

Plaza-Midwood

Thomas W. Hanchett

Plaza-Midwood is Charlotte's most diverse streetcar-era neighborhood. Its earliest avenues were platted in 1903 and its newest date from after the Second World War. ¹ Buildings range from turn-of-the-century factories and blue collar housing, to one of Charlotte's largest pre-World War II suburban shopping strips, to the city's most prestigious country club.

Though the Plaza-Midwood area was never the city's most elite district, as [Dilworth](#), [Myers Park](#), and [Eastover](#) were in their early years, it has had important residents. Bishop John C. Kilgo, a major regional Methodist leader and president of Trinity College in the years before it became Duke University; John Crosland, Sr., who started one of the most active homebuilding firms in the Southeast; and textile leader George B. Cramer, whose family founded Cramerton, N.C., are among those who have made their homes in Plaza-Midwood. The neighborhood was also the site of the experiments that led to the creation of WBT, one of the first radio stations to be licensed in the United States. Moreover, several noteworthy designs by such leading Charlotte architects as Louis Asbury, C. C. Hook, and William Peeps grace the area, along with noted New York City designer Aymar Embury's Charlotte Country Club, and the city's best preserved Queen Anne Victorian residence.

Plaza-Midwood did not formally come into being as a neighborhood until 1973. ² Residents who had organized to stop a highway through the neighborhood decided to form a permanent community organization, and chose a name that combined those of the area's picturesque main street and one of its larger subdivisions. Official boundary lines were drawn in 1979 by the Charlotte Planning Commission, part of a city-wide effort to define Charlotte's neighborhoods for the first time. ³ Yet, despite its diversity and its recent naming, Plaza-Midwood is clearly a single neighborhood. Its secondary streets continue across the old subdivision boundaries to form an interlocking web of residential avenues. The Plaza, a long, straight boulevard with a landscaped median, forms the neighborhood's spine. Mecklenburg and Belvedere avenues run east from The Plaza, tying together the area's network of sidestreets.

Sharp natural boundaries delineate the edges of the area. Central Avenue, a long-time city thoroughfare originally known as Lawyers Road, defines the neighborhood's southern boundary with a strip of commercial development. A band of industrial buildings along Hawthorne Lane and the CSX Railroad forms Plaza-Midwood's western edge. At the east, Briar Creek and the fairways of the Charlotte Country Club

preclude through streets, another distinct boundary. The least sharply-defined edge is at the north where Plaza-Midwood merges into Plaza Hills. Yet even here one can distinguish between the cottages of the 1920s through 1940s that characterize Plaza-Midwood and the post-World War II development that defines the areas north of Mecklenburg Avenue and Country Club Lane.

The diversity of ages and economic levels within Plaza-Midwood and its building stock are in part a result of the large number of early subdivisions that make up the neighborhood. The fact that Plaza-Midwood is composed of several subdivisions is not in itself unusual in Charlotte. Every neighborhood in the city grew up in this manner. The [Elizabeth](#) neighborhood, for example, is made up of five distinct developments whose names and boundaries have long been forgotten. Even Myers Park, conceived as a single mammoth project, is in reality a patchwork of areas platted at different times by a series of planners under the direction of successive leaders of the Stephens and Griffith companies. Plaza-Midwood, however, is made up of more developments than any other neighborhood. There are ten separate subdivisions, several of which were re-subdivided over the years, involving at least seventeen different development groups. There was no recognizable lead developer who built a major project around which smaller ones gathered. Plaza-Midwood had no one like Dilworth's Latta family, Wilmore's F. C. Abbott, or Elizabeth's W. S. Alexander.

But this fragmented development is not the underlying cause of the area's diversity. Even within the individual subdivisions there is surprising variety. Frequently, a single block will contain houses built decades apart for persons of widely varying economic levels.

The explanation of Plaza-Midwood's appearance today is to be found in its location in the Charlotte of the 1900s-1920s, and its position in the web of railroads and streetcar lines that shaped the city. The tract that became Plaza-Midwood had much to offer, but it also had some serious liabilities in terms of location. Its potential drew a stream of real estate developers who gambled that they could overcome the drawbacks to create a profitable new streetcar suburb for the booming city of Charlotte. The gamble seldom paid off as well as the developers would have liked.

Beginning with Dilworth in 1891, Charlotte's streetcar suburbs came to form a tight ring completely surrounding the old town. Almost all the new streets were contained within a two-mile radius from the Square at the center of the city. The arrangement was dictated by the nature of the trolley commuting system. Streetcar track was expensive to build, and needed relatively high density residential development to be profitable. Areas with the shortest commuting time to downtown developed first. Yet even before this first ring of suburbs was completed in the early 1910s, a few speculators had purchased land farther from town with the hope that it, too, could

soon be developed. The first subdivisions of Plaza-Midwood were part of this second tier of development, starting in 1903. The only other second-tier streetcar suburb to be built was the highly successful Myers Park development. Myers Park was not begun until 1911, an interval of eight years that saw Charlotte's demand for new housing leap as the city's population swelled by nearly fifty percent.⁴

Along with distance from town, developers in the Plaza-Midwood area faced a second liability. To get to the new subdivisions, commuters had to cross a major rail line. Charlotte planner Earle Sumner Draper, who arrived in 1915, has stated that railroad bridges were a key factor in the burgeoning growth of the southeast sector of the city, which continues to this day.⁵ In the early decades of this century twenty-five to thirty passenger trains entered the city each day, with many more freight trains and switching runs.⁶ Eight railroad lines crossed at grade and hemmed in the center city for many years. The town's first railroad bridge carried the South Boulevard streetcar line over the tracks on Morehead Street, allowing the trolleys to move freely south to Dilworth in the 1890s. The second, in the early 1910s, carried the southeasterly Elizabeth/Myers Park trolley under the railroad tracks on East Trade Street. No more bridges were built until the 1930s. Commuters to Plaza-Midwood were forced to cross the Seaboard Air Line track at Central Avenue each day. It was a busy line carrying freight from the Charlotte and Gastonia textile region to both the port of Wilmington and, via the Seaboard junction at Monroe, North Carolina, to Atlanta, Georgia. Frequent waits at the Central Avenue grade crossing undoubtedly deterred potential Plaza-Midwood area homebuyers.

The neighborhood's third major problem was one which its early developers could not have foreseen. The Plaza-Midwood area became the victim of a power play over control of the city's streetcar system. The trouble began about 1910 when the tract's early developers and the projectors of the planned Charlotte Country Club approached trolley owner Edward Dilworth Latta about extending service out to the section.⁷ Latta refused. He had good reason, for the Country Club was to be more than two miles beyond the existing end of the Central Avenue line at Hawthorne Lane. There was little prospect that rapid residential development would occur to offset the construction and operating costs for such a long track, and the developers were evidently unable or unwilling to subsidize the line as George Stephens would later do for Myers Park.

On June 6, 1910, developer Paul Chatham, who planned to sell house lots along what is now The Plaza, came before the City Board of Aldermen to request a franchise to build his own streetcar line.⁸ Latta quickly rose in opposition, for the move would break his monopoly over the city's mass transit. Latta suspected that Chatham had no plans to create a line, but instead would sell his rights to James B. Duke's mammoth Southern Power Company and thereby allow the electric utility to put its massive

resources into competition with Latta and force him out of business.⁹ Such tactics were commonplace in the heyday of the trolley, and in more than one American city new companies actually built track and operated parallel service at a loss until the old franchise-holders were forced to sell out. Charlotte historian Dan L. Morrill writes that "evidence abounds that the Dukes and Chatham were in collusion."¹⁰ Attorney Cameron Morrison represented both Chatham and Duke, and Chatham was a business associate of William States Lee, the Duke company's chief engineer.¹¹

The Aldermen's compromise must have pleased no one. Chatham received his franchise, but with the stipulation that it could not be sold or transferred. Ironically, a month later Southern Power received a franchise from the Board to allow their new Piedmont and Northern electric interurban to come into Charlotte via city streets. Duke had his armhold over Edward Dilworth Latta, and Latta sold out to the newly-formed Southern Public Utilities Company the same year.

