph shows the tulip garden at Ivey's home. It illustrates the idyllic suburban retreat Charlotte's New South elite sought to create.

The Ivey's Department Store at Fifth and North Tryon Streets was designed by English architect William H. Peeps and opened as the new home of J. B. Ivey & Company in 1924. The store was renovated and enlarged in 1939. On May 4, 1990, Ivey's was purchased by Dillard's, another department store chain. The building has recently been converted into luxury condominiums.

Myers Park is the most historically significant of Charlotte's streetcar suburbs. Thomas Hanchett and Mary Norton Kratt ably tell the neighborhood's history in their book, Legacy: The Myers Park Story. The events leading up to the founding of Myers Park in 1912 bear dramatic testimony to the positive consequences of New South leadership. The simple truth is that the business elite of Charlotte, undistracted after 1900 by the complications associated with genuine democratic processes and intrusive government, could act quickly and decisively, and sometimes the results of their actions were stunning. Myers Park is a case in point. Largely because of its bold and innovative design, Myers Park became the place where most of Charlotte's powerful and influential citizens decided to live. Lining its cathedral-like streets like pearls on an expensive strand are the pretentious homes of most of the men who shaped Charlotte in the first half of the twentieth century.



George Stephens

The individual most responsible for the creation of Myers Park was George Stephens, the co-developer of Piedmont Park. A native of Guilford County and an 1896 graduate of the University of North Carolina, Stephens had come to Charlotte to join the insurance agency headed by Walter Brem, the father of Stephens's roommate at Chapel Hill. In 1899, Stephens became a partner with F. C. Abbott in the real estate firm of Abbott and Stephens, the first seller of homes to use "For Sale" signs in the city. "George was ten years my junior in age," Abbott remembered, "a fine genial fellow . . . a great athlete . . . and very popular with his many friends." Abbott and Stephens also organized the Southern States Trust Company, which has evolved into the Bank of America of today.



The Colonial Revival George Stephens House on Harvard Place, designed by Hunter and Gordon.

Obviously a man of considerable ambition and talent, Stephens in 1902 married Sophie Myers, daughter of John Springs Myers, whose father had donated the land for Biddle Memorial Institute. Myers had inherited a large farm on Providence Road about three miles southeast of Charlotte. He sold it to his son-in-law's new company, the Stephens Company, on July 15, 1911. This land and adjoining parcels that Stephens had purchased would become the location for Myers Park. To design his new subdivision Stephens hired a young landscape architect named John Nolen, whom Stephens had met while serving on Charlotte's Park and Tree Commission during the planning and construction of Independence Park. It was the indefatigable New South booster D. A. Tompkins who made Stephens aware of Nolen.



This early photograph of Myers Park shows the newly-planted street trees along Ardsley Road, looking toward Providence Road from Harvard Place. The Duke Mansion is on the left.

As early as 1894, when Edward Dilworth Latta had offered Latta Park in Dilworth for sale to the City, the *Charlotte Observer* had supported the establishment of a municipal park system. In August 1901, the newspaper renewed its commitment, declaring that "all cities of consequence own their parks." On March 7, 1904, D. A. Tompkins appeared before the Board of Aldermen in his capacity as president of the Southern Manufacturer's Club. In keeping with his reputation as an effective and resourceful advocate, Tompkins amassed an impressive aggregate of materials and arguments in favor of his contention that Charlotte needed a public park.

No doubt aware that the Board practiced frugality in all financial matters, Tompkins suggested that the park be placed at the former site of the municipal waterworks, thereby eliminating the need for the City to purchase land. He pointed out that the property would be served by two trolley lines, the Piedmont Park line and the Elizabeth College line and, therefore, would be readily accessible to the rank-and-file citizens of Charlotte. The most compelling argument that Tompkins advanced was that public parks were a prudent and wise investment because they improved the moral and economic climates in cities. In support of this claim, Tompkins quoted from letters that elected officials in several communities had written to him such as Savannah, Georgia, Richmond, Virginia, Charleston, South Carolina, Mobile, Alabama, Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Toledo, Ohio.

At its meeting on March 7, 1904, the Board of Aldermen responded affirmatively to Tompkins's proposal and appointed Tompkins to head a special committee to oversee the project. He toured the site on April 23, 1904, with engineers from the City and discussed preliminary plans for the park. During the summer of 1904, Tompkins also negotiated with the owners of nearby property to secure the donation of additional land. He was successful. On August 1, 1904, Tompkins presented the deeds for approximately 47.5 acres of land to the Board of Aldermen, including 12.85 acres from the Highland Park Realty Company, developers of Elizabeth , and 5.57 acres from the Piedmont Realty Company, developers of Piedmont Park .

The acceptance of this property by the City assured that the park would become a reality. The *Charlotte Observer* greeted this news joyously. "It will unquestionably prove a blessing to the community, and public spirited men are unsparing in the gratification of its assured certainty," the newspaper proclaimed. D. A Tompkins explained at length the benefits which he believed the park would provide for Charlotte and especially for the industrial laborers who resided there. "We are increasing our industrial population, and many of our laboring men do not have an opportunity to get out into the country but once a week, on Sundays," he explained. "It is a good thing for them to have a park such as this will be."

On October 21, 1904, the *Charlotte Observer* reported that the City had selected the name Independence Park , no doubt in tribute to the alleged Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence of 1775. The Board of Aldermen created a Park and Tree Commission on November 7, 1904, to supervise the construction of the facility. Not surprisingly, Tomplins became chairman. The Commission moved ahead with dispatch. By June 1905, it had established contact with several landscape architects for purposes of soliciting proposals. The winner of this competition was Nolen. The design of Independence Park was the initial commission in what would become an illustrious career. Nolen earned a reputation for being one of the premier landscape architects and comprehensive planners in the United States. It is noteworthy that Tompkins and his associates would demonstrate such care in selecting the designer for Independence Park. This scrutiny was a manifestation of the New South leaders' commitment to making Charlotte a grand and majestic city, at least as long as such initiatives did not conflict with their economic agenda. In the opinion of the *Charlotte News* , it was the duty of the Park and Tree Commission "to make Charlotte famous for the beauty of its parks."

John Nolen came to Charlotte in 1905 to supervise the implementation of his plan. During his sojourn in this community, Nolen explained the theories and concepts which underlay modern landscape architecture. "It is a pleasure to talk with Mr. Nolen," the *Charlotte Observer* asserted. "He lives close to nature. His ideas and ideals are fresh and clean." On April 7, 1906, the *Charlotte Observer* reported that a "handsome driveway" at the upper and at the lower end of Independence Park had been built. The completion of these improvements, however, did not terminate Nolen's association with the Park and Tree Commission. He returned to Charlotte on several occasions to advise the Commission and to give public lectures and eventually developed an overall plan for Charlotte's development, which was never implemented. It is not surprising that George Stephens selected Nolen to fashion Myers Park .

Stephens recognized that only a high-quality planned community would be able to lure Charlotte's affluent residents from their center city estates. Nolen later wrote that Myers Park was "designed right from the first, and influenced only by the best practice in modern town planning." In keeping with his philosophy that the fashioning of

neighborhoods should be approached holistically, Nolen oversaw every detail of planning, including the layout of streets, the selection of trees and shrubs for street plantings, and even the drafting of individual landscaping schemes for the buyers of houses. "It is the painstaking work of this pioneer city planner and his successor Earle Sumner Draper that sets this area off from others where the wealthy lived in the same period, and that has made Myers Park Charlotte's most lastingly successful early suburb," writes Hanchett.

Although some streets in Myers Park were reserved for moderate price homes, such as Amherst, Colonial, and Hermitage Court, most of the neighborhood had houses for the affluent. Also, as in Piedmont Park, deeds contained covenants setting forth a wide range of regulations, including the kind of fences, the minimum allowable home prices, and the exclusion of all people except members of the white race. Houses in Myers Park mirror "the changing national fashions in architecture from the 1910s to the present," explain Kratt and Hanchett. There are no Victorian homes, such as the Reverend Detwiler House in Piedmont Park or the [Liddell-McNinch House](#) in Fourth Ward. They were passé by the 1910s. Most prevalent in the neighborhood are examples of Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, Bungalow, and Rectilinear or Four Square.



David Owens House in Myers Park

According to Kratt and Hanchett, the best example of the Rectilinear or Four Square style in Myers Park is the David Owens House built in 1916 at 825 Ardsley Road. Houses of this genre retain Victorian-like floor plans but have box-like, unadorned exteriors. The original landscaping was by Earle Sumner Draper for the John Nolen firm. The home and its surroundings are suggestive of the straightforward pragmatism that formed the core of [David Owens](#)'s being. This man, now forgotten by most Charlotteans, is one of many individuals who have demonstrated the pivotal importance of leadership in making Charlotte the city that it is today.

Chapter Ten

The New South Elite In Control



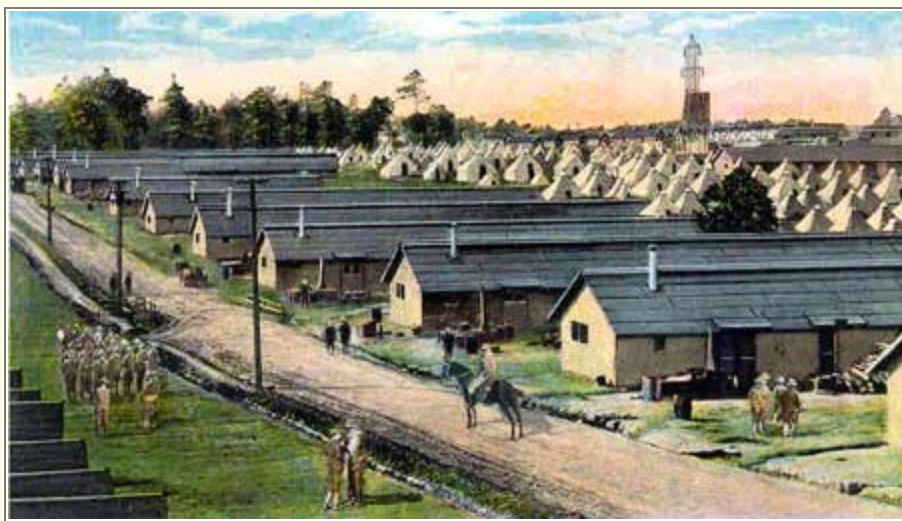
David Ovens

David Ovens exhibited the best qualities of Charlotte's New South elite. As early as 1912, when he had headed a fundraising campaign to build a new YWCA, Ovens had begun to establish himself as a prominent local philanthropist. Ovens was president of the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, which was established in 1915 as the successor to the Greater Charlotte Club. He was president of the Good Fellows Club, a charitable organization that had its origins in Second Presbyterian Church. "The chief value of this club lies not in its charitable work alone, but in acquainting five hundred men with the other side of life apart from our palatial clubs, luxurious homes, trips to Florida in winter and to Europe, or expensive resorts in Newport or Bar Harbor in the summer," Ovens declared. He headed Charlotte's first Community Chest Drive, forerunner of today's United Way. Ovens was the local chairman of the American Red Cross during World War II and served on the boards of several other prestigious Charlotte-Mecklenburg institutions, including Queens College, Davidson College, and Presbyterian Hospital. The list of his civic contributions goes on and on. Like many wealthy Charlotteans, Ovens also had a home at Blowing Rock, North Carolina. It still overlooks the 13th fairway of the golf course of the Blowing Rock Country Club.

Ovens was a member of the delegation that traveled to Washington, D.C. in July 1917 to lobby for the establishment of a World War One military training camp in Charlotte. Much as Dr. Charles J. Fox, James W. Osborne, and William Johnston had done in the late 1840s, Ovens and his compatriots were seeking to stimulate the local economy through the introduction of new infrastructure. They too were successful. General Leonard Wood,

commander of the Army's Department of the Southeast, visited Charlotte on July 5, 1917. Wood toured "the site offered on the southwest of the city." "Over and over this site," *The Charlotte Observer* reported, "went the party, inspecting the topography of the land, the streams, wooded sections, roads, and all else." Members of General Wood's staff were "charmed with several particularly high knolls, which afforded excellent places for the location of headquarters."

The Charlotte Chamber of Commerce raised thousands of dollars of private money to purchase a sufficient amount of land to accommodate the needs of the U. S. Army. Named Camp Greene in honor of Nathanael Greene of Revolutionary War fame, the massive facility, containing approximately 2000 buildings on 2340 acres of land, opened just to the southwest of town by the end of August 1917. Some 60,000 soldiers, many from New England, also later textile executive and Forsyth County native Harry Dalton, would eventually train at Camp Greene -- about as many people as then resided in Charlotte.



Scene of Camp Greene

The initial headquarters for Camp Greene were located in the James C. Dowd House, which still stands on Monument Avenue off Wilkinson Boulevard. The most tragic events at Camp Greene occurred during the Winter of 1918-1919, when a worldwide Spanish Influenza epidemic swept into Charlotte. Susie Harwood VanLandingham received a personal commendation from President Woodrow Wilson for her supervision of the Red Cross Canteen at Camp Greene. She remembered visiting the Spanish Mission style Southern Railroad Station on West Trade Street and seeing rows of coffins waiting to be loaded on trains headed for New England and elsewhere.

David Ovens is best remembered as a lover of the arts. One of his favorite civic responsibilities was serving for eighteen years, from 1934 until 1952, as president of the Community Concert Association. His job was to bring excellent professional actors and musicians to perform in Charlotte. The problem was that the city had no building that could meet even the minimum performance requirements of artists during the 1930's and 1940's. Founded in 1932, the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra played its initial concerts at Alexander Graham Junior High School on East Morehead Street before moving to the auditorium at Piedmont High School and then to the Armory Auditorium on Cecil Street, later Kings Drive. There was a time," remembered Ovens, "when the old Armory was becoming so shabby that people didn't want to go to artistic events there, and the attendance fell off."

A man of conservative tastes, Ovens detested modern architecture and modern art. "Everyone should be allowed to have one pet peeve," he proclaimed. "Mine is modern architecture." He spoke with special disdain about "those straight up-and-down, steel-ribbed, glass-enclosed structures that are more in keeping with the design of a small-town factory, or parking garage." Ironically, the Charlotte landmark that bears his name, Ovens Auditorium on East Independence Boulevard, is just such a building. It was fashioned by Charlotte architect A. G. Odell, Jr., whom Ovens called a "good friend."

Ovens played the pivotal role in securing public backing for Ovens Auditorium, originally called the Civic Center, and the Charlotte Coliseum, now Independence Arena. On October 27, 1949, Mayor Victor Shaw selected Ovens to head a planning committee to select a site for the new facility and to recommend an architect. Shaw described Ovens as "the most public-spirited citizen that Charlotte had ever known."



Ovens Auditorium and Charlotte Coliseum

Determined that Charlotte would have a cultural and entertainment facility worthy of its status, Ovens and his fellow members on the planning committee pushed ahead with their agenda. In May 1950, City Council approved the committee's recommendation that A. G. Odell, Jr. be the architect. The voters of Charlotte went to the polls on October 14, 1950, and gave their backing for bonds to acquire the land and build a new auditorium and a new coliseum. The Charlotte Coliseum and Ovens Auditorium were completed in 1955. David Ovens attended the official dedication ceremonies on September 11th. Not surprisingly, the featured speaker was evangelist and native son Dr. Billy Graham. David Ovens died almost exactly two years later, on September 9, 1957.



James B. Duke

Myers Park 's most powerful and influential resident was the noted industrialist and philanthropist James Buchanan Duke . On March 8, 1919, Duke purchased the Colonial Revival style home that architect C. C. Hook had designed in 1915 for utilities executive Z. V. Taylor and his wife, Irving Scales Taylor. Duke assembled twelve parcels of property to form an estate in excess of 15 acres. Between 1919 and 1922 he transformed the already-substantial house which the Taylors had built into a majestic mansion of 45 rooms and 12 baths. This was the only house that Duke owned in North Carolina during the years of his greatest power and influence. He called it Lynnwood. Duke owned a house (Rough Point) in Newport, Rhode Island, a townhouse on 5th Avenue in New York City, and maintained his legal residence on a 2600 acre estate in Somerset County, New Jersey.