The Plaza-Midwood area, however, was stuck with Paul Chatham's tiny streetcar line. For years commuters to the neighborhood had to get off the Southern Public Utilities Company trolley from downtown near Hawthorne and Central, and transfer to a battery-powered rail car operated by Chatham's company for the trip the rest of the way out Central and up The Plaza. The inconvenience slowed an already long trip, and permanently retarded the area's growth.

Far from downtown, blocked by the railroad, and hindered by poor trolley connections, the Plaza-Midwood area was slow to develop. Yet it continually lured real estate investors. It was well-drained land, some of the highest in the region. It was very close to the fashionable parts of Elizabeth, particularly the Central Avenue corridor where such city leaders as J. B. Ivey, F. C. Abbott, and others lived in large houses. And, after the Charlotte Country Club bought a tract of inexpensive farmland on Briar Creek in 1910, it was adjacent to the city's only golf club. A continual trickle of lot buyers seemed to justify the investors' optimism. But sales always remained slow, and forced developers to cut lot sizes, modify plans, and often to sell out to other speculators before all sites finally sold. The Plaza-Midwood area subdivisions did not fill up until well into the era of easy automobile transportation.

Oakhurst

There is not space for a detailed history of all of Plaza-Midwood's numerous development groups, but it is possible to provide a picture of the subdivisions and profile the most important of their creators. Benjamin D. Heath was the first man to take an interest in the area as something more than farmland. He had tasted business success as owner of a hardware store in Monroe, North Carolina (which gave

department store founder William Henry Belk his first mercantile experience)

.¹² Heath was attracted to Charlotte's booming textile economy and quickly became one of the city's financial leaders. By 1900 he was president of the [Charlotte National Bank](#), two textile mills and a fire insurance company, and partner in numerous other ventures.¹³

About 1900 Heath began to take an interest in suburban real estate, acting as partner with F. C. Abbott and young George Stephens in a development called Piedmont Park, including Sunnyside, Louise, Jackson, and Central Avenues in the present Elizabeth neighborhood.¹⁴ As soon as that subdivision was underway, Heath purchased the next piece of property out Central Avenue beyond Louise Avenue on his own.¹⁵ F. C. Abbott later remembered Heath's Oakhurst development (not to be confused with a later neighborhood of the same name out Monroe Road) as one of the city's earliest, predating several suburbs closer to town. It overlapped parts of today's Elizabeth and Plaza-Midwood neighborhoods:

. . . Mr. B. D. Heath . . . purchased the Chadwick farm with long frontage on Central Avenue extending almost out to The Plaza, and Oakhurst was developed. The price paid was one hundred dollars per acre and included the fine old homestead occupied as his residence the rest of his life. Some of Mr. Heath's old time friends "ragged" him heavily for paying such a price for land "way out in the country."¹⁶

Heath was smarter than his friends realized. He sold a number of lots on Central Avenue near Louise Street for fine homes near his own, all of which are now gone. But Heath recognized that the tract's main virtue was the Seaboard Railroad track through its center. He planned to make a rapid profit creating an industrial area, rather than a streetcar suburb. In 1897, just before B. D. Heath had made his purchase, H. S. Chadwick's Louise Cotton Mill had opened northwest of where the Seaboard crossed Central Avenue, and it expanded to 20,000 spindles in 1900.¹⁷ The same year, Heath sold off large parcels of his new tract to three other industrial concerns. On the northwest corner of the crossing was the Charlotte Casket Company, of which Heath was a director.¹⁸ Behind it was the factory of Barnhardt Manufacturing.¹⁹ A native of Cabarrus County, Thomas M. Barnhardt had been attracted by Charlotte's textile boom, and found his fortune in cotton waste.²⁰ He manufactured cotton batting from the material, which had previously been thrown away. In the 1920s he became a major supplier to the automobile upholstery industry, and eventually the Barnhardt Company occupied not only its original plant and the adjacent former casket factory, but a chain of facilities throughout the region.

The Cole Manufacturing Company built its present factory on the southeast corner of the railroad crossing about 1911. E. A. and E. M. Cole had begun operation about 1900 in a wooden building near Barnhardt's, producing seed planters patented by E.

M. Cole.²² The implements sold so well that the Coles commissioned architect C. C. Hook to build the present complex of handsome one-story brick buildings with Roman arched windows.²³ A 1980 Charlotte newspaper article called Cole "one of the world's largest manufacturers of seed planting, fertilizing, and farm machine equipment."²⁴



Cole Manufacturing Company Building

By 1903, with Barnhardt, Cole Charlotte Casket and one or two smaller industrial concerns in place, B. D. Heath had sold off most of his railroad frontage. He now platted most of the remainder of his tract as a blue collar residential area.²⁵ These Oakhurst avenues included the first streets of the area that is now known as Plaza-Midwood; Clement, Pecan (originally Chadwick), School and Gordon streets, plus parts of Thomas, Kensington, Chestnut, and Hamorton (originally Peachtree) streets. A few middle-income residences appeared on the north side of Central Avenue between the railroad crossing and the farm road that would become The Plaza, but most of the dwellings on the side streets were working class.

All of the housing in these blocks was privately developed.²⁶ None was owned by the factories, the usual pattern in other parts of Charlotte. By the time the city directory listed the streets in the late 1910s, there were some two dozen one-story Victorian cottages on what are now Clement, Pecan, Thomas, and Hamorton. Notable among these is 1216 Clement Avenue, an example of the "shotgun" house-type usually found in black neighborhoods but here occupied by white machinist A. Fred Love in its early years. Most of the cottages were inhabited by workmen at the nearby factories, including 1208 Clement, 1416 Pecan, and 1328 Thomas. One of the more elaborate

early dwellings on Thomas, at 1409, was the home of casket-maker Jackson Kiser. Cole Manufacturing assistant superintendent Arthur J. Helms could be found at 1409 Pecan, a house distinguished by a balcony inset in its front gable. Not everyone worked at the factories, however. United States Post Office foreman Vitchel Q. Stroupe lived in a multi-gabled Victorian house at 1443 Pecan, painter R. Harvey Allen resided at 1319 Thomas, and trolley conductor Charles P. Wooten could be found at 1424 Hamorton. During the 1920s, small bungalows for residents of similar means filled up the spaces between the first Victorian cottages. Though a handful of early residences have been demolished along Central and adjacent blocks, the remainder of this Oakhurst section looks today much as it did fifty years ago, and contains Plaza-Midwood's oldest dwellings.

Logie Avenue and Forest Circle

The next developments farther out Central Avenue came in 1909. D. A. Johnston, evidently a small-time real estate speculator, filed a plat for Logie Avenue, a short, one-block street off the north side of Central Avenue near Briar Creek.²⁷ The same year the Eastside Realty Company made plans for the suburb of "Forest Circle" in a hollow a bit closer to town (in 1983 the area behind McDonald's restaurant).²⁸ Eastside's partners were the socially prominent doctor C. J. McManaway, Coca Cola distributor J. L. Snyder, meat market owner L. P. MacKenzie, plus D. M. Abernathy and Thurman B. Long.²⁹ Evidently none had much experience in real estate, and their streets remained only on paper for years. A couple named J. J. and Sadie Harrill owned the land by 1914, but they were little more successful.³⁰

Today the oldest houses in the area, along Hamorton Street, are bungalows dating from the late 1920s. The hollow proved to be the only poorly drained land in the Plaza-Midwood area, a problem that persists today. Consequently, most of the streets drawn by Eastside back in 1909 were not actually opened until immediately after World War II when pent-up housing demand created a home-buying frenzy. The short, narrow streets are now mostly lined with low-cost structures built in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The avenues that occupy the Forest Circle subdivision include Landis, Randall, Fulton, Firth, Wolf, Roland, and portions of Hamorton and Kenwood. Roland Street has the most interesting history. It is said to run near the site of a nineteenth century gold mine. Mecklenburg County is, in fact, pockmarked with small "placer pit" digs, few of which panned out. When the street opened around 1941 it carried the romantic name "Gold Hill Avenue," but by 1951 had been switched to the less colorful Roland Street.³¹