Lynnwood or White Oaks

Apparently, two considerations were uppermost in causing Duke to purchase the property in Charlotte. First, business activities compelled him to spend extended periods of time in the city. Second, he wanted to expose his one and only child, Doris Duke , to the "ins and outs" of Southern life.



Dr. Walker Gill Wylie

In 1904, James B. Duke met Dr. W. Gill Wylie, a physician in New York City, who had joined with his brother in 1899 in launching the Catawba Power Company of Fort Mill, South Carolina, the first hydroelectric production venture on the Catawba River. Duke suggested that he form a partnership with the Wylie Brothers so that capital for expansion could be committed to the enterprise. The financially beleaguered Wylie Brothers readily accepted, thereby assuring the establishment of the Southern Power Company, later Duke Power Company. Prompting Duke to enter this field was his belief that the economy of North Carolina would achieve its potential only if sufficient power was available to sustain an expanding textile manufacturing component. The early history of the Southern Power Company proved that Duke was correct. The harnessing of the Catawba River allowed the textile industry to prosper in the Piedmont and was the single most important factor in stimulating the industrial growth of this region in the first half of the twentieth century.

That James Buchanan Duke took considerable delight in his accomplishment seems certain. It is not unreasonable to assume that Duke regarded Lynnwood as a symbol of his success in the hydro-electrical business. In any case, the most memorable feature of the estate was an enormous fountain, which according to some sources propelled water to a height of 150 feet. A favorite weekend excursion for Charlotteans was to park nearby and watch the huge column of water spray into the air. Ben Dixon MacNeill, staff writer for the *Raleigh News and Observer*, commented that Duke took "spontaneous pride" in 3 things -- his Rolls Royce, his daughter, and his fountain in Charlotte.

The most significant event in Lynnwood's history occurred in December 1924. A series of meetings in the sunroom in the west wing of the house culminated in the establishment of the Duke Endowment, a philanthropic enterprise of enormous importance to the people of North Carolina and South Carolina. Local institutions such as Johnson C. Smith University, formerly Biddle Memorial Institute, and Davidson College received substantial bequests. Furman College in South Carolina and North Carolina's Trinity College, which changed its name to Duke University, were also benefactors of Duke's philanthropy.

In this writer's opinion, one can gain instructive insights into the assertive and tenacious character of Duke and the other New South leaders of his era by visiting the Duke University Campus and viewing the statue of Duke that stands in front of the magnificent Gothic Revival style Duke Chapel. The bronze figure is 8 feet, 4 inches tall and sits on a 25-ton Cape Anne granite pedestal. The inscription reads: "James Buchanan Duke, December 23, 1856-October 10, 1925. Industrialist, Philanthropist, Founder of the Duke Endowment." James B. Duke's final consuming interest was building Duke University. As he lay dying, one of his last

recorded statements was "Don't bother me, nurse. Today, I am laying out the university grounds." James Buchanan Duke died at his home in Somerville, New Jersey.

Cameron Morrison was another prominent and influential resident of Myers Park . He lived on Queens Road until he and his second wife, Sara Eckerd Watts Morrison, moved to their suburban farm named Morrcroft in 1927. A native of Richmond County, Morrison was an adroit and flamboyant politician. His initial forays into the public arena occurred in the 1890s, when as a young attorney he headed the White Supremacist Red Shirt movement in Richmond County. The only elective office that Morrison held during these years was as Mayor of Rockingham, North Carolina, in 1893.



Cameron Morrison

Morrison moved his law practice to Charlotte in 1905. The *Charlotte Observer* described him as a young man of ability who possessed a clear, musical voice. On December 6, 1905, Morrison married Lottie May Tomlinson of Durham, North Carolina, who was to be the mother of an only child, Aphelia Lawrence Morrison. Lottie Morrison died in Presbyterian Hospital on November 12, 1919. A graduate of the Women's College of Baltimore, Maryland, and Peace Institute in Raleigh, North Carolina, Lottie Morrison had been active in local civic affairs. During World War I she had served as captain of a Red Cross canteen team at Camp Greene .

In 1920, Morrison opposed O. Max Gardner , Lieutenant Governor of North Carolina, in the Democratic primary for Governor. A principal ally of Morrison's in this campaign was Senator Furnifold Simmons , long-time leader of the Democrat Party. Morrison was victorious; and in January 1921, he became the Governor of North Carolina. In an address that he delivered on January 28, 1921, Governor Morrison exhibited the progressive and assertive spirit that was to characterize his administration. Indeed, his verbiage was vintage New South Boosterism.

"We do not want to move and have our being as a crippled, weak and halting State, but we want to stand up like a mighty giant of progress and go forward in the upbuilding of our State and the glorification of our God."

It was customary for the chief executives of North Carolina to make bold promises at the outset of their terms, but Cameron Morrison did a better than average job in fulfilling his pledge to the people. He is remembered best as the "Good Roads Governor." To bring North Carolina "out of the mud," Morrison secured funds for a massive road-building program. His objective was to construct paved highways to every county seat in the state. Governor Morrison also labored to upgrade the educational system throughout North Carolina. Allocations to the public institutions of higher learning were increased substantially during his administration. For example, fourteen buildings were erected on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill between 1921 and 1925, the years during which he served as Governor. Moreover, Morrison committed financial resources to the establishment of excellent primary and secondary schools at the local level. Another of Morrison's major accomplishments was the improvement of medical facilities, especially those involved in the treatment of the mentally and emotionally infirm.

In keeping with his Jeffersonian proclivities, Morrison believed that the existence of an educated citizenry was indispensable to the survival of the American republic. Indeed, he believed that those African American citizens who could demonstrate their ability to grasp and appreciate public issues should be permitted to exercise the full rights of citizenship. Illustrative of Governor Morrison's position on this matter was the fact that he channeled substantial resources to the improvement of the black colleges of North Carolina. Also noteworthy is the fact that the poll tax was eliminated during his administration.

On December 13, 1930, Governor O. Max Gardner surprised many political pundits by appointing Morrison to the United States Senate to serve out the term of Senator Lee S. Overman, who had recently died. In 1932, however, Morrison was unsuccessful in his campaign against Robert R. Reynolds, an Asheville attorney. Reynolds used his opponent's wealth as an effective political and oratorical weapon, accusing Governor Morrison of eating caviar and using a gold spittoon. In 1942, the voters of the Tenth Congressional District elected Morrison to the House of Representatives. He did not run for reelection. Instead, he campaigned in 1944 to return to the United States Senate. Again, he was unsuccessful, this time losing to Clyde R. Hoey of Shelby, North Carolina.

Governor Morrison did not run for public office again. His involvement in politics did not abate, however. He headed the North Carolina delegation to the National Convention of the Democrat Party in Chicago in 1952. His speech urging the delegates to preserve party unity appeared on national television. That Governor Morrison practiced what he preached was affirmed by the fact that he supported enthusiastically the candidacy of Adlai Stevenson for the Presidency. Indeed, the last political speech of his career, delivered at Freedom Park in Charlotte, echoed the same devotion to the Democrat Party that he had espoused as a young attorney in Richmond County in the 1890's.

"Of course there have been actions taken by Democratic Administrations of which I have not wholly approved. Of course, there have been, and still are, individuals within the Democratic Party whom I would much rather have seen elsewhere. But we must never let anything swerve us from the only honorable course, and that is the true loyalty to the Democratic Party, now, as in the past, and forever."

Governor Cameron Morrison died on August 21, 1953, of a heart attack at the age of eighty-three. His imposing home remains in Charlotte. [Click here to see.](#)



Ben Douglas

Mayor Ben Douglas had a house on Malvern Road in Myers Park . Like so many other New South leaders of Charlotte in the first half of the twentieth century, including Ovens, Duke, and Morrison, and for that matter Tompkins and Latta of an earlier generation, Douglas was not a native. Born in Iredell County, Douglas moved to Charlotte from Gastonia in the mid-1920s and established a funeral home at the corner of Fox Street and Elizabeth Avenue, now Independence Boulevard and Elizabeth Avenue. Older Charlotteans have vivid memories of the Douglas and Sing Mortuary, especially the green awning that extended all the way from the front door to the curb.

A tireless and adroit politician, Douglas was Mayor from 1935 until 1941, and earned the reputation of being the "Builder of Modern Day Charlotte." Douglas loved the drama and passion of the political arena, and he devoted his enormous energies and talents to leading the people into what he regarded as a bright and prosperous future. Born in the 1890s, he reached adulthood during the "roaring twenties," when it seemed that everybody was making piles of money in the stock market. Then came the crippling Depression of the 1930s. Douglas saw himself as a cheerleader, as an urban booster who would rally the people of Charlotte and give them hope.



Original Hangar at Douglas Airport

Douglas's greatest and most enduring contribution to the building up of Charlotte was his commitment to the establishment of a municipal airport, which still bears his name. Passenger air service began here on December 10, 1930, but the Curtis Condor airplane had to land at a private field. At Mayor Douglas's insistence, the Charlotte City Council voted on September 3, 1935, to apply for Federal funds from the Works Progress Administration to build an airport for Charlotte. When Washington approved the request on November 13th, the City decided to use the money for land acquisition. Voter-approved bonds were sold on March 1, 1936, to pay for the improvements, including the terminal and the hangar. "Hundreds of unemployed men, bundled in overcoats, stood in line for the first WPA jobs, which consisted of clearing the site of trees and underbrush," writes historian Ryan Sumner. The original hangar at what is now Charlotte Douglas International Airport survives. It is located at 4108 Airport Drive and is the home of the Carolinas Aviation Museum.



Ben Douglas appointed J. B. Marshall City Manager in May 1935. Marshall and Mayor Douglas provided dynamic leadership.

Douglas was a prime mover in persuading the War Department to establish an air station at Charlotte shortly before the entry of the United States into World War Two. Dedicated on April 21, 1941, and named Morris Field in honor of William Colb Morris, a World War One aviator from Concord, North Carolina, the air station was devoted primarily to the training of pilots and the maintenance of aircraft. Like Camp Greene during World War One, Morris Field was a boost to the local economy. "The Army Air Base at Morris Field became a \$6 million government investment," boasted the *Charlotte Observer* many years later. Charlotte architect W. R. Marsh designed the buildings, and Blythe Brothers Construction Company and Goode Construction Company, both local firms, built Morris Field.

Charlotte and Mecklenburg County had two other large military installations during World War Two. The former Ford Motor Company Plant on Statesville Avenue became the home of a U. S. Army Quartermaster Depot on May 16, 1941. Lastly, a committee of Charlotte businessmen, including Mayor E. M. Currie, R. S. Dickson, W. Carey Dowd, Jr., and Edwin

Jones, orchestrated a successful campaign to bring a large Naval Ammunition Depot to Mecklenburg County in 1942. Located in what is now the Arrowood Industrial Park and operated by the U. S. Rubber Company, the facility covered over 2200 acres and employed about 10,000 people. "During operations," reported the *Charlotte Observer*, the 'shell plant' grew to approximate the size and activities of a small city." Among those who worked at the "shell plant" was Dot Cornwell of Lincolnton. Only a year out of high school, she would board a bus each morning with other young women for the trip to her job in Mecklenburg County. She made \$27.50 per week, more than twice the pay she had received as a clerk in a dime store.

The substantial record of accomplishment of Charlotte's New South leaders is undeniable. It is difficult to imagine how Charlotte could have become the economic capital of the two Carolinas without the contributions of men like David Ovens, James Buchanan Duke, Cameron Morrison, and Ben Douglas. But just as incontestable is the fact that their power rested upon a narrow base and that Charlotte's elite expected the rank-and-file citizens of Mecklenburg County to be deferential and obedient.

Textile executive and philanthropist Harry Dalton kept a diary during World War Two. The 1942 volume survives. The entries provide a fascinating glimpse into the lifestyles and attitudes of Charlotte's New South leaders of that era. As mentioned earlier, Dalton had first come to Charlotte from his native Forsyth County as a young Army private at Camp Greene. An unpretentious but skillful negotiator, Dalton would eventually attain substantial wealth and influence. He and his wife were major benefactors of the Mint Museum of Art.

In October 1941, Dalton became the head of the rayon and nylon division of the War Production Board, which was headquartered in the nation's capital. Dalton would routinely leave Charlotte by train from the Southern Railroad Station in Charlotte for Washington, D.C. on Sunday nights and return the next Friday mornings and spend the weekends with his wife and two children at the family home in Myers Park. Sometimes the trip was arduous. "The trains are crowded these days with people going to & from Washington," he wrote on January 4, 1942. "There is hardly any standing room in the club cars." Dalton reported that the porters became so familiar with his traveling habits that they had his berth prepared for him when he boarded the train on Sunday nights at Charlotte's Spanish Mission style railroad station.



The Former United States Mint Building, now Mint Museum of Art.

Harry Dalton belonged to the small group of white men who virtually controlled Charlotte during World War Two. Known as the "Round Table," these privileged gentlemen gathered

most weekdays at noon for lunch at the restaurant in Ivey's Department Store. "I had lunch with the 'Round Table' group today," Dalton declared on January 2nd. Among the regulars were David Ovens, Henry Allison, Tom Glasgow, Norman Pease, and Mayor Currie. These men established a close, interlocking network of business and social relationships. "This is a rather interesting group of men," said Dalton. "Everything from world events to local and individual items are discussed."

One of the important bonding rituals for elitist males in Charlotte was playing golf. It still is. Dalton was an avid golfer and played most of his rounds at the exclusive Charlotte County Club, of which he was a member. "I had an 83 today," he wrote on November 14th. "I played with E. C. Griffith, Claude Cochrane, Jim Shannonhouse. 83 is fair for an ole man like me who has not played in two weeks." Another elitist ritual was traveling together to Chapel Hill or Durham to attend college football games. It still is. Dalton and about thirty of his friends boarded a bus at the Charlotte County Club on News Years Day 1942 for a trip to Duke Stadium, where the Rose Bowl was being held because of apprehension over a possible Japanese air attack against California. Duke was playing Oregon State. Dalton reported that one member of the party "felt a little too good." On the way back on the bus this person "kept pushing people's hats down over their heads, etc." "We got home about midnight," said Dalton. "It was an interesting day."



Charlotte Country Club

The prominent white men of Charlotte would also gather at the Charlotte County Club on special occasions to celebrate and pay tribute to one another. One such event was a banquet honoring David Ovens on his seventieth birthday. "Attended dinner tonite (sic.) to surprise David Ovens on his seventieth birthday," Dalton wrote on December 4th. George Ivey read a poem satirizing Eleanor Roosevelt. "Mr. Ovens does not like the Roosevelts," said Dalton. Other poems followed including one by Dalton about tires. Much of Dalton's time in Washington was spent assuring that enough rayon and nylon were available to produce tires for the military. Another gathering place for the privileged whites of Charlotte was the Mint Museum of Art in the fashionable Eastover neighborhood. "To Mint in afternoon to see the Strauss Collection of silver & paintings, wrote Dalton on April 26th.

In his 1942 diary Dalton often referred to World War Two and especially to the somber course of events in the Pacific Theater. "The Pacific news is bad," he stated on February 23rd. "The Japs are winning. Superior in numbers apparently. I hope we can eventually turn the tide." "The war news is worse from the Pacific area," he wrote on March 7th. On October 11th he said: "War all over the world. News not too encouraging." He spoke about "blackouts" and gas rationing. Dalton frequently attended farewell parties for prominent

young men who were going off to fight the Germans, the Italians, and the Japanese. " I had farewell parties with Jimmie Harris. He and Reed Anthony both going in the Navy," he reported on August 14th. A more lavish goodbye party was held at the James B. Duke Mansion in Myers Park on May 2nd for the Charlotte Memorial Hospital Evacuation Unit. Dalton and his wife Mary were there. "It reminded me of stories written about the dashing social units leaving the old plantations during beginnings of the Civil War.," wrote Dalton.

Harry Dalton , like most wealthy white males of his time, was a man of substantial accomplishment. On the last pages of his 1942 dairy he meticulously listed all the business, philanthropic, and cultural organizations in which he held leadership positions. Dalton was on the Board of Directors of nine corporations. He belonged to the Board of Directors of the Charlotte Country Club, Charlotte Memorial Hospital, Charlotte Chamber of Commerce , Goodfellows Club, and the Mint Museum of Art . He was on the Board of Trustees of Queens College and a Deacon at Second Presbyterian Church . Dalton received no pay for his work for the War Production Board in Washington, D.C., which regularly took him away from his home and family.