The Charlotte Country Club and Club Acres

In 1910 a group of Charlotte businessmen organized the Mecklenburg Country Club. Incorporation papers filed February 21, 1910, listed W. S. Lee, E. P. Coles, F M. Laxton, John M. Scott, Chase Brenizer, Dr. J. P. Mathison, Stuart W. Cramer, E. C. Marshall, A. J. Draper, and H. Twitty as equal stockholders.³² Charlotte was still a small city of only 34,000 people, but its newly wealthy industrialists and developers felt they merited the era's symbol of wealth and prestige, the golf course. They purchased a tract of farmland far out in the country, straddling Briar Creek on the north side of Central Avenue, and turned the old farmhouse into their clubhouse.³³

At almost the same time, Laxton, developer Paul Chatham, banker Word Wood, and Duke executive W. S. Lee chartered the Mecklenburg Realty Company.³⁴ The following year the company filed a plat for streets in Club Acres, a new subdivision just west of the clubhouse.³⁵ Mecklenburg, Belvedere, and Matheson avenues were part of this plan, along with a number of side streets that were never actually built. Belvedere was intended as the main drive to the country club enclave, and Mecklenburg Avenue was planned as the trolley route, an unusual separation of transportation modes. By 1918 developers had taken out water permits to begin construction of a handful of residences on Mecklenburg and one on Matheson.

The lapse of several years between platting of the streets and building of the first houses was indicative of the difficulties in attracting buyers to the area. So was the decidedly middle-income character of the earliest dwellings. Numbers 2132 Matheson Avenue and 2427 Mecklenburg Avenue, dating from 1916, are two-story frame houses that combine straight-forward Rectilinear style massing with Bungalow style details, such as wide-eaved, bracketed roofs.



2427 Mecklenburg Ave.

Both apparently initially housed real estate developers. The dwelling at 2320 Mecklenburg Avenue, erected two years later, is quite similar, and housed Power engineer J. W. Knowlton. Number 2222 Mecklenburg is the only 1910s residence surviving today that may be said to be imposing. The 1918 design for Western Electric Company manager W. R. Phillips is a two-story Rectilinear style brick residence that commands its hilltop site.

Unfortunately, the most important residence built during the Club Acres subdivision's first decade has been demolished. F. M. Laxton, major investor in both the subdivision and the country club, built a large two-story brick house in the 1910s at the corner of Mecklenburg and Belvedere avenues, right next to what was then the entrance to the club. A chicken coop behind the residence became the location of an important historic event in December, 1920, when Fred Laxton rigged up a primitive radio transmitter.³⁶ The radio experiments evolved into Laxton's WBT radio with studios in downtown Charlotte, the third radio station to be licensed in the United States. WBT played a part in attracting regional attention to the city and spurring its growth, and also helped make Charlotte a focus for early country music recording. The Carter family, Bluegrass music pioneer Bill Monroe, and banjo star Uncle Dave Macon were among those who regularly performed live from the downtown WBT facilities in the 1930s and 1940s, and were recorded at the nearby field studios of RCA Victor. In 1931, long after the chicken coop transmitter had given way to one atop the Independence Building, the Laxton residence was levelled to provide a more grandiose entrance to the new Charlotte Country Club building.

The difficulties in attracting buyers to Club Acres were highlighted when its developers rescinded the original deed restrictions for the area and allowed lots smaller than one acre. The 1919 document was signed by all parties involved in the project, and read like a "Who's Who" of economically powerful Charlotteans.³⁷ In

addition to the original Mecklenburg Realty Company, with prominent investors Draper and Wood among its leaders, two additional groups were now involved in the development. The Club Acres Company had construction man F. M. Laxton at its head, and the Mayfield Company had realtor E. V. Patterson and textile/banking leader J. T. McAden in charge. Among those with stock in the three companies were Myers Park founder George Stephens, realtors V. J. Guthery and O. J. Thies, builder William Isenhour, and financier John M. Scott.

With this roster of backers, the Club Acres development did not suffer from lack of capital or leadership. Neither did it suffer from competition from an opposing development group in Myers Park. Both suburbs had been begun in 1911 and both aimed for the "country club set," but they shared the same backers; Stephens, Draper, Wood, and to a lesser extent Patterson, Thies, McAden, Isenhour and Scott. In the course of the decade almost all of these men would themselves choose to live in Myers Park. The attraction of the country club was not enough to overcome the problems of distance, poor transit, and a disruptive railroad crossing that plagued all of the Plaza-Midwood subdivisions.

Development in Club Acres finally took off at the very end of the 1920s and especially in the 1930s, as it became commonplace for the upper-middle class to depend on automobiles rather than trolleys to commute to center city jobs. St. Andrews Lane, laid out for investors Hamilton McKay and J. H. Whitner in 1926, finally filled out in 1939 with the Colonial and Ranch style residences of upper middle income businessmen.³⁸ Charles F. Barnhardt, a leading cotton broker, and J. Norman Pease, a successful mill architect, teamed up to develop Country Club Lane in 1937.³⁹ Barnhardt's opulent house, complete with its own small lake, dates from the following year.⁴⁰ In the late 1920s and 1930s Mecklenburg and Belvedere avenues belatedly began to attract members of the city's leadership circle. Among them were cotton processor A. L. Boyle who built a Colonial Revival house designed by William Peeps at 2415 Mecklenburg (1928), Carolina Trust Company vice-president Benjamin J. Smith at 2448 Mecklenburg (1928), lawyer Robert E. Wellons at 2300 Mecklenburg (1932), WBT radio program director Charles Crutchfield at 2331 Mecklenburg (1943), and real estate leader William Tate at 2826 Belvedere (1939).⁴¹



2415 Mecklenburg Ave.

Architecture of this era tended toward brick Colonial Revival houses on ample lots. The largest residence of the period, though, was a striking example of the Tudor Revival. The Elliot Newcombe, Sr., house at [2817 Belvedere Avenue](#), said to have been built in 1931 by noted Durham architect George Watts Carr.⁴² Newcombe, with interests in textiles and packaging, was the stepson of mill magnate C. W. Johnston and husband of Mary Duke Lyon, a grandniece of utility tycoon J. B. Duke.⁴³



2817 Belvedere Ave.

Another mark of the neighborhood's success in the 1930s was the opening of the new country club building in 1931.⁴⁴ By now known as the Charlotte Country Club, the institution commissioned noted northern "society" architect Aymar Embury II to design its new clubhouse. Embury was well known for his "country-house" designs in better suburbs up and down the eastern seaboard, and he was also involved in country club and residential design in North Carolina's prestigious Sand Hills resort

region.⁴⁵ His Charlotte club building was a costly collage of revivalistic motives, from Georgian and English, to French, Grecian, and "modernistic." The grounds were laid out by Charlotte's Earle Sumner Draper. The large, white structure trumpeted the wealth of Charlotte's leaders in the midst of the Great Depression.



Charlotte Country Club

The Club Acres area continued to receive new houses after World War II. Country Club Drive filled up in the early 1950s with large ranch houses built for managers and sales supervisors of bustling young companies. On Saint Andrews Lane, Matheson Avenue, Belvedere Avenue, and Mecklenburg Avenue, new houses, often Ranch style, filled the remaining vacant lots and sometimes the side yards of earlier residences. Perhaps the finest dwelling of the post-war period was the home of John Crosland, Sr., (1951) at 3021 Belvedere Avenue facing the Country Club. Crosland was the generation's busiest suburban homebuilder, largely responsible for reshaping the post-war city. His imposing two-story residence by local designer Warren Mobley with its white columned portico echoes the club building.⁴⁶



John Crosland House

The Club Acres streets today reflect their long history. Under the tall trees planted in the 1910s there is now an unusually diverse array of houses, with architectural influences ranging from Bungalow to Ranch. The area retains the prestige it has enjoyed since the 1930s, and likely will keep its present appearance for years to come.