Women did continue to play a role in public affairs, especially with regard to public health and public education. This is Mrs. C. C. Hook, wife of the locally famous architect. A member of the Charlotte Woman's Club, she was a leader in establishing a High School Parent-Teachers' Association in 1915.

However impressive or magnanimous his attainments might have been, Harry Dalton demonstrated little awareness of the advantages that might accrue from sharing power with rank-and-file Charlotteans, especially African Americans. Just like D. A. Tompkins and Edward Dilworth Latta or James B. Duke or any of Charlotte's New South elite, Dalton believed that everyone would ultimately benefit from the leadership that only he and his "golf-playing buddies" could provide. Especially enlightening in this regard was Dalton's treatment of the black servants who worked in his Myers Park home. African American women prepared the meals for his family, not always successfully. "We have no cook: as Cora Young we let go," he declared on September 25th. Dalton was peeved when Cora's successor did not come to work even on Christmas Day. "Our cook . . . did not show up -- sick I guess." In true paternalistic manner, however, Dalton went out of his way to assist a substitute cook whom he respected. He wrote on June 28th:

The cook (Cora Young) has been on vacation. Julia McKinght, the nurse and Johnson C. Smith graduate is cooking. She teaches next year. We are trying to get her located. Mary called Dr. Harding, Superintendent of Schools. She is ever a conscientious girl. We hate to lose her but want to encourage her in bettering herself.

Julia, of course, taught in a racially segregated school.

As long as the rank-and-file citizens of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County recognized their station in life and did nothing to threaten the economic and social status quo, the wealthy and powerful elite treated them with characteristic Southern civility. Harry Dalton was at heart a kind and gentle person. He and his family attended church almost every Sunday. He and his wife were devoted parents. "We had a fine little Easter Egg Hunt in the back yard," wrote Dalton on April 5th. On August 22nd, when her son David celebrated his sixth birthday, Mary, said Dalton, "had a party of about 40 or more little boys and girls." But Dalton also understood that Charlotte's principal goal was always economic development. "I missed meeting of Chamber of Commerce to get industries for Charlotte," he declared on March 7th.

Anyone who wonders what happened when someone defied Charlotte's New South leaders need only examine the events surrounding the bloody streetcar strike that erupted in Charlotte in August 1919. The behavior of the executives of the Southern Public Utilities Company might be compared to a fist in a velvet glove -- warm and soft on the outside but tough and resolute at the core. In this instance as in all others, Charlotte's upper class, when threatened, chose to fight tenaciously to protect its privileged position; and the elite's ability to remain steadfast in the face of mounting criticism, to blame their adversaries for all wrongdoing, and to garner public support in the end was truly remarkable.

Trouble began shortly after midnight on Sunday, August 10, 1919. The motormen and conductors, after negotiations with the Southern Public Utilities Company had failed, parked the streetcars in the car barn in Dilworth and voted unanimously to go on strike. Their aims were to secure a pay increase and to gain recognition of their union, a local branch of the Amalgamated Association of Street & Electrical Railway Employees. The motormen and conductors were anxious to continue negotiating. "The street car operators of the town will meet the company officials in conference at any time the company expresses the desire," union organizer Albert E. Jones announced. The *Charlotte Observer* incorrectly predicted that the strike would soon be settled in a "spirit of fairness and friendship."

The president of the Southern Public Utilities Company , which operated Charlotte's streetcars after 1911, was Zebulon Vance Taylor , the same man who had just sold his Myers Park Colonial Revival style home to James B. Duke and one of the men who had persuaded the U.S Army to locate Camp Greene in Charlotte. Taylor's position remained unchanged throughout the strike. He refused to submit to the workers' demands and accused Albert Jones of being an outside agitator.

Taylor was condescending in his characterization of the strikers. "We know our 'boys' too well," he proclaimed on August 12th. "They are of our blood. They were raised by the same kind of mother as our mothers." Taylor called the labor unrest "dastardly, cunning, unfeeling" and insisted that the company could not afford to raise the pay of the strikers. As for the union, he agreed to recognize a local union but not one affiliated with the Amalgamated Association of Street & Electrical Railway Employees . Just as Latta had done in 1903, Taylor announced that he would hire and train an entirely new workforce if the conductors and motormen refused to accept the company's offer. The trolleys would remain in the barn, said Taylor, "until the company is enabled to secure car men of this section qualified to give efficient service."

The situation worsened when a large, boisterous crowd, composed mostly of mill workers from North Charlotte, gathered outside the electric substation on Elizabeth Avenue at Sugar Creek around midnight on August 12th. The demonstrators had come to give their support to the local electrical workers who had struck earlier that day. The electricians were also seeking higher pay and recognition of their union. Two electricians had pulled the switches inside the Elizabeth Avenue substation in the afternoon and had cut off power to the entire city for a brief period. The police had arrested the pair for trespassing. Z. V. Taylor feared that the mill workers who had assembled that night on Elizabeth Avenue would try to seize the substation and cut the power again. He therefore summoned the police. Chief Walter B. Orr spoke to the crowd, and the mill workers went home without further incident.



Mill Workers from North Charlotte

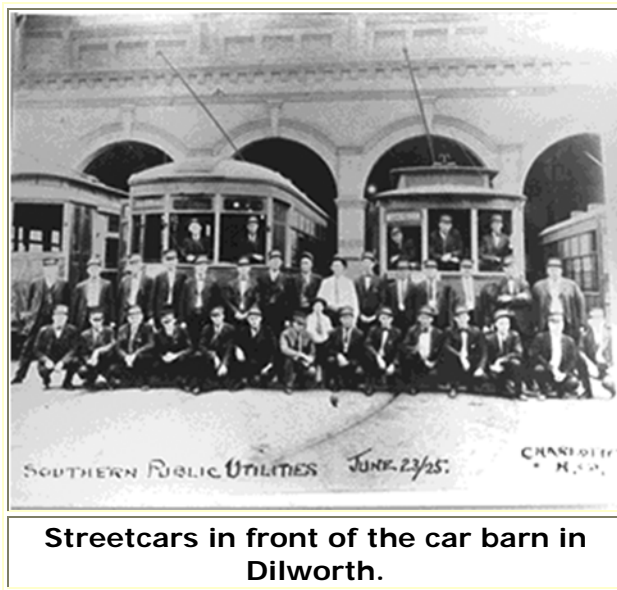
Mayor Frank R. McNinch called the unauthorized interruption of electrical power an outrage. "If any men or set of men challenge the forces of law and order, let them take notice that they do so at their personal peril," McNinch warned. No doubt realizing that the misdeeds of a few could be used to discredit the legitimate aims of the strikers as a whole, Z. V. Taylor insisted that his company was "standing between the community and the forces of disorder." According to Taylor, "foreign and dastardly influences" had caused otherwise "good men" to cut off electrical service, thereby "jeopardizing the lives of the suffering in the hospitals." Taylor proclaimed that it was "high time that this people be aroused as never before in a century." The *Charlotte Observer* was more temperate in its editorial response. "The hope is entertained by the people of the city as a whole that the slight unpleasantness yesterday will be given distinction as the one that will mark the course of the strike toward a peaceable and satisfactory end," the newspaper declared on August 13th. The editors also commended Mayor McNinch for his efforts to maintain "peace and good order."



Mayor McNinch summoned representatives of the strikers and Z V Taylor to City Hall on North Tryon Street in an effort to settle the escalating dispute. Several sessions were held, but no agreement was reached on the issue of the recognition of the union. "We feel that some progress has been made, but the parties are still far apart and we can only hope that further conferences may find a basis of settlement acceptable to all," announced Mayor McNinch on August 14th. Meanwhile, the Southern Public Utilities Company escalated tensions by continuing to place advertisements in the newspaper soliciting applications for new streetcar workers. "Applications will be received at my office, beginning Saturday morning," said streetcar superintendent R. L. Wommack.

By August 15th the *Charlotte Observer* was growing impatient with the absence of streetcar service and blamed the continuation of the strike mainly on the workers., who, the newspaper claimed, were being coached by a "strike agitator." The supposed villain was Albert Jones. In a moment of ill-advised candor, Jones responded to this criticism by saying: "I have long since learned that the capitalists who employ Mr. Taylor own the major part of Charlotte, but only recently I learned that they control the city hall, the banks, the newspaper, etc." Charlotte was not accustomed to such immoderate rhetoric. Mayor McNinch "denounced the statement of A. E. Jones," reported the *Charlotte Observer* on August 19th. The mayor called Jones's declaration a "willful and scurrilous lie." Jones later retracted his statement and apologized.

A meeting attended by some 2000 people was held at the Mecklenburg County Courthouse on the night of August 19th to hear the workers' side of the issue. The principal speaker was Marvin Ritch, a Charlotte attorney who was active in attempting to organize local mill hands. Ritch extolled the virtues of unionism and assured the crowd that textile workers were solidly allied with the streetcar conductors and motormen. He proceeded to issue a threat to the Southern Public Utilities Company if it attempted to operate the trolleys with replacement crews. "Let them run," he declared. "The textile workers are so strongly organized that they will not ride cars operated by 'scabs' and other people will not take a chance." Jones spoke next. He assured the strikers that he would not leave Charlotte until their demands were met. "All the speakers were cheered heartily, but the cheering came from spots in the crowd and was not by any means unanimous," said the *Charlotte Observer*.



Streetcars in front of the car barn in Dilworth.

Motormen and conductors began picketing in front of the car barn on South Boulevard. Their primary reasons for doing so was to ascertain if president Taylor and his associates had decided to bring strikebreakers to town. Armed clashes were occurring in many cities of the North, where streetcar strikes were also occurring. Committees of leading businessmen were appointed to attempt to end the Charlotte strike peacefully. The Federal government sent an official of the Department of Labor to town to try to mediate the dispute. On August 21st, Mayor McNinch and a citizens committee chaired by Clarence O. Kuester, nicknamed "Booster Kuester" because of his ardent support for Charlotte's growth, urged President Taylor to recognize the Amalgamated Association of Street & Electrical Railway Employees and the national union of the electricians. "Mr. Taylor announced that he could not acquiesce in the agreement," reported the *Charlotte Observer*.

On Saturday, August 23rd, president Taylor, in direct defiance of the recommendations of Mayor McNinch and the citizens committee, stated that the Southern Public Utilities Company would resume streetcar service on Monday, August 25th with replacement crews. He also withdrew his earlier offer to give the former motormen and conductors priority in hiring. "From the beginning of this unfortunate break," Taylor proclaimed, "our former employees have seemingly disregarded the counsel of their friends at home and have followed after a malignant traducer of their city and its official and its institutions." The *Charlotte Observer* announced that service would not begin immediately to the mill villages of North

Charlotte and Chadwick-Hoskins "because of open threats that have been heard of disorders, destruction of company property and possible violence to passengers in these sections."

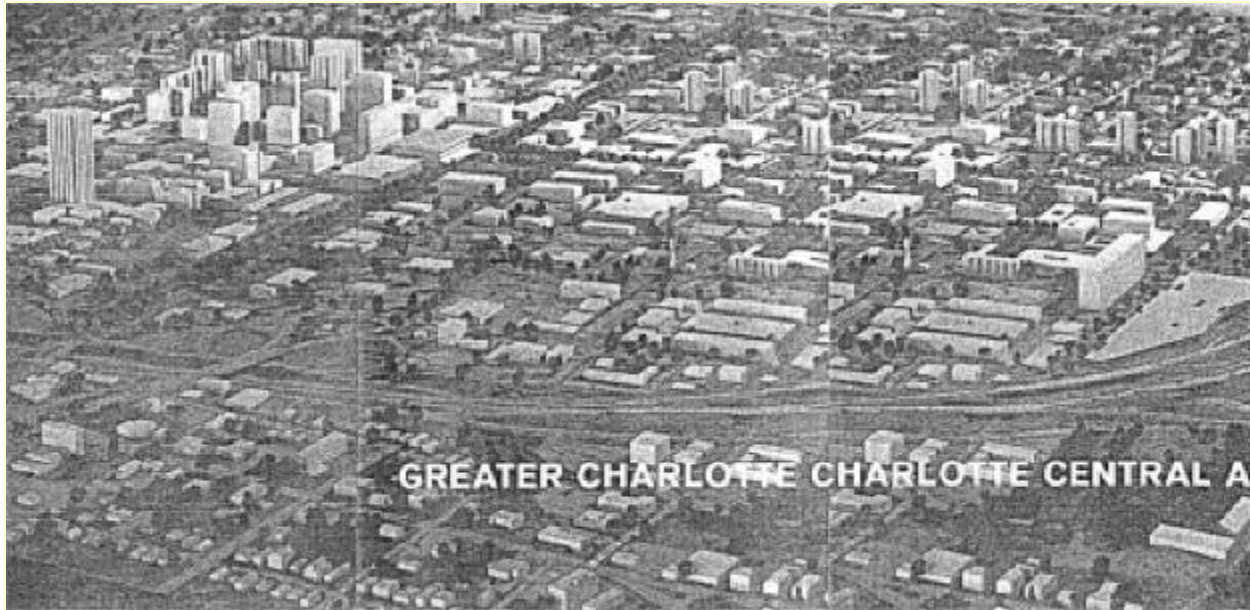
Mayor McNinch dispatched a body of policemen to the car barn in Dilworth on the morning of August 25th to maintain order. A large crowd of mill workers and strikers gathered along South Boulevard and hurled insults throughout the day at the replacement motormen and conductors as each trolley left for its run along the streets of Charlotte. The trolley crews carried guns. In mid-afternoon a group of spectators began throwing stones at a passing streetcar on South Boulevard. The crew opened fire, and the vandals dispersed. Matters really got out of hand after dark. A group of North Charlotte residents moved toward the police, and an officer struck a teenager over the head with the butt of a gun. The boy was taken to St. Peter's Hospital and was found not to be seriously injured, but the incident angered many of the onlookers.

The frustration of the crowd grew minute by minute. The working class whites must have realized the utter hopelessness of their situation. Gunfire erupted outside the car barn about 3 a.m. on August 26th between the police and the demonstrators. About 100 shots were exchanged. "When the smoke had cleared away," said the *Charlotte Observer*, "14 wounded were picked up and rushed to various hospitals, while Walter F. Pope, the first man found dead, was sent to the Hovis undertaking establishment." Four demonstrators were killed, including a machinist and a railroad engineer. One was mortally wounded in the abdomen. 14 others were injured, some seriously.

The local press showed no sympathy for the strikers. "The business organizations of the city have gone on record against the sort of unionism that has been imported into the city and there is a determination that this character of agitation shall be suppressed," declared the editors of the *Charlotte Observer*. Z. V. Taylor and the Southern Public Utilities Company had won the day. The New South leaders remained firmly in control. Some of the former motormen and conductors were rehired. The trolley barn is still in Dilworth, although it was converted to a bus barn after 1938. At night its corbelled brick walls have an almost menacing appearance, especially for those who know that it was here that Charlotte had its bloodiest incident of labor unrest. Plans are afoot to make the car barn part of a lavish, upscale development. The wonders of adaptive reuse of historic buildings shall never cease.

Chapter Eleven

The Emergence of Diversity: Women, District Representation, And Modernist Architecture



A. G. Odell's 1966 Vision For Center City Charlotte

The thirty years following the end of World War Two in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County were anything but dull and boring. These three decades are rivaled in importance in terms of fundamental social and political modification only by the arrival of white settlers in the 1740s, the defeat of the Confederacy and the end of slavery in the 1860s, and the overpowering of Populism and the enactment of Jim Crow laws at the turn of the last century. Change occurred on many fronts, but all shared the common result of increasing participation by a broader spectrum of society in influencing and making decisions about the future of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

The decades immediately following World War II also witnessed a major shift in the architecture of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. Modernist architects, including A. G. Odell, Jr., J. N. Pease, Jr., rose to prominence in Charlotte during these years and became outspoken advocates of principles of design that rejected traditional notions of beauty, especially the attachment of decorative ornamentation to the outsides of buildings. Infused with optimistic expectations of the future, architects like Odell and Pease argued that buildings should encourage humanity to move boldly into a bright, prosperous, and better "world of tomorrow." "The basic tenets of Modernism emphasized function and utility; abstract beauty, sculptural form, and symbolism; honesty in materials, and the use of modern materials and technology as well as an emphasis on the use of natural materials," write historians Sherry

Joines Wyatt and Sarah Woodard. A. G. Odell, Jr. had nothing but disdain for the architecture he observed when he arrived in Charlotte in the late 1930s. "There was nothing here," he remembered, "that illustrated the honesty of stone as stone, steel as steel, glass as glass. Everybody was still wallowing in the Colonial heritage." Odell, Pease, and other Charlotte architects were determined to change that circumstance.

Nobody was predicting profound change when World War Two came to an end. Everybody assumed that it would be "business as usual." Indeed, during the immediate post-war years it looked as if Charlotte's white male business elite would continue to monopolize local power. The process by which Independence Boulevard came into being seemed to affirm this truth.

Independence Boulevard tore this community apart. Beneath the deafening din of car horns and truck exhausts one can still hear the anguished cries of the hundreds of Chantilly, Elizabeth, and Piedmont Park residents who gathered at Midwood School on Central Avenue on September 8, 1946. These were desperate people who had just learned that Mayor Herbert Baxter and the City Council wanted to use \$200,000 of local bond money to help build a massive "cross-town boulevard" up Westmoreland Avenue, down High Street, and across the Sunnyside Rose Garden, through Independence Park, along Fox Street past the Douglas and Sing Mortuary, through Cherry and the Thompson Orphanage pasture, up Stonewall Street and down Brevard Street to end at Morehead Street.

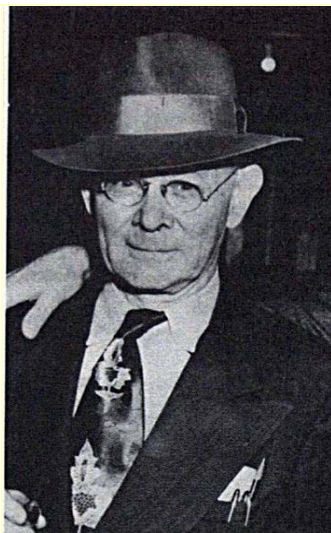


Mayor Herbert Baxter

The protestors called it a "foolish scheme" that could "throttle traffic between downtown and the eastern residential districts." One irate resident suggested that the route had been chosen

because it would increase the value of the property that Ben Douglas , District Highway Commissioner and former Mayor, owned at what is now the intersection of Independence Boulevard and Elizabeth Avenue. "In fact, it is strange," the irate citizen proclaimed, "how the highway seems to seek out the schools, the stadium, one of the few parks we have, the Rose Garden and other such places to bring its roaring buses and streams of cars along throughout the day and night." "Virtually everybody who lives in the eastern part of the city will have to cross its snake-like meandering," the group warned.

Lucille K. Tyson , an elderly lady, lived at 829 South Brevard Street, right in the path of the proposed "cross-town boulevard." "My thoughts may not mean so much, but I feel pretty blue and washed up today," she lamented in a letter to the *Charlotte Observer* on March 13, 1947. "Many times I've looked out to see surveyors all around the place, our property staked off. Again, an official sitting in a parked car observing and figuring." Ms. Tyson felt powerless, maybe afraid, as she saw her whole world crashing down around her and saw no way out of her dilemma. "We work and work to enjoy a few happy moments in our old years, knowing we do not have many more to go. Here comes a new idea. A Super Highway! There! We have to pick up and go," she decried. "Certainly, I feel let down about having to lose a home. It is something to think about when it hits you."



John P. White

"Somebody's toes are bound to be stepped on." That's how Councilman John P. White , the affable, cigar-smoking, 67-year-old production manager and mechanical superintendent of the *Charlotte Observer* responded to the protestors of the proposed "cross-town boulevard." A native of Alabama, White lived on Grandin Road in the Wesley Heights neighborhood off West Trade Street. Like the majority of Charlotte businessmen of that era, he was caught up in the euphoria and optimism that gripped the country in the years immediately after World War Two.

Exciting things were happening all over Charlotte. The real estate market was booming, as developers like C. D. Spangler Sr. and John Crosland labored feverishly to provide housing for the hordes of veterans who were marrying and beginning their families. Brides

appeared in regal, white gowns on page after page of the Sunday newspaper, serenely ready to partake of the wonders of the newest kitchen paraphernalia. Dishwashers. Electric can openers. WBT was about to put its FM station on the air. Bing Crosby and Ingrid Bergman were starring in "The Bells of St. Mary's" at the Carolina Theater. In August 1946, Liggett Drugstore opened its lavish, modernistic retail outlet on the northeastern corner of the Square, where the Bank of America headquarters is now located.

This was not a time for sentimentality or restraint. "You only look back for reasons to move ahead, and by golly nobody can say that we lacked ideas," Mayor Baxter told journalist Kays Gary in 1964. A handsome and personable Bostonian, Herbert Baxter had come to Charlotte during World War One to train at Camp Greene, had settled here, had prospered in the lumber business, and had moved to a fine home on Queens Road in Myers Park. "Because he was so much a doer by nature," the *Charlotte Observer* reported, "he was never a precise planner, never a man to wait to weigh every possible detail that might go wrong." The same could have been said about Edward Dilworth Latta, Z. V. Taylor, or most of Charlotte's New South leaders.

The real brain behind the building of Independence Boulevard was James B. Marshall. Marshall Park in Uptown Charlotte is named for him. He was a brilliant engineer who had served as Mayor Ben Douglas's City Manager. Born in Anderson, South Carolina in the early 1890s, Marshall graduated from the College of Charleston and settled in Charlotte in the 1920s. He left City government in 1941 and joined J. N. Pease as an engineer and contact man with City Hall.

In 1946, the Charlotte Planning Board hired Marshall as a consultant to prepare a master plan for Charlotte's streets. Several months earlier, the North Carolina Highway Department had conducted a comprehensive survey of local traffic trends and had determined that Charlotte needed "cross-town boulevards" to relieve congestion on uptown streets. The prospect of grand and majestic expressways was music to the ears of men like Mayor Baxter and District Highway Commissioner Douglas. They knew that Charlotte had become a major trucking and distribution center in the first half of the twentieth century and that highways were essential to the local economy. Buildings such as the Charlotte Supply Company Building and the Textile Mill Supply Company Building attested to Charlotte's service to the regional textile industry.

The first mention of what was to become Independence Boulevard occurred in the *Charlotte Observer* on May 7, 1946. C. W. Gilchrist, Chairman of the City Planning Board, announced that Jim Marshall had completed a street plan that included an expressway from Graham Street eastward along Stonewall to Sugar Creek, where it forked, one arm leading to the Monroe and Albemarle highways, and another connecting with Queens Road. On June 4th, City Council adopted Marshall's master scheme, even though the exact route of the cross-town boulevard was still undecided.

The issue did not surface again until September 1946, when word leaked out that the expressway would split the Chantilly, Elizabeth, and Piedmont Park neighborhoods. A throng of infuriated citizens packed the City Council meeting on September 10th, and their

spokesman, attorney Frank K. Sims, Jr., accused the City of being secretive and manipulative. They had good reason to be mad. The group had not even seen a map of the proposed route. Mayor Baxter assured the neighborhood leaders that the location of the expressway was still up in the air; he directed City Manager Henry A. Yancey to release maps of the cross-town boulevard; and he promised the protestors that they would have ample time to express their concerns.

On October 8, 1946, the City Council gathered for an informal dinner at the Myers Park County Club, where Mayor Baxter was president. In those days it was customary for the Councilmen to decide issues in private and then to emerge like the College of Cardinals and cast their pre-determined votes. Imagine what the scene must have been like. There in the midst of Myers Park, with fine china, cut crystal, and sumptuous food on the table, the representatives of the people endorsed the route through Chantilly, Elizabeth, and Piedmont Park. That's how deals were struck in those days. Baxter and his colleague were following a well-traveled path -- no pun intended.

On October 21, 1946, the outraged residents of the affected neighborhoods descended upon City Hall for a public hearing. The atmosphere was tense and electric. "Isn't it a little absurd," Frank Sims remarked, "to build a highway that winds and twists and turns across a park and baseball diamond and over a rose garden and through a thickly populated residential section just to reach Ben Douglas's property?"

Mayor Baxter and the Councilmen did modify their position in the face of this fierce public opposition, at least in terms of the preferred route. They instructed Jim Marshall and Henry Yancey to come up with alternative routes for the expressway. At 2:00 p.m. on November 12, 1946, the City Council toured eastern Charlotte to examine three prospective rights-of-way. One was the original route up Westmoreland Avenue and through Independence Park, from which the cross-town boulevard eventually took its name. A second used Westmoreland but turned left on Hawthorne Lane to Fourth Street and continued across Sugar Creek to Stonewall. The third spared Chantilly, Elizabeth, Piedmont Park, the Sunnyside Rose Garden, and Independence Park by entering the city along Monroe Road, swinging left past the railroad overpass to connect with Randolph Road, continuing to the intersection of Queens Road and Fourth Street, then moving through the Cherry neighborhood to Morehead Street, and proceeding along Morehead to South Boulevard.

City Council approved the third route by a vote of 5 to 1 on November 25, 1946. Ponder what that decision would have meant for the Eastover and Crescent Heights neighborhoods and the Mint Museum of Art. But this route was never built, because the Federal government, the principal financier of the project, rejected it outright as unsuitable for an expressway. On December 5, 1946, the Councilmen took up the issue again. For a while it looked like Charlotte would never decide the issue of where to build Independence Boulevard. The members of City Council seemed to be hopelessly divided, two favoring the original route, two supporting Hawthorne Lane, and two opposing the road regardless of its route.

City Councilman John P. White saved the day. He persuaded Ross Puette and Henry Newson to abandon Hawthorne Lane and back the original route. "By jingo, at one point

there, I thought I was going to have to switch to Hawthorne Lane myself," White laughed. Such were the fickle ways of politics in those days. The battle was not over. City Council approved the contract with the Federal government on March 11, 1947, but the opponents threatened to sue the City for misuse of local bond money. The next City Council had to reaffirm its support for the project in June 1947. The momentum to build the cross-town boulevard was irreversible. And we all live with the consequences -- good and bad.



Dr. Elmer Garinger

Few Charlotteans noticed when Bonnie E. Cone , a mathematics teacher at Central High School , was named the director of the Charlotte Center of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1947. The school was a temporary facility created to educate veterans. Cone's appointment to head the institution turned out to be a momentous event and a harbinger of significant change. A woman of indomitable will and determination, Cone began almost immediately laying plans to make the school a permanent institution of higher education. "It is doubtful that city leaders fully anticipated at the beginning the ramifications of having a major university in their midst," writes Ken Sanford in his history of Charlotte College and UNCC . "However," Sanford continues, "the coming of state-supported higher education to Charlotte set in motion a sequence of events that would forever change Charlotte and its greater region."



Charlotte College at Central High School

The creation of Charlotte College in 1949 as a municipal-financed institution and its eventual transformation into the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in 1965 was a seminal development in the history of this community, perhaps as notable as the arrival of Alexander Craighead in 1758, the coming of the first railroad to town in 1852, and the opening of the Charlotte Cotton Mills in 1881. So profound was the impact of Cone's attainments that one must place her accomplishments even above those of Jane Smedburg Wilkes, in this writer's opinion the second most important woman in Charlotte-Mecklenburg history.

"Charlotte College wouldn't be where it is now if it hadn't been for her," said Board chairperson J. Murrey Atkins about Bonnie Cone. Bonnie Ethel Cone was born on June 22, 1907, in Lodge, South Carolina, a tiny railroad town of some 200 people located roughly midway between Columbia and Charleston. Reared in a conservative Baptist home, Cone acquired a love of teaching as a young child. Her first students were the animals on her father's farm. "I taught every little animal around in those fantastic years," she told a reporter many years later. "I knew from the time I started to school that I wanted to be a teacher." Always an excellent student, Cone graduated from Coker College, a private liberal arts college in Hartsville, South Carolina, in 1928 with a B.S. in mathematics. She taught in the public schools of South Carolina until 1940.

Bonnie Cone earned an M.A. in mathematics from Duke University and moved to Charlotte in 1941 to teach the same subject at Central High School. The school's principal, Dr. Elmer H. Garinger, was most impressed with Cone's intelligence and instructional abilities. In 1943, Cone returned to Duke to work as a statistician for a U.S. Naval Ordnance Laboratory. After a brief stint in Washington, D.C., she returned to Central High School in 1946 and resumed her career as a high school mathematics instructor. Not surprisingly, Elmer Garinger recruited Bonnie Cone also to be a part-time teacher in the newly-opened Charlotte Center of the University of North Carolina. She taught mathematics to engineering students.

In August 1947, Garinger summoned Cone to his office and asked her to become the Director of the Charlotte Center, because the first occupant of that position had returned to Chapel Hill. "I took the job of director only as a temporary position," she explained. "I had

prepared myself for high school teaching, and that's what I wanted to do." Cone's administrative office was formerly the Lost and Found Room at Central High School . Cone did not own an automobile. She rode a bus to campus from a house where she rented a single room. She had no administrative experience beyond the classroom or what she might have acquired working for the Navy.



Dr. Bonnie E. Cone

Everybody assumed that Cone had taken a dead-end job. Indeed, it is unlikely that Chapel Hill would have allowed a woman to assume the position if the job had appeared to have had any prospects of becoming permanent. "People told me I was out on a limb, that I couldn't last. They said I should look for another job." Cone worked up to eighteen hours a day. She taught classes. She recruited faculty. She even made sure the classrooms were left clean for the high school students who would return the next morning. "I can't say anything but

good about her," proclaimed Mary Denny , a long-time associate. Cone's most enjoyable task was advising students. "Miss Cone is one of the very choice people in college education work because she takes such a personal interest in all of the students," said Elmer Garinger .

Cone decided to fight to keep the Charlotte Center open because of the educational opportunities the institution provided for students who otherwise would have had little hope of attending college. "I saw what was happening to the young people," she explained. Governor James Holshouser summed up Cone's achievements best at the time of her retirement. "Some people devote their lives to building monuments to themselves. She has devoted hers to building educational opportunities for others."

Cone's first major victory came in 1949. She and her supporters won permission from the North Carolina General Assembly to continue the two-year college under the auspices of the Charlotte public school system of which Garinger had just become Superintendent. Named Charlotte College , the institution ran on a shoestring. It operated with part-time faculty in part-time classrooms and had to depend almost solely upon student tuitions for its financial survival.

The man responsible for obtaining initial State funding in 1955 for Charlotte College and maybe as influential as Bonnie Cone in the early history of the institution was W. A. Kennedy , nicknamed "Woody." Ken Sanford calls Kennedy the "spiritual father of Charlotte College." Because he died in 1958 and therefore like Moses on Mount Nebo could only look into the "promised land" of the college's present suburban campus, "Woody" Kennedy is largely forgotten.

A graduate of North Carolina State University and seller of textile machinery, Kennedy was unswerving in his determination to establish a State-supported institution of higher education in Charlotte. Kennedy worked tirelessly, even spending his own money to prepare and mail out questionnaires to potential backers of the school. Kennedy left no stone unturned in his search for money. If necessary, he and Bonnie Cone would let it be a private institution. At one point he approached Governor Cameron Morrison about giving money to the school, which would then be renamed "Morrison College." Morrison declined.

Sometimes Kennedy's rhetoric in support of a State-supported four-year college for Charlotte became strident. "For years Carolina and State have both tried to throw us a sop or bone here in Charlotte in the nature of an extension course in order to keep us quiet," he stated. According to Kennedy, extension courses were not sufficient to meet the educational needs of Charlotte and its environs. "1000 additional high school graduates would go to college each year if they had the same opportunity or the same available facilities as some other areas of the state," Kennedy declared. Characterizing his critics as the same kind of nay Sayers who had told leaders like the Oates Brothers and D. A. Tompkins that Charlotte would never become a major textile center, Kennedy called for a positive attitude on the subject of making Charlotte College a four-year, State-supported institution. "Do you believe in a timid or bold approach to this problem?," he asked.