Chatham Estates: The Plaza

Early maps drawn before residential development began in the Plaza-Midwood area show only three pre-existing roads.⁴⁷ The main highway was Lawyers Road (later Central Avenue) at the southern edge of the tract. A lesser road named Poorhouse Road wound out of downtown along the present route of Parkwood Avenue at the northern edge of the tract. It ran out to the county poorhouse, a structure that still stands as the annex to Spencer Memorial United Methodist Church at 1025 36th Street. The third road was a farm lane that connected Lawyers Road and Poorhouse Road. This last track was destined to become The Plaza, the grand boulevard of the Plaza-Midwood neighborhood.

The man who made the transformation was Paul Chatham. Like many Charlotte real estate developers, Chatham had made his first money in textiles. He had been born in 1869 in Elkin, North Carolina, a member of the wealthy family who operated that city's Chatham Woolen Mills.⁴⁸ Educated at Trinity College (now Duke University) in Durham, and the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, he served as an official with the family firm for several years.

In 1907 Paul Chatham moved to Charlotte, purchasing a fine residence on fashionable South Tryon Street.⁴⁹ He soon "became interested in the real estate business," and according to the *Charlotte Observer*, quickly became "prominent in the life of Charlotte."⁵⁰ His first major development was Chatham Estates, including the streets now known as The Plaza, Nassau Avenue, Tippah Avenue, Thurmond Place, and parts of Mecklenburg, Mimosa, Belvedere, Belle Terre, Chestnut, and Kensington Streets.⁵¹ When Chatham filed his plat for the new streets in 1912, Club Acres and most of the other Plaza-Midwood subdivisions were already on paper, but it still took a good bit of vision to imagine the farmland as a subdivision. As fellow developer F. C. Abbott remembered years later, "At that time The Plaza was a narrow dirt road , surrounded on both sides by a large strawberry farm. . . ."⁵²

It was landscape architect Leigh Colyer who helped provide the vision. Bolstered by family capital, Chatham was able to follow the lead of George Stephens in Myers Park and Edward Dilworth Latta in Dilworth and hire a professional designer to plan his new suburb. He chose Charlottean Colyer, a native of Chester, England, who had emigrated to the Carolinas with his father Charles F. Colyer.⁵³ The elder Colyer had been a romantic who fell in love with the mountains around Asheville, North Carolina, and spent the remainder of his life there as a painter and landscape designer. The younger Colyer had learned landscape design and drawing working with his father, and by the late 1890s was at work in Charlotte, where he became the city's first full-time landscape architect. By the time of his death in 1953 he had executed a variety of projects across the region, including Chatham Estates, the Belvedere suburb of Shelby, North Carolina, Charlotte's Elmwood Cemetery expansion, an award-winning mill village in Lincolnton, North Carolina, and the grounds of the North Carolina State Sanitorium.⁵⁴ Colyer was also responsible for numerous residential landscape designs for the area's leading citizens including the Linebergers and Stowes in Belmont, the Cannons in Cabarrus County, Judge Webb and Clyde Hoey in Shelby, and Ralph VanLandingham in Charlotte.⁵⁵

Leigh Colyer's design for Chatham Estates called for widening and straightening the dirt farm road into a mile-long, hundred-foot wide boulevard, with asphalt-paved twin roadways flanking a central median for streetcar tracks.⁵⁶ Two parallel streets and some half-dozen cross streets formed a grid, relieved by carefully placed curves. The boulevard was to have large estates of the wealthy, while streets were to hold more modest homes, a common Charlotte pattern in the period.

There was to be a formal park in the low-lying triangle of ground bounded by what are now Cochran, Mimosa, and Norcross streets. Another low piece of ground along a stream between Thurmond and Nassau streets was evidently intended as a "greenway" park. Today, except for slight changes to Thurmond Avenue and abandonment of the parkland, The Plaza and nearby streets follow Colyer's plan.

Paul Chatham used his financial resources to hire Colyer, to build his own streetcar system, to subsidize city water, electricity and telephone service, all carefully run along the alleys behind the building lots, and even installed ornamental light poles along the boulevard. He renovated a Victorian farmhouse near The Plaza and Central, and used it as a second residence for himself.⁵⁷ He also financed a publicity campaign with handsome maps and brochures of the neighborhood, and commissioned an artist to draw an aerial view of what the suburb would look like.⁵⁸ He then called on his social skills and family and industrial connections to entice buyers out to the new suburb.

Chatham had some initial success. Union National Bank president H. M. Victor built a large Colonial Revival residence (now demolished) in the block of The Plaza between Kensington and Belle Terre about 1914. Wealthy cotton broker Ralph Van Landingham purchased a five-acre site a block north the same year and commissioned architects Hook and Rogers to create a handsome house set in grounds designed by Leigh Colyer.⁵⁹ Also in 1914 architect Louis Asbury designed a large Rectilinear residence for Methodist Bishop John C. Kilgo at 2100 The Plaza. Kilgo was a distinguished figure in North Carolina in that day, recently retired as president to Trinity College (perhaps not coincidentally Chatham's alma mater) and a director of the Southern Railroad.



Bishop John C. Kilgo House

In 1915 a former downtown mansion was moved out to the suburb. Cotton and grain merchant R. M. Miller, Jr., son of an associate of textile machinery magnate D. A.

Tompkins, had evidently tired of his 1891 Queen Anne Victorian style residence on North Tryon Street at Seventh Street. He had the old house and a neighboring structure moved from the lot and commissioned Louis Asbury to design a new dwelling in the "modern" Colonial Revival style.⁶⁰ Miller's old house was moved to what is now 1600 The Plaza, where it was purchased by the Scott family.



The Miller house was very nearly the last large residence in Chatham Estates. The following year, 1916, Joseph D. Woodside, owner and operator of the Woodside Motor Company, moved into a new house at 1801 The Plaza, and stockbroker John L. Scott took up residence at 1405 The Plaza. With those sales, Paul Chatham's luck at attracting well-to-do lot buyers ran out.

Sales in Chatham Estates did not pick up again until the mid 1920s. By that time Chatham had been forced to abandon his vision of The Plaza lined with grand suburban estates on large lots. Small one-story bungalows arose between the large two-story residences built a decade earlier. Lots were frequently split up to allow

more buildings, and Chatham was apparently forced to sell off some of the undeveloped blocks to keep the project alive. The Nassau Heights Land Company, composed of real estate speculators U. S. Goode, F. E. Robinson, and T. D. Newell, Jr., purchased several blocks of Nassau Boulevard near Hamorton and advertised lots for sale in "Nassau Heights."⁶¹ By the early 1930s the streets of Chatham Estates were lined with modest bungalows and looked much as they do today.

Midwood

After Oakhurst, Club Acres, and Chatham Estates, the last major development in the present Plaza-Midwood neighborhood was the subdivision called Midwood. Eastside Realty had been the first to consider development of the land that became Midwood, in 1911, but it was not until 1914 that a group known as Century Realty platted most of the streets we see today.⁶² Century's directors included Charlotte Country Club official E. P. Coles, Plaza homeowner Ralph VanLandingham and a third man named W. M. Paul.⁶³ The roster overlapped those of both Chatham Estates and Club Acres, and it was not surprising that they planned their streets to join these earlier developments. Today Midwood's grid of straight avenues forms the heart of Plaza-Midwood and does much to unite its various subdivisions.

Unfortunately for its developers, the streets of Midwood were farther from downtown than Chatham Estates, and farther from the Charlotte Country Club than those of Club Acres. Consequently, Midwood took longer to develop than even those two painfully slow areas. Not until the very end of the 1920s did the first dwellings appear along Midwood, Ashland, Winter, Chatham, and the blocks of Belvedere, Kenwood, Club, and Truman that ran through the subdivision. By the 1950s the subdivision finally filled up, the streets lined with the compact cottages of barbers, dentists, salesmen, and small store owners.

Johnston Courts, Club Drive, Eastern Retreat, and Masonic Drive

A number of smaller developments rounded out the neighborhood, each contributing a street or two of compact dwellings. D. A. Johnston's 1913 Johnston Courts subdivision created dead end Haywood Court, and one block each of Mimosa, Belvedere, Kennon, and Belle Terre avenues, completing development west of The Plaza.⁶⁴ A group of 1920s bungalows completing development west of The Plaza. A group of 1920s bungalows survive and dominate this section today. Lawyers Delaney and Lowery filed plans for the first block of Club Road off Central Avenue (originally

to be called Ridgeway Avenue) in 1925. ⁶⁵ In 1947 the adjacent short blocks of DeArmon, Truman, and Morningside drives were platted under the name Eastern Retreat. ⁶⁶ The area's final street was Masonic Drive along Briar Creek, formally laid out in 1951, nearly half a century after Plaza-Midwood's residential development had begun. ⁶⁷

The Central Avenue Business District

In 1984 an unbroken string of small businesses lined Central Avenue for its entire length in Plaza-Midwood. At the heart of this district is a two-block area between Pecan Avenue and The Plaza that dates from before World War II. The stores evidently clustered here originally because this was where the streetcar turned the corner onto The Plaza.

"Streetcar shopping strips" were common in Charlotte by the end of the 1930s. They could be found in suburban areas all over the city at the end of a line or at a major turn. They ranged in size from one or two stores, such as Spoon's drugstore at Seventh and Hawthorne or the grocery and drugstore at Parkwood and The Plaza, to small clusters of shops such as those found at Morehead and South Boulevard or at Beatties Ford Road and Oaklawn Avenue (still called "The End" by old-timers), to full-scale shopping districts. The largest may still be seen today at Davidson and 36th streets in North Charlotte, where it served not only trolley commuters, but also workers in the surrounding mill villages who walked through it to work each day. Other large districts are found at Pegram Street and Parkwood Avenue in the Villa Heights neighborhood, and at South Boulevard and Park Avenue in Dilworth. Of all the city's streetcar shopping strips, Plaza-Midwood's is the second largest after the one in [North Charlotte](#).

Commercial development seems to have begun with Lewis Long's Grocery in 1916. The utilitarian two-story brick store building still stands at Central and Pecan, undecorated except for segmented arched window openings. The location was a logical one, for the intersection dated far back into the nineteenth century, when Pecan Avenue was a country road connecting Lawyers Road (Central Avenue) with the Providence Road which ran south to Providence Presbyterian Church. ⁶⁸ Long undoubtedly hoped to draw trade from such travelers, as well as from residents of the Elizabeth neighborhood, the Plaza area, and the factories along the railroad tracks.

Long's Grocery remained surrounded by houses for some twenty years. It was not until the 1930s, when Plaza-Midwood began to fill up with automobile commuters, that additional stores joined the grocery. Not only was Plaza-Midwood growing, but adjacent Chantilly was finally taking shape. Chantilly's straight streets south of Central Avenue had been platted as a separate subdivision by Chatham in the 1910s, but the project never got trolley connections and remained dormant for some two decades. As more houses were built throughout the area, more stores sprang up along Central Avenue. Merchants chose their location in order to be able to catch streetcar commuters as well as auto drivers and pedestrians. By the late 1930s there was a row of one-story and two-story brick stores lining the south side of Central between Pecan and Thomas, and scattered additional commercial development in adjoining blocks.

Among the new business was W. T. Harris' 1936 grocery store at 1504 Central Avenue. Harris' store prospered and in 1951 became the Harris-Teeter Supermarket, with a handsome large store two blocks away at Central and The Plaza. By the 1980s Harris-Teeter had grown into a major Southern chain, with the 1951 store still in use and affectionately known as "Old Number One." The year 1936 also saw the opening of a Pure Oil gas station at Central and Pecan that remains a neighborhood landmark. The facility was built to resemble a small Tudor Revival cottage, complete with steep-pitched roof and wood and stucco "half timbering." It was part of Pure Oil's national policy to try to fit their stations into residential neighborhoods and give this new land use added respectability. Today the Plaza-Midwood structure is Charlotte's best surviving example of the effort. Not all 1930s structures on Central Avenue were commercial. Midwood School was completed in 1936, one of a pair of schools designed for the city by local architect M. R. Marsh.⁶⁹ The facility was yet another indication that the area was finally filling up with families.



Pure Oil Gas Station

[Trolley](#) service ended in Charlotte in 1938, but the Central Avenue business district continued to grow for another fifteen years.⁷⁰ Businessmen felt it made sense to locate in an established shopping area. Among the newcomers was an early drive-in ice cream stand, the Dairy Queen at Central and Pecan. The 1951 building with rounded corners and subtle strips of decorative neon, blends Art Deco and International style architectural influences and is one of Charlotte's best surviving examples of auto-oriented design. A block up the street was another notable example of the same architectural influences. Architect M. R. Marsh's Plaza Theatre (now destroyed) dated from 1945-46, one of a number of neighborhood movie houses that appeared in the city in the 1940s.⁷¹



Dairy Queen

By the mid-1950s, the business district had reached what would be very nearly its maximum growth. In addition to the 1930s storefronts on the south side of Central from Pecan to Thomas, there were now businesses on both sides of the street all the way to The Plaza. More shops spilled down adjoining blocks of Thomas, Gordon, and Commonwealth avenues. Then, in 1956, Park Road Shopping Center opened across town and signaled the end of the old "streetcar strips."⁷² The new center had junior department stores as well as specialty shops and food stores. It was not a supplement to downtown shopping, as the streetcar strips had been, but an alternative to the center city. More importantly, the Park Road Shopping Center had plentiful automobile parking in front of the stores. Within five years eighteen new shopping centers sprang up around the city.⁷³ The old streetcar strips, designed for pedestrian traffic from their surrounding neighborhoods, seemed old-fashioned, and they languished.

There was, however, one merchant who was able to capitalize on the decline of the Plaza-Midwood business section. In 1959 the Levine family took over a failed variety store at 1509 Central Avenue.⁷⁴ Benefiting from the area's decreasing rents, and instituting a policy of stocking only items selling for less than \$3.99, the Levines were able to build a thriving business that they named the Family Dollar Store. The enterprise grew rapidly and by the mid 1980s Family Dollar was a major regional discount chain with over 650 stores throughout the South.⁷⁵ In 1958 the Central Avenue business district received its own automobile shopping center. The Cole family attempted to cash in on the new trend by building a small center on part of their factory grounds at Pecan and Central.⁷⁶ Called Central Square, it is still in operation with a supermarket, a drugstore, and half a dozen smaller shops, including a

new Family Dollar Store. The shopping center's modest success was not enough to bring vitality to the rest of the business district.

Neighborhood Organizations

By the 1960s, Charlotteans who watched the city's development were predicting the demise of areas like Plaza-Midwood. With gasoline in seemingly endless supply, the city's automobile-dependent suburbs sprawled out further and further. Already the inner suburbs, even recently-completed Plaza-Midwood, appeared unfashionable, destined to be replaced by offices, apartments, and factories. The city's first comprehensive zoning plan targeted much of the neighborhood, particularly The Plaza and the old "Oakhurst" streets, for multifamily and office redevelopment. As original owners grew old and died, speculators bought up houses with the idea of running them down as rental property, then demolishing them to build new apartments and offices.⁷⁷

Despite this trend a number of younger families were attracted by the area's solid, affordable housing and closeness to downtown. The early large residences along The Plaza ranked with the best in the city. William and Francis Gay brought attention to the area with their museum-quality restoration of the Queen Anne style R. M. Miller, Jr., house, which they named "Victoria," at 1600 The Plaza, which they began in 1970. The H. M. Victor mansion was pulled down for new apartments, but slowly the other houses on The Plaza, large and small, began to be renovated.