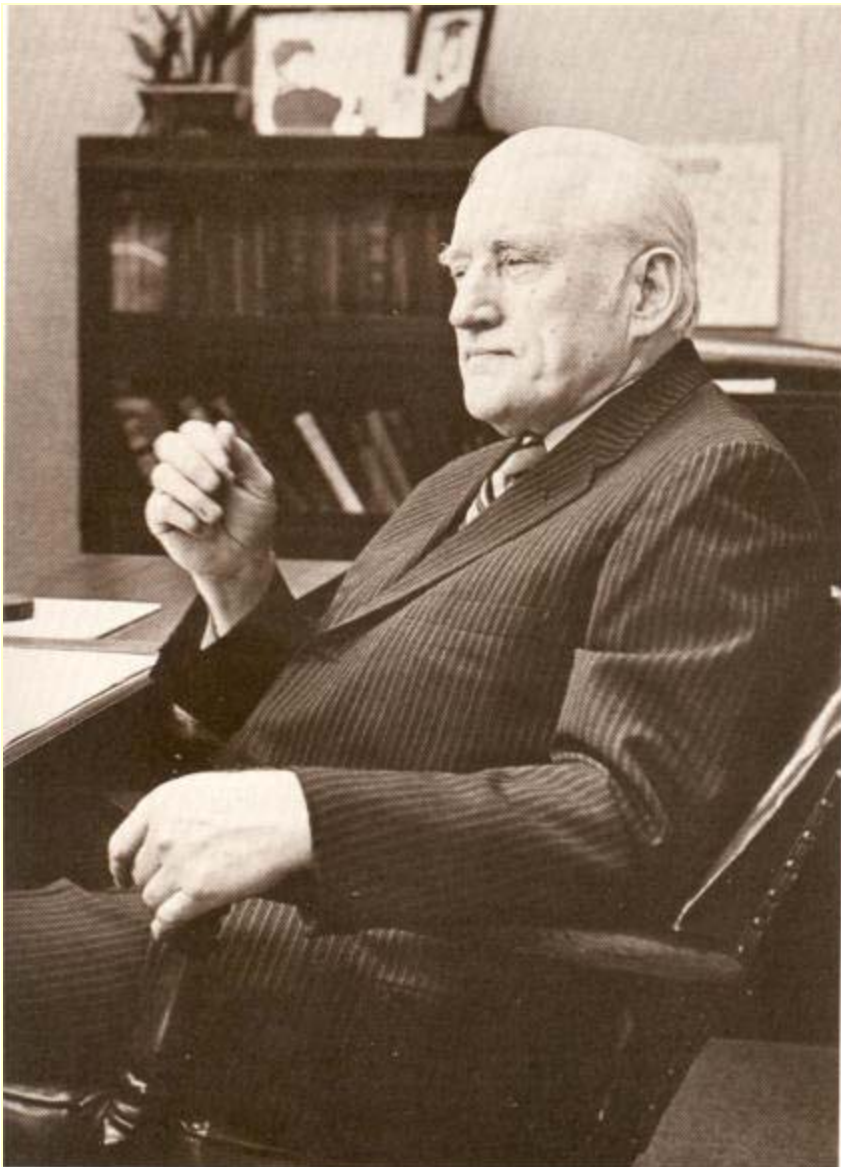
Except for the tenacity of Kennedy and Bonne Cone, Charlotte College would never have moved beyond being a two-year community college. "Miss Cone has provided the faith on which the college many times found its primary ability to exist," commented J. Murrey Atkins. "She has stuck with it and never even thought of giving up when sometimes the sledding seemed pretty hard." Support among the business executives of Charlotte for the school was lukewarm at best. One influential graduate of North Carolina State feared that putting a state-supported college in Charlotte would harm his beloved alma mater. "I would not be in favor of anything that would in any way hinder the growth and prestige of 'dear old State,'" he wrote. The writer was not alone in harboring such sentiments. "Charlotte has never been short on pride," said the *Charlotte News* on May 11, 1956, "but with the chips down, it has often exhibited distressingly little interest in higher education in the past."

Dramatic breakthroughs for Charlotte College did occur in 1957 and 1958. The school began holding its first day classes; it acquired an independent Board of Trustees; local property tax revenues in support of the school increased; and Charlotte College secured options on land for its own campus. Several sites were considered, including the Cameron Morrison Estate or Morrocroft, the former Naval Ammunition Depot site in what is now the Arrowood Industrial Park, a cleared site in the Second Ward or Brooklyn neighborhood, and a 248-acre tract on Highway 49 northeast of Charlotte owned by Construction Brick and Tile Company. On August 12, 1957, the Charlotte College Board of Trustees voted to buy the Highway 49 property. Businessman Oliver Rowe remembered going to the site with Bonnie Cone when the only buildings on the land were a barn and a silo left from earlier farming days. "She reached down and grasped a handful of earth, let it sift through her fingers and said, 'This is the place. This is the place.'"



The Groundbreaking Ceremony. J. Murrey Atkins is on far right. Bonnie Cone has shovel in hand.

Charlotte College moved to its suburban campus in 1961. The first two buildings, one named for "Woody" Kennedy, were designed by A. G. Odell, Jr., the same man David Ovens had selected to design Ovens Auditorium and the Charlotte Coliseum on Independence Boulevard. Odell, the son of a wealthy Concord textile family and graduate of Cornell University, was Charlotte's best known and most prolific Modernist architect. Upset that the Charlotte College buildings resembled those that Odell was designing for St. Andrews College at Laurinburg, Cone nonetheless pushed ahead with Odell's plans for the new campus. A groundbreaking ceremony was held on November 21, 1960, and classes opened the following September. On May 8, 1962, the Board of Trustees voted to request the addition of the junior year in 1963 and the senior year in 1964. The North Carolina General Assembly did approve four-year, state-supported status for Charlotte College in 1963.



Oliver Rowe was among Ms. Cone's staunchest supporters. A building on campus is named in his honor.

Bonnie Cone was seemingly omnipresent on the Charlotte College Campus in those early days. This writer, a brash twenty-five year old historian at the time, joined the faculty in June 1963 and had his first office in what had been the kitchen for the college soda shop. The floor sloped down to a drain in the middle of the room where countless fluids of countless types had once descended into the unknown depths below. Bonnie Cone walked by one day and saw the less than ideal environment in which this writer worked. It might have reminded her of the Lost and Found Room at Central High School. "I will not have a faculty member of mine sit in a place like this," she proclaimed. Carpenters arrived within an hour to rectify the situation.

Uppermost in Cone's mind was making Charlotte College a campus of the University of North Carolina system. "Few of the faculty and staff recruited in 1963 and 1964 would have come to the brand new four-year college without seeing through Cone's eyes the university that was to unfold," says Ken Sanford. J. Murrey Atkins, long-time chairman of the Charlotte College Board of Trustees, would not live to see the dream's fulfillment. He died on December 2, 1963. But Bonnie Cone persevered. Victory came on March 2, 1965, when the General Assembly approved the transformation of Charlotte College into the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, effective July 1, 1965. Not since Stephen Mattoon had raised the money to build Biddle Hall in 1883 had Charlotte witnessed such an astounding success in the arena of higher education. A spontaneous celebration erupted on campus when word reached Charlotte from Raleigh. "Miss Cone, can you hear the victory bell ringing?," exclaimed her secretary into the telephone.

Certainly, there were influential women in this community before Bonnie Cone. Not the least among them was Gladys Avery Tillett. Tillett labored tirelessly for the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, even using a handkerchief embroidered "Votes for Women." She helped found the Mecklenburg League of Women Voters and was an active Democrat until her death in 1984.

It was in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s that substantial numbers of women began to assume positions of political influence in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. "A lot of women became involved in the political process in our community -- not just pouring the tea and helping the guys, but getting out there themselves and being in the forefront," remembered one member of the Women's Political Caucus. "It was very exciting, the beginning of women feeling they had some power, to be reckoned with, to be able to speak in a voice," recalled another. In 1954, Martha Evans, an exuberant redhead, became the first female member of the Charlotte City Council. She twice ran for mayor, against James Smith in 1959 and against Stan Brookshire and James Smith in 1961. Evans lost both times. In 1972, Myers Park resident Elizabeth or "Liz" Hair won a seat on the Board of County Commissioners and became chairperson of that body in 1974. A founding member of the Charlotte Women's Political Caucus, Hair was determined to advance issues that were especially important to women. She was instrumental in establishing the Mecklenburg County Women's Commission, the Council on Aging, and the adoption of the county's first affirmative action plan. She was responsible for the County's initial greenway master plan and was pivotal in saving the historic First Baptist Church in 1977 as the home of Spirit Square.

Betty Chafin, now Betty Chafin Rash , was also an early leader of the Charlotte Women's Political Caucus . Born in Atlanta and reared in Winston-Salem, Chafin came to Charlotte in 1965 and soon started devoting much of her energy and talents to broadening the base of political participation in this community. Elected to City Council in 1975, she became a champion for ending the totally at-large system of electing members to that body. It had been that arrangement, enacted in 1917, that more than anything else had assured that white males would dominate local government. "Almost the whole council lived in one quadrant of the city," declared one of Chafin's allies. "This whole community was being governed by a slice of pie which if you'd eaten it, you would've eaten up southeast Charlotte."

District representation was the "product of no blue-ribbon committee, Chamber task force or uptown bankroll," wrote *Charlotte Observer* columnist Jim Morrill. It was the "result of a small group of people who wanted to push more chairs around the public table." Sam Smith , a computer software developer, called it "as pure grass-roots an effort as you'll ever see." Smith insisted that Charlotte's Westside was the "stepchild" of the city and would never receive just treatment until it was more adequately represented on City Council and on other elected and appointed committees and agencies. Smith recruited other Westsiders, including truck driver Marvin Smith , and leaders of Charlotte's emerging neighborhood movement to back his efforts

Bill McCoy of the Urban Institute at UNCC assisted Smith and his supporters in developing a plan for having City Council consist of seven district representatives and four at-large representatives. John Belk , son of New South retailer William Henry Belk , was mayor from 1969 until 1977. A millionaire, Belk vigorously opposed district representation. On October 11, 1976, he took the unprecedented step of vetoing a resolution calling for a referendum on the issue. Rash and the other three members of City Council who had supported the initiative were stunned. "All we wanted," explained City Councilman Neil Williams , "was the chance to submit the proposal to the people."



Mayor John Belk opposed district representation.

According to Belk, a specific scheme had to be presented to the voters. "Being for district representation is like being for motherhood," he declared. "In my opinion, you've got to find out who your mother is before you come out for motherhood." Belk insisted that district representation was not a priority issue. Wrangling over district boundaries, he argued, would take inordinate amounts of time and would divert public attention from the more urgent need to consolidate city and county governments. "I think the main thing that needs to be worked out is consolidation of the city and county," said Belk during the debate on October 11th.

Much like his father, Belk believed that corporate executives and their lieutenants could provide the best government for all. "When you've got a winning team," he maintained, "you ought to leave it alone" Mayor Belk contended that "district representation would impede growth of the city, create 'horse trading' among council members and mean that the district council members would not represent the city at large on some issues," writes Alex Coffin in his book, *Brookshire & Belk*.

Sam Smith and his allies overcame Belk's veto by gathering thousands of names on petitions to force a referendum. "We won in the face of a lot of power," said Smith. The voters of Charlotte narrowly approved district representation for City Council on April 19, 1977. Blacks broke their traditional alliance with southeast Charlotte and sided instead with middle class and lower middle class white precincts in west, north, and east Charlotte and with neighborhoods such as Dilworth. A reporter for the *Charlotte Observer* understood the import of what had occurred. "When neighborhood groups in north, west, and east Charlotte combined with a substantial majority of black voters to pass district representation Tuesday, they said goodbye to a long tradition in city government -- the domination of City Hall by well-to-do business leaders from southeast Charlotte."

The establishment of district representation on City Council in 1977 and the eventual adoption of similar arrangements for the Board of County Commissioners and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board in the 1980s sounded the death knell of the political system that the New South leaders had established at the turn of the last century. "The result," says Alex Coffin, "was that fewer payroll-meeting businessmen -- or businesswomen -- were elected thereafter." Not surprisingly, there was a concerted effort by some business executives to abolish district representation. In 1981, the citizens of Charlotte defeated that initiative. They went to the polls and said "yes" to continuing the new system by a margin of 11,023 votes. The days of unrivaled political hegemony by Charlotte's business elite were over.



A. G. Odell, Jr. in an informal moment

The architecture and urban design plans for Charlotte-Mecklenburg of this era also reflected the profound changes that were occurring in this community in the years immediately following World War II. Especially noteworthy in this regard is the work of A. G. Odell, Jr. A. G. Odell, Jr., the flamboyant son of a Cabarrus County textile executive, studied architecture at Cornell University and came to Charlotte in 1939 to establish a one-man office. By the time of his death in April 1988 Odell oversaw the operations of one of the largest and most influential architectural businesses in North Carolina. "In a society where class connection still counted for much, young Odell had automatic entry to the offices of the area's mill owners and businessmen," writes historian Thomas Hanchett. When Odell arrived, Charlotte's buildings were overwhelming conservative and revivalist in appearance and had been so for decades. "Most architecture in the area can best be described as pseudo-neoclassical, with elements of design copied from buildings elsewhere that had already incorporated copied elements of classic design," remembered M. H. Ward, one of Odell's early associates. A. G. Odell, Jr. became Charlotte's principal champion of the International style and devoted his considerable talents and energies to reshaping the local urban landscape. For good or ill, he largely succeeded. Odell embraced the architecture of "tomorrow" and had nothing but disdain for the revivalist buildings he observed on the streets of Charlotte.

One of Odell's earliest surviving International style houses is the Robert and Elizabeth Lassiter House at 726 Hempstead Place in Charlotte. Built in 1951 in the otherwise traditionalist Eastover neighborhood, the Lassiter House exhibits the exuberant boldness one finds in Odell's designs. A friend of attorney Robert Lassiter, Odell worked closely with Lassiter's wife Elizabeth in developing plans for the house. Steel beams support the roof and eliminate the need for load-bearing interior walls, thereby enabling large open spaces to predominate throughout the interior. A particularly ingenious scheme was an arrangement whereby the dining table could be set in the kitchen, complete with food and adornments, and slid through the wall into the dining room, where guests could witness the dramatic arrival of the entire repast.



Odell made special arrangements for a built-in television.



The foyer of the Lassiter House is walled in glass to allow light to penetrate the interior.

Another of Odell's early home designs is the Goldstein House (1958) on Merwick Circle. Fashioned by Albert Cameron, an architect in Odell's firm, the house is modest in size but dramatic in impact. The fundamentals of the International style centered upon the exploitation of new materials, especially reinforced concrete, strengthened steel, and large expanses of glass, to create grace, airiness, and to allow great amounts of sunlight to penetrate the interior of structures.



The exposed rafters and lavish use of glass are typical of the Modernist style.

It was in the area of urban design that A. G. Odell, Jr. was to have his greatest impact upon Charlotte. Odell took his lead from the thinking of such revolutionary post-World War One European architects as Le Corbusier. From about 1920 until shortly before his death in 1965, Le Corbusier was an untiring proselytizer for what he called the "Radiant City." To his way of thinking, urban designers should break completely with the past. Le Corbusier had no sympathy or interest in the preservation of existing buildings or neighborhoods. "Modern town planning comes to birth with a new architecture," he proclaimed. Le Corbusier envisioned people living in high rise apartments surrounded by lustrous skyscrapers separated from one another by large expanses of manicured open space and dramatic fountains. Urban cores should be hygienic, antiseptic, and ordered -- not cluttered, begrimed, and haphazard. The tradition of mixing functions in a single structure or neighborhood was an anathema to Corbusier. The city of the future would be divided into discreet sections devoted to specific purposes -- working, living, leisure -- connected to one another by expressways.