The influx of newcomers spurred a renewed interest in community organization. The area had had an active neighborhood group as early as the 1940s. In 1947 the Midwood Men's Club under President Richard L. Young raised over \$6,500 to purchase a tract of land for a neighborhood park.⁷⁸ Midwood Park off Mecklenburg Avenue and Norcross Place was the result of that effort. In the early 1970s a new community group was born when the city proposed to extend four-lane Matheson Avenue through the Club Acres section of the area. Affected residents formed a citizens group that succeeded in stopping the highway and keeping the neighborhood intact. Shortly afterward a permanent group was formed under the leadership of residents Mary Ann Hammond and Francis Gay.⁷⁹ It was they who finally dubbed the neighborhood Plaza-Midwood, in 1973.

The new Plaza-Midwood Neighborhood Association set about the task of convincing Charlotte's leaders, development interests, and potential homebuyers that their neighborhood was not expendable. In the mid 1970s the group convinced city council to "downzone" much of the area to residential use.⁸⁰

From 1980 to 1983 the Plaza-Midwood association received professional assistance in its efforts to attract new owner/occupants to the area and stimulate reinvestment in buildings. The Federal Home Loan Bank Board and a group of other federal lending agencies had created Neighborhood Housing Services of America, Inc. to encourage local banks in United States' cities to establish loan funds aimed at revitalizing older neighborhoods.⁸¹ The Charlotte Planning Commission chose Plaza-Midwood as the city's pilot neighborhood in this program. Plaza-Midwood Neighborhood Housing Services staff administered twenty-three low interest loans, provided technical expertise for forty-six other rehab projects, helped residents get the Thomas-Hamorton-Pecan area rezoned to reflect its use, and convinced the city to underwrite an additional \$13 million in tax-exempt financing for residential and commercial improvements.⁸²

Neighborhood Housing Services' last accomplishment was to help create a Plaza-Midwood Development Corporation. Financed largely by Central Avenue businesses, the corporation's goal is the revitalization of the commercial district. Today, thanks to the efforts of area residents, the successes of Neighborhood Housing Services, and the ongoing work of the Plaza-Midwood Neighborhood Association and the Plaza-Midwood Development Corporation, Plaza-Midwood's future appears bright.

Notes

¹ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Deed Book 195, pp. 28-29; Map Book 6, p. 581.

² Dave Howard of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Planning Commission, telephone interview with Thomas W. Hanchett, December, 1983. Francis Gay, interviews with Thomas W. Hanchett in Charlotte, December, 1982 and December, 1983. Mary Ann Hammond, telephone interview with Thomas W. Hanchett, December, 1983.

³ "Neighborhood Definition Study" (Charlotte: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission, 1979).

⁴ Charlotte's population jumped 88% between 1900 and 1910, and increased another 36% from 1910 to 1920, according to data published by the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, "1950 Census Data" (Charlotte: Chamber of Commerce, 1950), which conveniently included city-wide and ward figures back to 1850.

⁵ Earle Sumner Draper, interview with Thomas W. Hanchett at Vero Beach, Florida, June, 1982. For more on the early railroad bridges see the section of this report

entitled "The Center City."

⁶ D. R. Reynolds, ed., *Charlotte Remembers* (Charlotte: Community Publishing Co., Inc., 1972), p. 109.

⁷ Dan L. Morrill, "Edward Dilworth Latta and the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company (1890-1925): Builders of New South Charlotte," 1983, draft manuscript in the files of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, p. 24.

⁸ Minutes of the Charlotte Board of Aldermen, Book XI, p. 470.

⁹ Morrill, "Latta" manuscript, p. 24.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Joseph Schuchman, "Union County: an Architectural and Historic Inventory," 1983, draft manuscript in the files of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Survey and Planning Branch, Raleigh, NC.

¹³ *Charlotte Observer*, December 2, 1900. See also *Charlotte News*, July 18, 1919.

¹⁴ F. C. Abbott, *Fifty Years in Charlotte Real Estate, 1897-1947* (Charlotte: privately published, 1947?), pp. 16-17.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Dan L. Morrill, "[A Survey of Cotton Mills in Charlotte, North Carolina](#)" (Charlotte: Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1979).

¹⁸ Sanborn Insurance Map, 1905, on microfilm in the Carolina Room of the Charlotte Public Library. *Charlotte Observer*, December 2, 1900.

¹⁹ Sanborn Insurance Maps, 1905, 1911, 1929, on microfilm.

²⁰ D. R. Reynolds, p. 159. *Charlotte Observer*, June 8, 1975.

²¹ Sanborn Insurance Maps, 1905, 1911.

²² LeGette Blythe and Charles R. Brockman, *Hornets' Nest: the Story of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County* (Charlotte: McNally of Charlotte, 1961), p. 275. *Charlotte Observer*, July 2, 1980, November 11, 1982.

²³ Dan L. Morrill, interview with Thomas W. Hanchett at Charlotte, North Carolina, November 1981.

²⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, July 2, 1980. A pronounced slump in U.S. agriculture forced the firm out of business less than half a decade later.

²⁵ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Deed Book 195, pp. 28-29.

²⁶ Information on individual structures in Plaza-Midwood was developed by Janette Thomas Greenwood with assistance from Thomas W. Hanchett, using the Charlotte city directory collection and vertical files in the Carolina Room of the Charlotte Public Library, supplemented with water permit data on file at Charlotte Utility Department, 5100 Brookshire Boulevard. Dates are generally accurate within two years.

²⁷ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Map Book 230, p. 34.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 298.

²⁹ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Record of Corporations.

³⁰ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office, Map Book 230, p. 298.

³¹ Charlotte city directory collection in the Carolina Room of the Charlotte Public Library.

³² Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Record of Corporations book 3, p. 59; Record of Corporations book 5, p. 168. *Charlotte Observer*, August 7 and 8, 1977.

³³ For a photograph of the original clubhouse see "The Queen City of the South -- the Reason Why," a promotional brochure done for Chatham Estates about 1915, and now part of the VanLandingham papers in the archives of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

³⁴ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Record of Corporations book 3, p. 45; Record of Corporations Book 4, p. 563.

³⁵ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Map Book 230, pp. 96-97, 130.

³⁶ Reynolds, pp. 60-64.

³⁷ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Deed Book 445, p. 121.

³⁸ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Map Book 3, p. 343.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Map Book 5, p. 183.

⁴⁰ *Charlotte News*, May 26, 1938. Barnhardt died before the structure was completed.

⁴¹ The information that Peeps designed 2415 Mecklenburg Avenue comes from Boyle's son, Erwin Boyle, interview with Thomas W. Hanchett, Charlotte, North Carolina, December, 1983.

⁴² Elliot Newcombe, Jr., telephone interview with Thomas W. Hanchett, December, 1983. For more information on Carr, see Claudia P. Roberts, *Durham Architectural and Historic Interview* (Durham: City of Durham, 1982).

⁴³ Newcombe interview.

⁴⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, December 12, 1931.

⁴⁵ Information on the country clubs may be found in Embury's professional papers at the George Arents Research Library, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. The papers are unfortunately not complete, and do not contain a comprehensive job list that might allow the researcher to determine what private commissions Embury undertook in North Carolina.

⁴⁶ Mrs. John Crosland, Sr., telephone interview with Thomas W. Hanchett, December, 1983.

⁴⁷ Butler and Spratt, "Map of Charlotte Township, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, From Recent Surveys 1892." Copies are in the collections of the History Department of the Mint Museum, Charlotte, and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission.

⁴⁸ *Charlotte Observer*, August 9, 1944. This is Chatham's obituary.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Map Book 230, pp. 162-163.

⁵² Abbott, p. 18.

⁵³ Leigh Colyer, Jr., interview with Thomas W. Hanchett in Charlotte, North Carolina, June, 1982, and November, 1983.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Seline Colyer Martin and Helen Colyer Moak, interview with Thomas W. Hanchett in Charlotte, NC, November, 1983. *Charlotte Observer*, August 14, 1953. The plat map of Shelby's Belvedere suburb, elegantly hand-rendered and signed by Colyer, is on file at the Washington County Courthouse.

⁵⁵ Colyer, Jr., Moak and Martin interviews.

⁵⁶ A brochure for Chatham Estates may be found in the VanLandingham papers in the UNCC archives. A detailed two-color plan with tiny drawings of the earliest mansions, and an impressive "birds-eye" view of the neighborhood-as-planned were collected by planner John Nolen in 1917 as background for his "Civic Survey," and are now in the Nolen papers, collection #2903, Cornell University Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Ithaca, New York.

⁵⁷ *Charlotte News*, May 10, 1983. The two-story frame structure stood at 1220 Thomas Avenue-just South of The Plaza. It was part of the Ho-Toy Chinese Restaurant, until demolished in 1983.

⁵⁸ See note 56.

⁵⁹ Current owners Mr. and Mrs. George C. Cline have the original Hook and Sawyer blueprints for the house.

⁶⁰ Information for the designated historic property "Victoria," on file at the Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission office.

⁶¹ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Map Book 3, p. 91; Record of Corporations Book 7, p. 464.

⁶² Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Map Book 230, pp. 114, 284-285.

⁶³ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Map Book 230, p. 208.

⁶⁴ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Record of Corporations Book 4, p. 95.

⁶⁵ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Map Book 3, p. 168.

⁶⁶ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Map Book 5, p. 400.

⁶⁷ Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office: Map Book 6, p. 581.

⁶⁸ Butler and Spratt map.

⁶⁹ The twin of the Midwood School is Eastover Elementary School on Cherokee Road. Eastover teacher Mary Lynn Morrill and fellow staff and students have compiled a history of that building.

⁷⁰ Dan L. Morrill, "[Myers Park Streetcar Waiting Stations: Survey and Research Report](#)" (Charlotte: Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1980).

⁷¹ "The Work Of M. R. Marsh and Successor Architects," job list in the Department of Archives and Special Collections at the Atkins Library of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

⁷² *Charlotte Observer*. April 23, 1961.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *Charlotte News*, July 26, 1983. *Charlotte Observer*, July 27, 1983. The store may not have carried the name "Family Dollar" in its first years, for the name is not listed in the city directory until 1962.

⁷⁵ Ibid. and *Charlotte News*, September 16, 1983.

⁷⁶ *Charlotte Observer*, April 23, 1961.

⁷⁷ This process is extremely common in post-war American urban development. For instance see Peter Wolf, *Land in America: Its Value, Use and Control* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), p. 409. Leonard Downie, Jr., *Mortgage on America: the Real Cost of Real Estate Speculation* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), pp. 3, 7. For a description of the process at work in Charlotte, see the *Charlotte News*, April 11, 1980. Several interviewees indicated it was a major problem in Plaza-Midwood, including Dave Howard of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission, interview with Thomas W. Hanchett in Charlotte, July, 1984; Francis Gay, interview with Thomas W. Hanchett in Charlotte, July 1984; Mary Ann Hammond, telephone interview with Thomas W. Hanchett, July, 1984; Arthur Dye, Jr., interview with Thomas W. Hanchett, July, 1984.

⁷⁸ *Charlotte News*, July 26, 1947; October 2, 1947. Material pertaining to the history of the neighborhood organizations of the Plaza-Midwood area may be found in the archives of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

⁷⁹ Dave Howard of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission, telephone interview with Thomas W. Hanchett, December 1983. Francis Gay, interviews with Thomas W. Hanchett in Charlotte, NC, December, 1982, and December, 1983. Mary Ann Hammond, telephone interview with Thomas W. Hanchett, December, 1983.

⁸⁰ Hammond interview, July, 1984.

⁸¹ Howard interview, December, 1983.

⁸²"Neighborhood Housing Services of Charlotte, Inc., in Plaza-Midwood: 1983 Annual Report." NHS also sponsored a one-day Neighborhood Heritage Celebration in January of 1983 that brought together more than 200 long-time residents and provided many research leads for this report.

ELLIOT H. NEWCOMBE HOUSE

1933

2817 Belvedere Avenue



The Elliot H. Newcombe house is a large [Tudor Revival](#) dwelling set far back from the road, probably the largest residence in Plaza-Midwood. Its design was the work of George Watts Carr, Durham, North Carolina's leading architect and uncle of Newcombe's wife Mary Duke Lyon Newcombe. The house is a picturesque jumble of wings, each with a high, slate-covered hip roof. Tall chimneys rise here and there. The whitewashed brick walls have corbelled decoration under the eaves, and are pierced by small window openings, in keeping with the "Olde English" tone. A many-sided stair tower with narrow lancet windows and a tall conical roof dominates the facade. The grounds include a two-story garage in the same style.

Newcombe was stepson of C.W. Johnston, who founded the Johnston Mills and was among the region's wealthiest textile men. Newcombe's wife Mary was the grandniece of tobacco and utility tycoon James Buchanan Duke. Newcombe himself began his career as president-treasurer of Southern Specialties, a textile-supply company. He later became involved in packaging, heading the Charlotte division of Old Dominion Paper Box Company and founding the Atlantic Coast Carton Company. Newcombe also was instrumental in beginning the Charlotte Country Day School in the 1940s, and founded the Squash Hill Hunt Preserve in eastern Mecklenburg County. He lived in this house from 1933 until about 1960 when Dr. Ross McElwee, the current owner, purchased it. According to Newcombe's son Elliot Newcombe, Jr., the house remains much as it was designed, with the exception of new heating and air conditioning equipment.

JOHN CROSLAND, SR., HOUSE

1951

3021 Belvedere Avenue



John Crosland, Sr., ranked among Charlotte's most prolific and important developers, the man perhaps most responsible for the sprawling suburban development of the city since World War II. He is rivaled in importance only by Edward Dilworth Latta, who developed the city's first suburb in 1891, and by post-war competitor Charles Ervin. Crosland was born in 1898 in Richmond County, son of the second largest cotton planter in North Carolina. After education at Davidson College and North Carolina State University, Crosland came to Charlotte and worked at a number of business occupations before settling on home building in 1937. His pre-war developments of Westbrook Street in Third Ward and the subdivision of Club Colony south of Myers Park, among others, helped introduce the Ranch style house to Charlotte and put him in a good position to make the most of the post-WWII housing boom. At Crosland's death in 1977 the city was ringed with his neighborhoods, totaling 6,500 houses, including Plaza Hills (1946), Forest Park (1948), Ashley Park (1949), Clanton Park and Seneca Park (1956), Spring Valley and Jamestown Drive (1959), Beverly Woods (1960), Billingsley Park, Woodbridge and Laurel Wood (1961), Hampshire Hills and Huntingtowne Farms (1964). John Crosland, Jr., became president of the firm in 1965.

After living for a few years at a time in several houses elsewhere in Charlotte, Crosland built this fine residence facing the Charlotte Country Club in 1951, and remained here till his death. The design by draftsman J. Warren Mobley, an associate of Charlotte architect Thomas C. Rickenbaker, echoes the Country Club across the street. The main, gable-roofed block of the house is built of whitewashed brick and features a recessed portico with slender two-story ionic columns.

COLE MANUFACTURING COMPLEX

1911

1318 Central Avenue



recent photo



1946 photo

The red brick buildings of the Cole Manufacturing complex comprise the finest non-textile-related manufacturing facility remaining in Charlotte. The company was organized in January of 1900 by E.A. and E.M. Cole to produce seed planters patented by E.M. Cole. It remained in the family throughout its eight decades of operation,

becoming a nationally-recognized maker of agricultural implements. A 1980 newspaper article called Cole "one of the world's largest manufacturers of seed planting, fertilizing, and farm machine equipment." That year proved to be the company's peak, unfortunately, and it was caught by a disastrous slump in farm prices that curtailed demand for new machinery. Cole Manufacturing closed in November of 1982, and the future of its buildings is uncertain.

The first Cole plant was in a wooden structure on the north side of Central Avenue along the Seaboard railroad track. In 1911 the company moved to expanded, fireproof quarters in the present complex on the south side of Central. The handsome buildings were designed by C.C. Hook, Charlotte's first full-time architect, designer of such landmarks as the [Charlotte City Hall](#), the J.B. Duke mansion, and the first buildings of Queens College. The complex had three main buildings clustered around a rail siding: the foundry, the paint shop/wood shop, and the assembly building. Smaller structures included a power house, pattern shop, and machine shop. Separate buildings were a necessity to lessen the hazard of fire.