Le Corbusier

In 1965-66 Odell and Associates developed a comprehensive plan for the remaking of Center City Charlotte. It reflected his iconoclastic philosophy and established the fundamental parameters of uptown development for more than two decades. The plan continues to have considerable impact today. The initial impetus for the remaking of Center City Charlotte originated with the Downtown Charlotte Association in the early 1960s. Convinced that the urban core was spiraling downward in the face of growing suburbanization, the Association hired Hammer & Associates, economic consultants, in early 1963 to study what Center City Charlotte needed. The Hammer Report determined that new stores, green space, parking garages, and new entertainment facilities were required. It was this report that induced the Downtown Charlotte Association to hire A. G. Odell and Associates in 1965 to devise the Center City Plan, which was officially released in September 1966.



A. G. Odell, Jr.

Odell benefited from the temper of his times. The 1960s and 1970s in Charlotte-Mecklenburg and the United States as a whole were decades of buoyant optimism, the persisting unpopularity of the Vietnam War notwithstanding. An eagerness to greet the challenges of the future and an almost total rejection of history and its architecture dominated elitist thinking. In a speech to the Charlotte Civitan Club's 1966 Distinguished Citizens Award Ceremony, Dr. John T. Caldwell, Chancellor of North Carolina State University, advanced the commonly held assumption of that day that focusing upon the past was counterproductive to "progress." Charlotte "is a community filled with optimism for the days ahead, or it is a city enjoying a past that probably never was," he declared. Caldwell continued: "Charlotte is a city which is captive to the mores and fears of the past, or it is a community which greets the new demands of contemporary America with resilience at least and with eagerness at best."

The *Charlotte Observer* sounded a similar tone. The newspaper was a consistent champion of the growth and expansion of Charlotte and its environs. Predictably, it issued a

call for aggressive implementation of Odell's Center City Plan when it was presented to the Charlotte City Council in March 1966. The editorial page contended that "Charlotte . . . has been studied enough. Those concerned about making this a more functional, more attractive city will now begin to act." The *Charlotte Observer* chided City leaders again in July 1966 for their alleged record of sluggishness in moving ahead with daring innovations. "Past councils have been much too reluctant to act with boldness and determination in redevelopment," the newspaper proclaimed.

On March 2, 1966, James Rouse, the visionary developer of the planned community of Columbia, Md., trumpeted the same message in a stirring address he gave to attendees at the first annual UNCC Forum. He argued that unless Charlotte acted quickly and boldly it could squander its chances for becoming "one of the country's most glorious cities." According to Rouse, the people of Charlotte stood "on the threshold of opportunity." To step back from the challenge, he insisted, would propel Charlotte in the wrong direction. "You can also succeed in reaching the point where the big, ugly cities are now. And you will surely get there if you don't plan with boldness and vision," Rouse maintained. Not surprisingly, the *Charlotte Observer* rushed to endorse Rouse's remarks. "Charlotte, as the major city of the Carolinas, can plan, can grow in an orderly manner, can become a city of the future," the editors declared. "But its citizens will have to have their minds stretched again and again."

Odell's Center City Plan was bold and visionary. Voters had approved a bond referendum the previous year to fund street improvements in the Center City; and the leveling of virtually every structure in the Second Ward or "Brooklyn" neighborhood, a large African American enclave, was already proceeding apace.¹⁵ Building upon these initiatives, Odell proposed a series of audacious initiatives. Like Le Corbusier, Odell embraced the philosophy of the "Radiant City." His plan predicted that visitors would "be coming to a new Charlotte, a Charlotte built anew with imagination, with sound economic reasoning, with a full knowledge that Charlotte's position of leadership in the Carolinas and in the Southeast is one which the city deserves."¹⁶ What the *Charlotte Observer* called "swaths of expressway construction" would enable suburbanites to drive their automobiles more easily to the urban core.¹⁷ Parking decks would be built to house all the additional cars coming to the Center City, and all curbside parking would be eliminated. The intersection of Trade and Tryon Sts. would be transformed into a true "Square" by creating a plaza at the southeastern corner bordered by a hotel and retail shops.

Odell, much in the tradition of the International style, advocated the creation of residential districts defined by parks and high rise apartment buildings. The plan called for the destruction of all the older homes in Fourth Ward, which the *Charlotte Observer* termed a "slum." Edwin Towers, a high rise apartment building for the elderly, was then under construction and apparently was the type of structure Odell envisioned for much of Fourth Ward. The plan advocated the burial of all utility lines and the removal of the railroad tracks between College and Brevard Streets and the turning of the rail line into a "Convention Boulevard."

The most crucial element of Odell's Center City Plan, what the *Charlotte Observer* called its "spark," was the construction of a Convention Center at the corner of South College St. and East Trade St. John A. Tate, Jr., Chairman of the Committee for the Master Plan, underscored the urgency of proceeding with the building when he spoke to the Charlotte Rotary Club on June 14, 1966. "The convention center is the 'heart' of the master plan for downtown revitalization," Tate insisted. "It is the 'trigger' and the 'stimulant' for redevelopment of the first block of South Tryon Street."

The story of how the Convention Center got built is a tortuous and twisted tale. The schedule for erecting the Convention Center was sidetracked on several occasions, but the City finally began constructing the facility in October 1971. "We're concerned that this building will have a character of its own that will symbolize Charlotte in the eyes of the nation," said A. G. Odell. Odell promised that the Charlotte Civic Center, as it became called, "will compare with any in the country." The building opened with great fanfare on September 9, 1973. Ironically, the Charlotte Civic Center, which has been replaced by a new, larger convention center, stands empty today; and its future is in great jeopardy.

In this writer's opinion, the 1973 Charlotte Civic Center demonstrates a major weakness of the International style. The building's most distinctive features are large pyramidal skylights that are only visible from a perspective several hundred feet in the air. While perhaps impressive as part of an architectural model, the Charlotte Civic Center presents blank brick walls to the pedestrian and provides no vitality or life to the streetscape. This criticism in no way detracts from the historic importance of the building, however. The Charlotte Civic Center did stimulate large-scale real estate developments on adjacent parcels, specifically the North Carolina National Bank Complex and the Radisson Hotel. The building was also the most crucial element in the implementation of A. G. Odell Jr.'s seminal 1966 Charlotte Center City Plan.

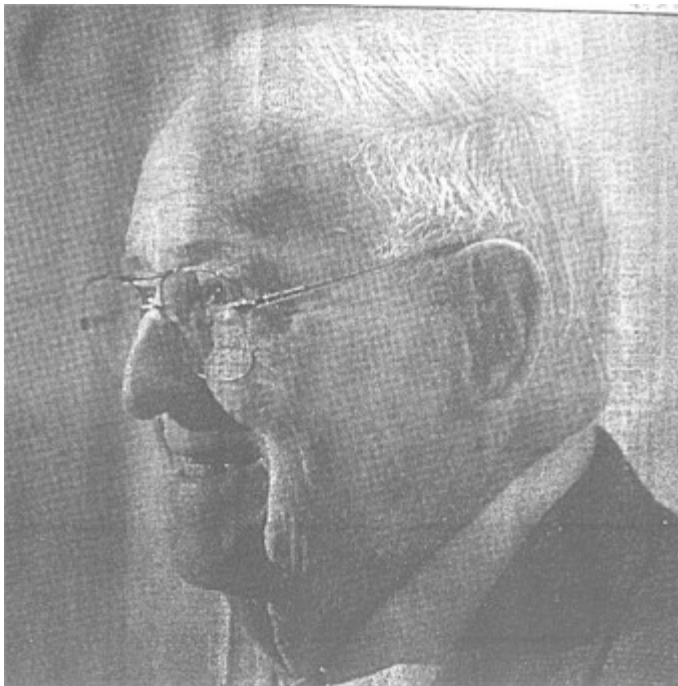
The other leading proponent of Modernist architecture in Charlotte was J. N. Pease Associates. In the early 1960s, the editors and production staff of the Charlotte Observer saw the need to expand the newspaper's home so that more presses could be brought on line and more space could be provided for its various departments to keep up with growing circulation. General Manager Bill Dowd considered several sites, including suburban tracts off Interstate 85; but he and publisher Jim Knight preferred locations in the Center City. "Dowd feared that the newspapers' move to the suburbs at that juncture would cripple downtown," writes Jack Claiborne in his history of the Charlotte Observer. It is not surprising that the Observer wanted a contemporary, non-traditional style building for its home, since the newspaper had consistently championed Charlotte as a "progressive place."



This is the J. N. Pease Company's drawing of the building.

Real Estate agent Louis Rose succeeded in assembling the entire block surrounding the building the *Charlotte Observer* had occupied at the corner of South Tryon St. and W. Stonewall St. since 1927. Dowd made the announcement in December 1965 that the *Charlotte Observer* would not move to the suburbs but would construct a new building on the tract that Rose had put together. "We are particularly pleased," he proclaimed, "that our newspapers are to remain in downtown Charlotte, and we are hopeful that the developments we have in mind will be an enhancement of downtown and a stimulus to plans for revitalizing the central business district." The *Charlotte Observer* moved into its new Center City home in 1972.

J. N. Pease Associates, a Charlotte-based design and engineering firm, was the architect of the new Charlotte Observer Building. J. Norman Pease, a native of Columbus, Ga., and James A. Stenhouse, born in St. Louis, Mo. but a resident of Charlotte from early childhood, co-founded their company in 1938. The building of Fort Bragg and the hiring of J. N. Pease Associates to provide architectural and engineering services for the massive military base gave a great boost to the firm. The success of J. N. Pease Associates continued after World War Two as Stenhouse and Pease competed successfully for major projects, including the new home of the *Charlotte Observer*. Commenting on Pease's career, the *Charlotte Observer* stated: "So sweeping was his presence, most Charlotte residents have probably worked in, banked in, studied or prayed in one of his products." J. N. Pease Associates, in addition to many other projects, designed Edwin Towers in Fourth Ward, most of the buildings at Central Piedmont Community College, developed a master plan for the expansion of the government center in Center City Charlotte and fashioned most of the buildings and spaces created therein, including Marshall Park.

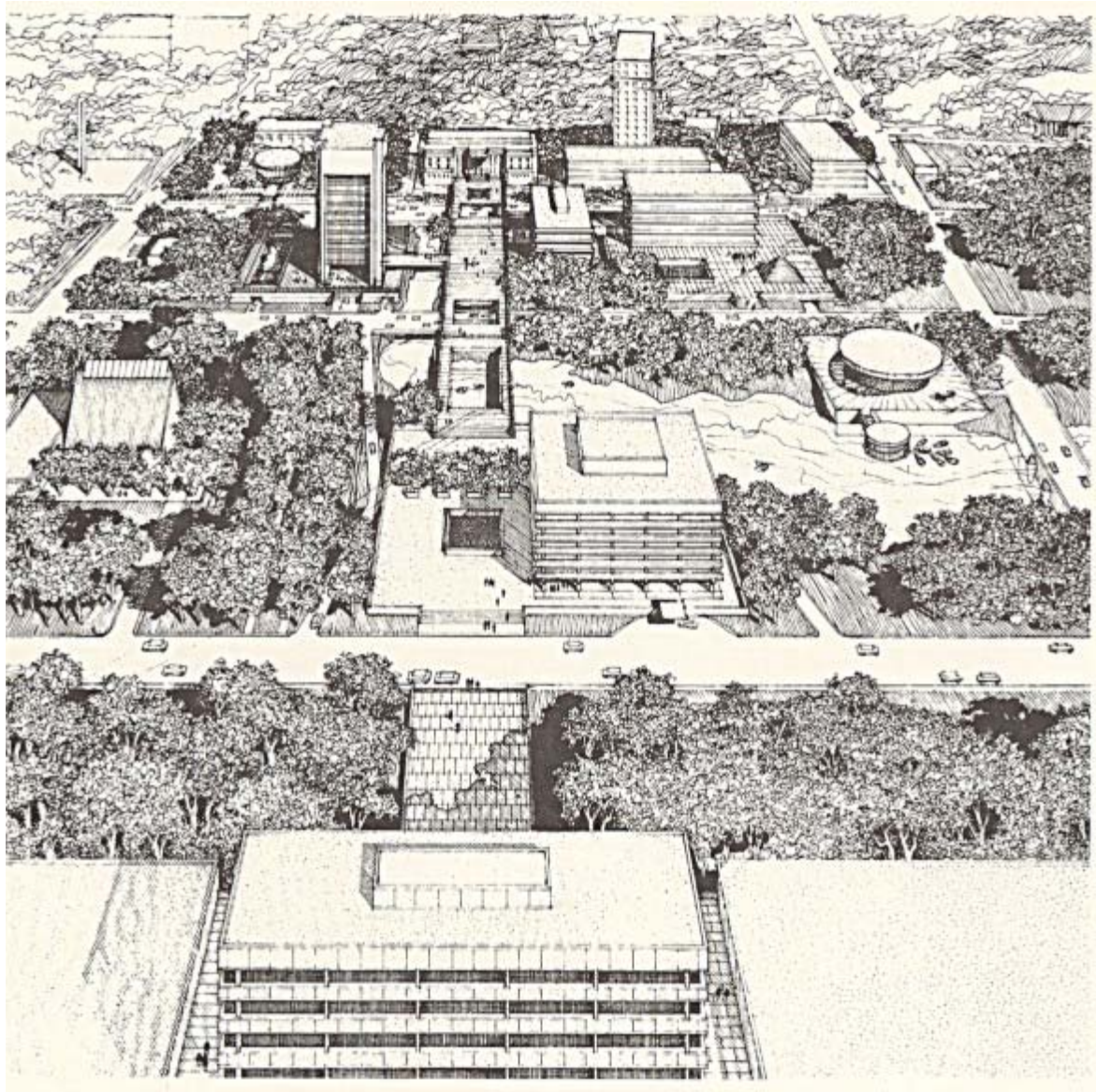


J. N. Pease

Pease, who had moved to Charlotte in 1920 to open an office for Lockwood Green, an engineering firm, was an engineer, not an architect. He believed that by offering a wide range of services, including having its own structural, electrical, and mechanical engineers, J. N. Pease Associates could win contracts to design and oversee the construction of

municipal facilities, such as governmental office buildings, sanitary plants and water treatment works for cities. Pease was also eager to provide design and engineering services for clients in the private sector.

Not surprisingly, especially in the post-World War Two years, J. N. Pease Associates became an advocate of the Modernist style. The School of Design at North Carolina State championed Modernism after the arrival of Henry Kamphoefner as dean in 1948, and many of its graduates joined firms like J. N. Pease. Also, as noted earlier, A. G. Odell, Jr. had established his office in Charlotte in 1939 and had become an ardent advocate of Modernism. A final factor in inducing J. N. Pease Associates to embrace Modernism was the influence of J. Norman Pease, Jr. Trained in Modernist principles at Auburn University, the younger Pease joined his father's firm after World War Two and replaced Beaux Arts-trained James Stenhouse as chief designer.



J. N. Pease Associates developed this plan for the government center in 1966. It demonstrates the commitment of the firm to the concepts of the

"Radiant City." It does retain the original Charlotte City Hall, the Mecklenburg County Courthouse, and the Law Building (since destroyed), but the overall thrust is toward high rise and mid-rise buildings in a manicured landscape.

According to Claiborne, the design of the Charlotte Observer Building was inspired by the headquarters of the *Miami Herald*, then the home newspaper of the Knight Publishing Company. The intent was to erect an "imposing castle," a structure that would communicate to the public the importance of the *Charlotte Observer* to the community and the region. The influence of Modernism upon the design is obvious. In keeping with Swiss architect Le Corbusier's notion of the "Radiant City," which J. Norman Pease, Jr. had studied at Auburn along with the ideas of such exponents of Modernism as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius, the building is devoid of lavish decoration, uses its essential form and the employment of contemporary materials to convey its significance, and is surrounded by a manicured lawn and landscaping.



Chapter Twelve

The Emergence of Diversity: African Americans



An African American stands in front of the monument commemorating the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. Jim Crow and the declaration's promise were irreconcilable.

The significance of the creation of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, the concurrent rise of female influence on local elected governmental bodies, and the enactment of district representation notwithstanding, it was the persistent struggle of African Americans to gain the full rights of citizenship that occupied center stage in Charlotte-Mecklenburg during the years of social transformation that followed World War Two. The black veterans who returned to Charlotte in 1945 found the rules of racial segregation demeaning and repugnant. "It was very upsetting to realize you have given precious time of your life for supposed freedom in a country that was still segregated," said Charlottean Gerson Stroud. Raymond Rorie, a school principal, agreed. "This was one of the problems we black soldiers faced," he declared. "We were protecting our country when we didn't have freedom ourselves." Jim Crow was about to enter its last days in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. There were three main players in this compelling drama -- two blacks and one white. They were Fred D. Alexander, Julius Chambers, and Mayor Stan Brookshire.



Fred Alexander Being Sworn In As Member Of The Charlotte City Council. Milton Short is in the middle.

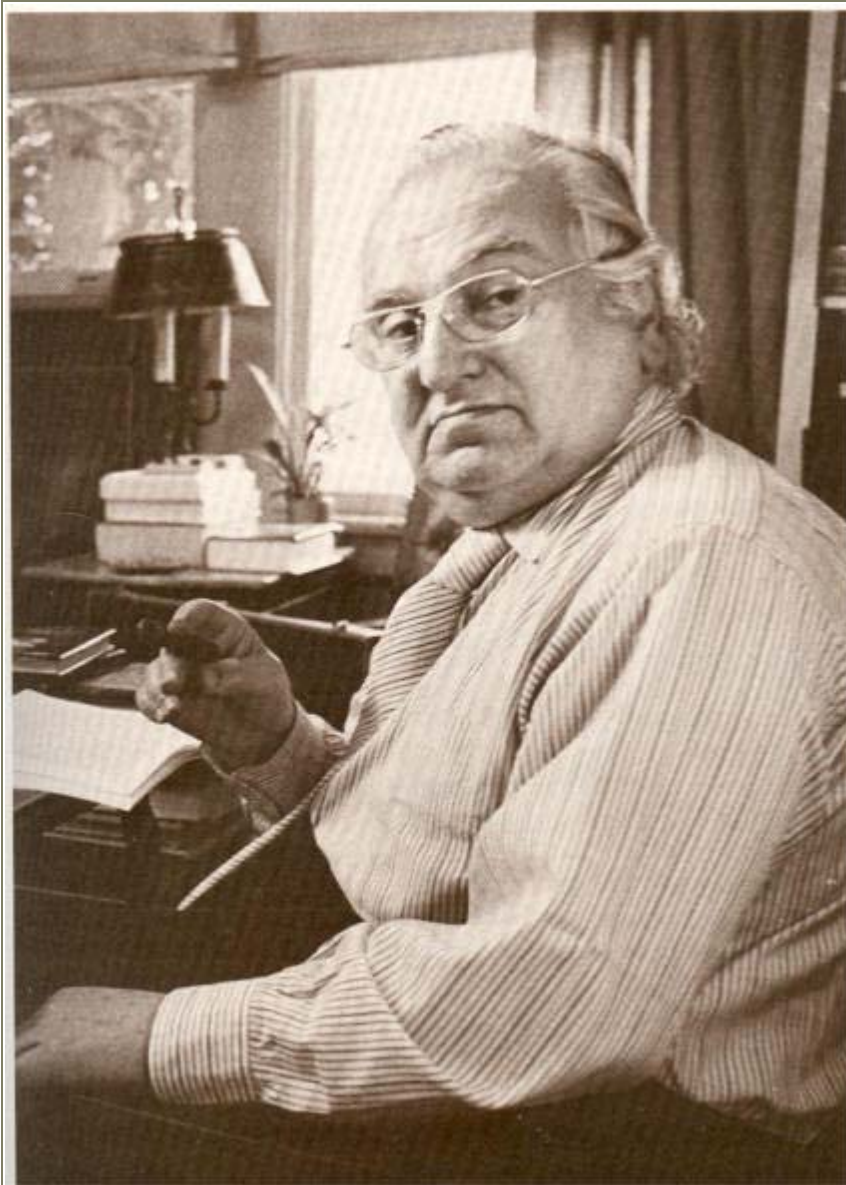
In 1965, Fred D. Alexander became the first African American elected to the Charlotte City Council and the first black to hold elected public office in Mecklenburg County since the 1890s. He served for nine years. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had put the full weight of the Federal government on the side of equal access for all citizens to public accommodations and the voting booth. "Alexander personified a new age in which blacks took advantage of the opportunities" offered by Federal Civil Rights legislation, writes historian Randy Penninger in his M. A. Thesis on Alexander's political career.

Frederick Douglas Alexander was named for Frederick Douglass, the Great Emancipator of the nineteenth century. Born in Charlotte in 1910, Alexander had a soft-spoken, diplomatic demeanor, which assisted him in winning white support for the improvement of the African American community. "Fred was just simply a person who handled every kind of situation well," commented furniture retailer and fellow City Councilman Milton Short. Alexander's father was Zachariah Alexander, who, after graduating from Biddle Memorial Institute, established Alexander Funeral Home in the Second Ward or Brooklyn neighborhood. It was there that Fred and his brother, Kelly Alexander, who would eventually become State president of the NAACP, learned the social skills and sensitivities to other people's feelings that would serve the two Alexander brothers well in their respective public careers.



Fred Alexander

Even before Fred Alexander graduated from Lincoln University in Chester County, Pennsylvania in 1931, he had decided that access to the ballot box was the only way that black Charlotteans could improve their lot. He was asked by a classmate to go with him to Africa to work for the liberation of its native people. "My God," Alexander remembered saying many years later, "*I Came* from Africa, and If I can go there to help free *HIS* people, I can go back home and help free my *OWN* Africa." Alexander carried through with his promise. "Fred came back to Charlotte with one thing in mind -- political action," said noted local author and newspaperman Harry Golden .



Harry Golden, publisher of the *Carolina Israelite*, was a prominent Civil Rights advocate in the 1950s and 1960s.

Beginning in the 1930s, Fred Alexander devoted great amounts of time to registering African Americans to vote. New Deal programs assisted him in this endeavor. "Constantly working for increased political awareness of blacks, Alexander lobbied for the appointment of black police officers and mail carriers, for business courses in the black high schools, and for improved health care," writes historian Randy Penninger. Alexander was a founding member and executive secretary of the Citizens' Committee for Political Action, an organization established in 1932 to increase political participation by African Americans. In 1949, the group sponsored two candidates for public office. Bishop Dale, a lanky Texan who operated an insurance and real estate business in Second Ward, ran unsuccessfully for City Council; and James Wertz, pastor of St. Paul's Baptist Church on East Second Street, failed in his bid for a seat on the Charlotte City School Board. Their defeats were virtually guaranteed,

because an at-large voting and representation system for municipal offices had been instituted after Dale had almost won a seat on City Council in 1934.

Happily for Fred Alexander and other aspiring African Americans, the political culture of Charlotte began to change after 1950, largely because of voluntary integration of public facilities and businesses in Charlotte in 1963, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and, most importantly, the successful integration, albeit limited, of the local public schools in 1957. It was during the 1950s and 1960s, sometimes called America's "Second Civil War," that the White Supremacy initiatives of the 1890s began to give way to new arrangements, both politically and socially. These years, writes Jack Claiborne in his history of the *Charlotte Observer*, were a "time of upheaval."

Fred Alexander carefully built the political base from which he would launch his campaign for City Council. "There has been no Negro in public office in my lifetime," he proclaimed. "If there had been, we would have seen a different type of community human relations." Knowing that he would have to win a city-wide race, Alexander sought appointments to high profile institutions so he could become better known in the white community. He became the first African American member of the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce in 1962 and of the Mecklenburg County Board of Public Welfare in 1963. He was picked to serve on the Mayor's Community Relations Committee and became a member of the Executive Committee of the Mecklenburg County Democrat Party in 1964.

Fred Douglas Alexander announced his candidacy for the Charlotte City Council on February 4, 1965. "Alexander stresses his desire not to be considered 'the Negro candidate,' but rather as a man who will work for the good of the entire community," proclaimed the *Charlotte Observer* on April 24, 1965. He told reporters that it was "necessary for somebody to interpret the needs of a third of our population." Although regarded by some blacks as overly cautious, especially by outspoken Civil Rights advocate Dr. Reginald Hawkins, Alexander received an outpouring of support from the African American precincts and was able to garner just enough white support to win the last contested seat. On May 11, 1965, Fred Alexander took the oath of office as the first black City Councilman in twentieth century Charlotte.

Alexander sought from the outset of his tenure on the Charlotte City Council to increase the voice of the black community in public affairs by having African Americans appointed to governmental boards and commissions, including the Welfare Board, the Civil Service Board, and the Urban Redevelopment Commission. "Alexander believed black representation on boards and commissions was necessary," writes Randy Penninger. As the lone African American member, Alexander met with little success. He did take a leadership role in bringing urban renewal to the Greenville neighborhood and in advocating programs to provide low income housing throughout the city. "I feel the strain upon the housing needs of the City of Charlotte, especially as the condition exists among our Negro citizens," Alexander declared on September 18, 1967.



Fred Alexander Watches Fence Separating Elmwood And Pinewood Cemeteries Being Removed On January 7, 1969.

Alexander's most significant victory during his years of service on the Charlotte City Council was the removal of a fence that separated Elmwood Cemetery and Pinewood Cemetery, the former for whites and the latter for blacks. "It's cheaper to take it down than to maintain it. Plus the insult that comes with it," said Alexander on April 30, 1968. There was opposition in the white community. "To me it seems the colored people are acting just like some children—wanting everything they can get," said one woman. The fence did finally come down. City Council voted on January 6, 1969, to remove this galling vestige of Charlotte's Jim Crow past.

The greatest challenge to the continuation of the status quo in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County in the years following World War Two arose in the area of public education. On September 4, 1957, the local public schools became racially integrated for the first time in their history. With the backing of School Superintendent Elmer Garinger, Dorothy Counts enrolled that day at Harding High School; Gus Roberts entered Central High School; his sister, Girvaud Roberts, became a seventh grader at Piedmont Junior High School; and Delores Maxine Huntley matriculated at Alexander Graham Junior High School.

In this writer's opinion, the gradual abandonment of rigid racial segregation in the 1950s and 1960s in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County occurred essentially for the same reason that it had been put into place in the 1890s. Jim Crow had now become *bad* for business. Men like D. A. Tompkins, Hamilton C. Jones, and Cameron Morrison, had looked upon Populism and black Republicanism as threats to unrelenting economic development and growth at the turn of the last century. By the 1950s, however, the racial arrangements of the South were becoming increasingly anachronistic, even embarrassing, and were isolating the region from the rest of the county and the world.

Such realizations among Charlotte's business elite allowed Dr. Elmer Garinger, the unassuming and fatherly Superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools since 1949, to summon key members of his staff to his office in July 1957 and announce that a small number of African Americans would be assigned to white schools that fall. "It was the right thing to do, and despite any confusion or discomfort it might soon cause, Charlotte, North Carolina, was going ahead with it," states Frye Gaillard in his book, *The Dream Long Deferred*.

Tensions were running high between the races in September 1957. Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools were scheduled to open on September 4th with four African American students attending previously all-white classrooms for the first time. In May 1954, the United States Supreme Court had ruled in the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that "separate but equal" schools were inherently unequal, thereby setting aside the legal precedents established in 1896 in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The Court "handed the South the greatest problem of readjustment the region has had to face since the Civil War," declared the editors of *Charlotte Observer*. On December 1, 1955, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other black activists launched the now famous boycott of the city buses in Montgomery, Alabama. On September 2, 1957, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus surrounded Central High School in Little Rock with National Guardsmen and declared the campus off limits to white and to black students. Faubus stated in a televised speech that night that if African American students attempted to enter Central High, "blood would run in the streets."



Klansmen picket the Visulite Theater on Elizabeth Avenue.

It was within this emotionally-charged atmosphere that Charlotte-Mecklenburg prepared to integrate its schools on September 4, 1957. Robed and hooded members of the Ku Klux Klan picketed the Visulite Theater on Elizabeth Avenue on September 1st. They were protesting the showing of the movie, "Island in the Sun," directed by Robert Rossen and starring such notable performers as James Mason, Joan Collins, Dorothy Dandridge, and Harry Belafonte. The film depicted interracial romances. The Klansmen dispersed without incident when they were ordered to do so by Police Chief Frank Littlejohn. "A few obvious sympathizers of the Klan parked near the theater jeered photographers who arrived to make pictures of the pickets," reported the *Charlotte Observer*.

Even more provocative and outlandish were comments made by a racist rabble-rouser named John Kasper. He delivered an inflammatory speech to about 300 white people who had gathered on the steps of the Mecklenburg County Courthouse. He called upon the white citizens of Charlotte to rise up against the school board. "We want a heart attack, we want nervous breakdowns, we want suicides, we want flight from persecution," Kasper declared. Aware that native-born evangelist Billy Graham was scheduled to arrive from New

York City the next day, Kasper said: "Billy Graham left here a white man but he's coming back a n..... lover." Billy Graham, a man of impeccable character and highest standing in Charlotte and the nation as a whole, declined to respond to such ridiculous dribble when he stepped off the train at the Southern Railroad Station on September 2nd.

The culmination of the crisis occurred shortly after 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday September 4th at Harding High School. 15-year old Dorothy Counts left her parents' home on Beatties Ford Road just across from Johnson C. Smith University, where her father taught theology. She was driven to Harding that late summer morning by Dr. Edwin Tompkins, also a member of the Johnson C. Smith faculty. Not since D. H. Hill and his colleagues had charged the dormitories at Davidson College in 1854 had there been such explosive passion on the campus of a local school.



Dorothy Counts Walks To Harding High School.

A crowd of upperclassmen who had registered earlier that morning congregated in front of the school to listen to John Z. Warlick and his wife, leaders of the White Citizens Council. "It's up to you to keep her out," shouted Mrs. Warlick. Attired in a simple print dress with a broad bow and ribbon dangling from her collar, Dorothy Counts walked up the sidewalk that led to the front door. Hoots and catcalls filled the air. Dorothy Counts remained stoical throughout this electrifying encounter. She said nothing, even though some young whites threw trash and rocks toward her, most landing at her feet. "I do remember something hitting me in the back," she told a newspaper reporter, "but I don't think they were throwing at me, just in front and at my feet." Dorothy Counts exhibited remarkable poise that day. When asked if any whites spat upon her, Counts answered: "Yes. Many. A good many times, mostly on the back."



Mayor Brookshire was determined that pictures such as this would never appear in the press again.

Dorothy Counts soon succumbed to the harassment and scorn she experienced. "The students were pushing, shoving, spitting in my food," she explained many years later. "But the first time I was afraid was when I saw my brother in the car and students broke a window." Counts withdrew from Harding High School after attending for only four days and transferred to a school in Pennsylvania, but the other three African Americans who had enrolled with little or no fanfare at other schools on September 4th remained for the entire year. Gus Roberts would eventually graduate from Central High School. Indeed, the contributions of Gus Roberts, Girvaud Roberts, and Delores Huntley to the advancement of integrated schools were more substantial, if less confrontational, than those made by Counts. Progress, however, was slow. "Not a lot happened in the schools for the next several years," writes Frye Gaillard. The number of blacks attending integrated classrooms increased but only gradually. Charlotte remained mostly a segregated city.

The greatest legacy of the stirring events that had transpired at Harding High School on September 4, 1957, was the determination of Charlotte's business leaders that such events would never happen again. Photographs of Dorothy Counts walking demurely through a throng of screaming and spitting students had appeared in newspapers across the United States, including the *New York Times*. "Those pictures sickened Charlotte's corporate executives," Jack Claiborne told this writer. Thereafter, influential Charlotteans, most notably C. A. "Pete" McKnight, editor of the *Charlotte Observer* from 1954 until 1976, nurtured an atmosphere of racial tolerance that facilitated the rise of Fred Alexander and other moderate African Americans to positions of community-wide influence. "We have not defied the Court, but we have made it clear that we will make changes slowly and with due regard for the personal feelings of our people," stated the editors of the *Charlotte Observer* on May 17, 1958, the fourth anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.



Mayor Brookshire

The man who best exemplified the accommodating attitude of Charlotte's white business elite on racial issues was Stan Brookshire, Mayor of Charlotte from 1961 until 1969. Like Ben Douglas, a native of Iredell County, Brookshire graduated in 1927 from Trinity College, now Duke University, and in 1933 joined with his brother, Voris Brookshire, in establishing Engineering Sales Company. In matters of economics and business Brookshire was a typical New South booster. Expansion and growth were at the top of his agenda. "We had a lazy city ready to burst out at all seams, and it did, and it's still doing it and will continue to do it," said City Councilman Jim Whittington when commenting on Brookshire's impact on Charlotte. Milton Short told this writer that Mayor Brookshire assigned him the task of investigating where Charlotte could construct new water lines -- the umbilical cords of suburban expansion. A natty dresser, Brookshire circulated in the same privileged venues that men like Harry Dalton had enjoyed during World War Two. "He loved to play golf, and he enjoyed the burnished ambience of the country club," remembered Jerry Shinn, associate editor of the *Charlotte Observer*.



The Savoy Theater on Rozzelles Ferry Road evolved into theater used by blacks only.

Brookshire "always considered himself the Chamber of Commerce's choice for mayor and he ran the city from that perspective," stated City Councilman John Thrower. Having served as president of the Chamber of Commerce, Brookshire was recruited to run for mayor by Charlotte's white business leaders who did not want the more liberal Martha Evans to win. On racial issues Brookshire was a moderate. Above all else he sought to avoid a repeat of the embarrassing events of 1957, when national newspapers had carried photographs of Dorothy

Counts being harassed as she entered Harding High School . "Brookshire identified himself with Atlanta Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr .," explains Alex Coffin. Unlike Mayor Arthur Hanes of Birmingham, Alabama, who championed the continuation of segregation, Brookshire, like Allen, favored peaceful reconciliation and looked upon moderates in the African American community like Fred Alexander as his principal allies.



**Johnson C. Smith University
students stage sit-in.**

Charlotte teetered on the edge of racial conflict in the early 1960s. There were sit-in demonstrations at eight local lunch counters on February 9, 1960. Store managers refused to serve the African Americans and closed down. Seven did resume operations on an integrated basis the following July. Black dentist and Presbyterian minister Reginald Hawkins , whom Brookshire despised, was the most strident voice in the local African American community. On May 20, 1963, Hawkins led hundreds of Johnson C. Smith students on a protest march against racial segregation in restaurants, theaters, hotels, motels, or any other business establishment that served the general public.



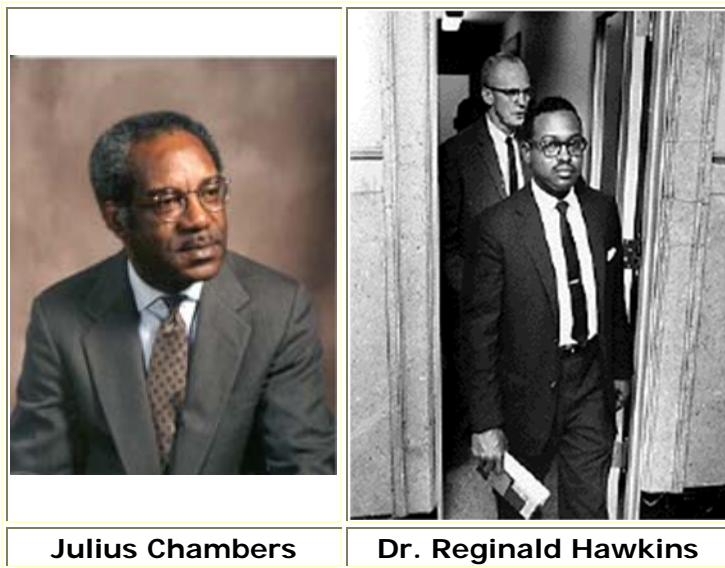
Warner Hall, minister of Covenant Presbyterian Church and Chairman of the Committee on Community Relations, was a strong voice for peaceful accommodation and racial tolerance.

Hawkins, a native of Beaufort, North Carolina, had a penchant for publicity. He purposely chose the 188th anniversary of the alleged signing of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence in 1775 to stage his protest. "There is no freedom as long as all of us are not free," the tempestuous dentist and preacher shouted. The crowd greeted his remarks with "Yeah" and "No." "We shall not be satisfied with gradualism," Hawkins proclaimed. "We want freedom and we want it now." As the students began to disperse, Hawkins issued a threat to the white leadership of Charlotte. "Any day might be D Day They can either make this an open or democratic city or there is going to be a long siege. They can choose which way it's going to be."

This was not idle talk. Mayor Brookshire knew that demonstrations were occurring in Raleigh, Durham, and Greensboro, and that large numbers of protestors were being arrested. "Pete" McKnight of the *Charlotte Observer* telephoned Brookshire and suggested that decisive action was needed to maintain the peace. Brookshire agreed. He asked Ed Burnside, president of the Chamber of Commerce, to call a meeting of the Chamber's executive committee. These actions culminated in the Chamber of Commerce's approving a resolution on May 23rd calling upon businesses in the community to open their doors voluntarily to African Americans. "May 23, 1963, could be the day leading to a major breakthrough in human relationships for the Queen City and the Carolinas," stated a *Charlotte Observer* editorial. ". . . once the leadership of this community has set its course, regardless of the individual problems encountered," the newspaper continued, "it will not swerve from it until all citizens can breathe free in the public ways." This prediction was borne out in the weeks and months that followed. Legal racial segregation ended voluntarily in Charlotte and

Mecklenburg County in 1963. "I positively think that this voluntary action enabled us to avoid the violence of murder, riots, arson, and looting, which plagued many of our cities," declared Brookshire shortly before his death from lung cancer in 1990.

The struggle for full integration of the public schools was not yet over, however. Julius Chambers , a laconic but brilliant lawyer, often speaks in a quiet monotone that gives little indication of the passion for racial justice that burns in the core of his being. Born in Mt. Gilead, North Carolina, Chambers arrived in Charlotte in July 1964 after receiving a law degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, an advanced degree from Columbia University, and serving for one year as an intern for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. "He provided for blacks in Charlotte the legal brilliance that their movement had lacked," writes Frye Gaillard. Reginald Hawkins did not wait long to visit Chambers in the lawyer's rented office on East Trade Street to express frustration over the progress of integration in the public schools.



On January 19, 1965, Julius Chambers , acting on behalf of Vera and Darius Swann , whose son had been assigned to all-black Biddleville Elementary School near Johnson C. Smith University , filed legal briefs in Federal District Court in Charlotte. Chambers argued that the pupil assignment plan of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools violated the United States Constitution and that the School Board was obligated to take more resolute action to eliminate the vestiges of racial segregation that persisted in the public schools.



William E. Poe

Many Charlotteans, including School Board Chairman William Poe , believed that this community had a sterling record with respect to race relations and that some in the African American community were pressing their demands for more comprehensive school integration too assertively. "I never knew of any occasion when he even wrote a letter," Poe stated many years later when discussing Chambers. "He never came in and said, 'let's talk about these things.'" Such behavior frustrated and angered Poe.



**Police Investigate
Bombing.**

Anger of a more sinister kind erupted in Charlotte during the early morning hours of November 22, 1965. Sticks of dynamite exploded with dramatic suddenness in the yards of the homes of Fred Alexander , Kelly Alexander , Reginald Hawkins , and Julius Chambers . It was as if a compressed coil of racial hatred suddenly sprang forward. Luckily, nobody was hurt. The perpetrators were never identified, but Mayor Brookshire and the Charlotte City Council left no doubt as to how they felt about this incident. "We are ashamed and horrified

by the acts of violence," read their official statement. "They have done much damage to the four homes involved. They have done far greater damage to our community." According to Alex Coffin, Brookshire regarded these bombings as the "low point in his time in office." "The despicable acts of these nightriding terrorists do not represent the spirit of Charlotte," asserted the *Charlotte Observer*. Mayor Brookshire himself would experience the barbs of racial retaliation. A burning cross was found in his yard on August 26, 1966.

Charlotte experienced another round of intense racial stress in the days following the tragic assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968. Cities across the country exploded in orgies of rage, and many wondered whether the same would happen in Charlotte. President R. P. Perry closed Johnson C. Smith early for spring holidays "to maintain calm." Students at Davidson College donned black armbands in honor of Dr. King, and those at Second Ward High School wept openly during an emotionally wrenching memorial service. Mayor Brookshire and County Commission Chairman Jim Martin declared a city-wide day of mourning and scheduled a memorial service for noon on April 6th at Ovens Auditorium. Dr. Warner Hall,, pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church and chairman of the Mayor's Committee on Community Relations, said that the people of Charlotte needed to come together to express a "personal sense of loss."



Police stood at the Square in April 1968 after dark to assure that nobody was on the streets.

George Leake, the passionate and physically imposing minister of Little Rock A.M.E. Zion Church, alarmed Mayor Brookshire and other civic leaders during a meeting of the Committee on Community Relations on April 6th. Leake spoke with uncharacteristic candor to representatives of the white elite. African Americans, he said, rejected "attempts to placate the Negro community and to soothe the conscience of whites." Leake called upon the business community to "teach Negroes in the same way that they teach the dumb white folks." He warned that Charlotte could experience "long hot summers" and even "chaos" unless it curbed the racist behavior of some policemen and improved recreation programs in poorer neighborhoods. Blacks, he said, would continue to fight "with the ballot, boycott, picket and will march if that is the only way you'll answer the call." He ended by inviting whites to come to a memorial service on April 8th where "men of color will honor one of their own."

This writer attended the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Service held at St. Paul's Baptist Church on the evening of April 8, 1968. It was a memorable experience. The streets were virtually empty, because Mayor Brookshire had declared a city-wide nightly curfew

earlier that day. Black ladies in white dresses greeted the people politely and handed out programs at the door of the Gothic Revival style church, which would soon fall victim to Mayor Brookshire's "slum clearance" program for the Brooklyn neighborhood.

The banging radiators along the walls of the packed sanctuary seemed to underscore the significance of the moment. The audience was about half white and half black. Mayor Brookshire was there. County Commission Chairman Jim Martin was there. "I didn't believe you would come," proclaimed Rev. Leake. "I am encouraged that at last you did come down and share with us." Kelly Alexander concurred. "I'm glad to see so many people here," he declared. "I'm sorry it took Martin Luther King's death to bring us together."



Some of the attendees at the April 8th Memorial Service



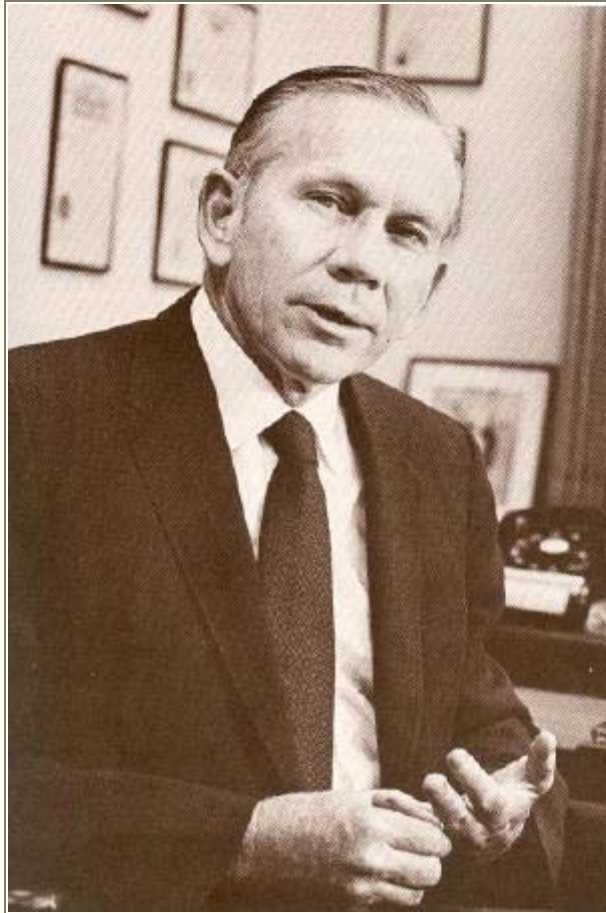
Bishop Leake

George Leake delivered a stirring sermon. His sonorous tones reverberated against the walls of the old sanctuary, evoking tears and shouts of "Amen" from many in the audience. He began in a dignified, measured manner similar to that employed by preachers in white churches. It did not take long, however, for the more dramatic style of the African American clergy to come to the surface. Leake suddenly thrust his arms skyward and began swaying from side to side in the pulpit. Perspiration beaded on his forehead and trickled down the side of his shiny, black face. "The Lord has gathered him up and said, 'Martin you have done enough. You have walked enough miles, you have made enough speeches.'" The service ended with black people and white people singing "We Shall Overcome," the anthem of the civil rights movement. This writer realized that he was witnessing a watershed moment in the history of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. Dr. Raymond Wheeler of the Southern Regional Council appreciated its meaning. "I tell all of you, black and white, racial separation is not the answer."



Local physician Raymond Wheeler was a champion of racial tolerance.

There were still major challenges to face. On April 23, 1969, Federal Judge James B. McMillan ruled for the plaintiffs in the landmark Swann case. McMillan, a native of Robeson County, declared that the public schools of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County had "the affirmative duty to desegregate 'now' by positive measures." The eventual outcome of his order was the establishment in 1970 of a system of cross-town busing to assure that schools would be racially integrated. This community is still grappling with the issue of how to provide equal educational opportunities for all children when many neighborhoods continue to be racially homogenous. Yet the trend toward greater racial understanding is irreversible. At the time of the completion of this manuscript African Americans are fully represented on the Charlotte City Council and the Board of County Commissioners. A black man is Chairman of the Mecklenburg County School Board. Another African American is County Manager. The City Manager is a woman. The two representatives from Mecklenburg County in the U.S. House of Representatives are a black man and a white woman.



Judge James B. McMillan.



Protestors march in front of Judge McMillan's home.

Banks will lead Charlotte into the new century. Financial institutions have long occupied a vital place in the history of this community. The First National Bank of Charlotte opened in August 1865, followed by the Bank of Mecklenburg four years later, and the Merchants and Farmers Bank in 1871. Word H. Wood, a native of Elkin, N.C. and graduate of Eaton & Burnett Business College in Baltimore, Maryland, moved from Winston, North Carolina to Charlotte in 1901. He and George Stephens, a boyhood friend, were instrumental in establishing the Southern Trust Company, which has evolved into today's Bank of America. On July 26, 1905, William Henry Belk and others secured a charter for the Charlotte Trust Company, which later merged with the Charlotte National Bank and became an initial tenant of the Realty Building or Independence Building. Certainly, the opening of the Charlotte Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond on December 1, 1927, furthered strengthened Charlotte's role as a regional banking center.

The significance of financial institutions in Charlotte's economy leaped forward again in the 1980s. Hugh McColl, a feisty ex-Marine and president from 1983 until 2001 of what is now the Bank of America, led a successful effort to expand the operations of local banks across state lines. The bank's first out-of-state full service acquisition, because it already owned a trust company in Orlando, was in Florida in 1982. The pace quickened after the Supreme Court ruled on June 10, 1985, that states could band together in regional compacts to permit reciprocal interstate banking without having to open their doors to banks from all states. Within months McColl's bank bought Pan American Banks Inc. of Miami, Florida,

Bankers Trust of South Carolina, and Southern National Bankshares Inc. of Atlanta. "If you don't grow, you do the opposite. You die," said McColl in 1987. Like Bonnie Cone, D. A. Tompkins, and Edward Dilworth Latta, McColl is a South Carolinian and a quintessential Charlottean, because economic development is uppermost on his agenda. No less aggressive than McColl in expanding Charlotte's role in interstate banking was Edward Crutchfield, Jr., president of First Union Corporation.

If one could somehow cheat the clock and host a dinner party with such local notables as Cameron Morrison, Dr. Charles Fox, David Ovens, Hamilton C. Jones, Ben Douglas, Hugh McColl, and Ed Crutchfield attending, it would be a harmonious and congenial gathering, because except on the issues of race and increased rights for women, Charlotte has not had a fundamentally new guiding principle in at least 150 years. This writer cannot help but wonder what the generations of Native Americans who sat huddled around campfires at the Big Rock would think about the world that white people and black people have wrought. The Big Rock now sits in the middle of a suburban housing development that has lots of cul-de-sacs. The beat goes on.