In 1983 the foundry and machine shop are gone, and the power plant has been greatly altered, but the rest of the buildings remain in good original condition with the exception of bricked-in windows. Hook chose a Roman motif for the complex, and drew robust brickwork that is today some of Charlotte's finest. The large buildings feature tall, round arched window openings that march down the long sides. Corbelled pilasters and corbelled parapets add to the rhythm. The smaller buildings, particularly the pattern shop, have scaled-down arches and prominent belt courses. Several recent pre-fabricated sheet metal buildings, and one low brick structure apparently dating from the 1950s, fill out the complex.

DAIRY QUEEN

1951

1431 Central Avenue



Charlotte in the late twentieth century is largely a product of the automobile. Fully two-thirds of the city's growth has come since the end of streetcar service in 1938. Yet very little remains of the city's early automobile-related architecture, because continued prosperity has allowed replacement of early structures with newer ones.

The Central Avenue Dairy Queen is one of Charlotte's best-preserved early examples of roadside architecture, although insensitive alterations have occurred in recent years. Along with a twin (which also survives) on Wilkinson Boulevard, it was built in 1951, part of the same flush of post-WWII prosperity that saw automobile-dependent suburbs surround the earlier city. The ice cream stand sits back from the street surrounded by a parking lot, clearly designed for drive-in rather than walk-up trade. Like most roadside food-service facilities of the 1950s, it provides only window service, with no seating. The building shows strong influence of the [Art Moderne style](#) in its stuccoed walls and curved cornice decorated with subtle strips of pink and green neon tubing.

PURE OIL STATION

1936

1501 Central Avenue



Some observers have called the gas station the most ubiquitous new building type of twentieth century America. The former Pure Oil station on Central Avenue illustrates an important step in the evolution of the type in Charlotte. The city's first stations, like the one still standing at 314 East Fifth Street believed built in 1911, were simple, undecorated sheds with flat-roofed porches sheltering the pumps in front. By the late 1920s, as a result of rising competition between national chains, distinctive architecture came to be used as a technique to enhance brand identification. Pure Oil was a leader in this national movement, modeling its facilities on the then-popular Tudor Revival style. The quaint half-timbered, steep-roofed stations not only provided a strong image for Pure, but also helped the facilities blend into residential neighborhoods. By the 1940s, however, this pseudo-residential approach had been abandoned in favor of the white enameled panels and flat roofs of the International Style.

The Central Avenue Pure Oil Station is Charlotte's only surviving example of a cottage-type facility, and may well be the city's best-preserved 1930s station. Today it looks much as it did when it opened in 1936, with a steep eaveless gable roof, clapboard walls, and half-timbered gable ends. There is a round-topped, cross-buck front door flanked by small-paned windows, with a bay window to one side. The canopy over the pumps echoes the main roof and half-timbering, and is supported by massive "hand-hewn" columns.

BARNHARDT-CRAMER HOUSE

1938

2733 Country Club Lane

Charles Barnhardt was among Charlotte's leading cotton brokers during the first three decades of the twentieth century. In 1937 he and mill architect J. Norman Pease teamed up to develop Country Club Lane, a new street in the Club Acres subdivision adjacent to the prestigious Charlotte Country Club. Barnhardt kept several acres of the development for his own homesite, and began work on a picturesque lake and a handsome \$50,000 mansion. Tragedy struck May 26, 1938 as he inspected the dam and concrete spillway. Barnhardt, clad in a heavy trench coat and unable to swim, slipped and drowned in twelve feet of water.

The next owner, Pietro B. Crespi, evidently finished the mansion and lived there throughout the 1940s. Crespi, like Barnhardt, was a wealthy cotton broker. About 1952 the residence was purchased by George B. Cramer, who continues to own it today. Cramer is the youngest son of textile-inventor Stuart Cramer, a major outfitter of mills throughout the Piedmont and founder of the Cramer Mills and the village of Cramerton, now part of Burlington Industries. George B. Cramer served as secretary of Cramerton Mills beginning in 1932, and remains in the textile business in 1983 as a partner in the firm Cramer and Cramer.

The Barnhardt-Cramer house was designed by Charlotte architect Martin Boyer and built by Blythe & Isenhour. The white stuccoed two-and-one-half story structure is set back from the street at the end of a winding drive. The main gable-roofed block has end chimneys in the Colonial revival mode, and the long one-story porch across the front is supported by Ionic columns. The site includes several acres of heavily wooded grounds, and the small lake.

PHILLIPS-CALDER HOUSE

c 1918

2222 Mecklenburg Avenue



Though W.R. Phillips took out a water permit for this house in 1920, city directories show him living on the street as early as 1918. William Phillips served as Charlotte manager of the Western Electric Company, probably an important position in the region's economy in the period when the Piedmont's mills were converting from steam to electric machinery. In the late 1920s Phillips and his wife Geneva sold their residence to Duncan G. Calder, an official of great importance in the electrification of the region. Calder served as treasurer of J.B. Duke's Southern Public Utilities Company, which ran Charlotte's streetcar system, and acted as treasurer or secretary for many of Duke's other utility concerns throughout the Piedmont, including the Caldwell Power Company, North Carolina Public Service Company, Surrey Power Company, and others. Calder left the house in 1951, and from then until the 1970s it was the home of cotton broker Allison J. Davant.

The Phillips-Calder House commands a high knoll above Mecklenburg Avenue, which originally was the route of the trolley from The Plaza to the Charlotte Country Club. The house is in the Rectilinear style, a hip-roofed, two-story cube with a minimum of ornament. A wood-shingled gable pokes through the front roof, and there is a shingled front bay window. A wide one-story porch with simple Doric columns ,wraps around three sides of the brick structure.

BOYLE-SANDRIDGE HOUSE

1928

2415 Mecklenburg Avenue



This delicate Colonial Revival residence was designed by prominent Charlotte architect William H. Peeps in 1927. Peeps, a native of England, created such notable Charlotte landmarks as the Latta Arcade, Iveys Department Store, and numerous Myers Park mansions. His house for A.L. Boyle is a two-story double-pile Georgian Colonial sheathed in clapboard. Three narrow dormers pierce its front roof, above a modillion cornice. The front facade is six bays wide, with twelve-over-twelve-pane windows, and a small porch. Peeps evidently considered the Boyle residence among his more important commissions for he included it in his published portfolio of designs.

Albert L. Boyle was a prominent cotton processor in Charlotte, who is said to have been forced to sell his just-completed residence during the Great Depression. The dwelling came into the possession of J.D. Sandridge, who made it his home into the 1970s. Sandridge was a key local executive with DuPont, major supplier of dyes to the Piedmont's textile factories.

BARKER-BRITTON HOUSE

c 1916

2427 Mecklenburg Avenue



The Barker-Britton House is among the oldest of those clustered around the Charlotte Country Club, having been built about 1916, probably by real estate developer E.V. Patterson. Charles E. Barker, its first owner/occupant, was regional manager for Marshall Field and Co., who sold burlap sacking to the region's cotton producers, and he served as president of the Charlotte Electric Repair Company. Barker was also active in local real estate development, a partner along with George Stephens, F.M. Laxton, and J.M. Harry in the Club Acres Company which developed these streets. In the early 1950s, Barker sold his home to William J. Britton, Jr., then assistant manager of Anderson Clayton and Company, cotton factors. Today Britton is one of Charlotte's last cotton brokers. His wife Christina has been a force in Charlotte's cultural life, serving as President of the Opera Guild of Charlotte and of the Children's Theatre Council.

The Barker-Britton house is a rustic design that combines features of the Rectilinear and Bungalow styles. In massing it consists of a simple two-story rectangular block covered by a wide-eaved gable roof that features brackets and exposed rafters under the eaves. There is a central front dormer with a similar roof. Walls are sheathed in "german" novelty siding, and the many large windows have wide, plain surrounds. A wide one-story porch with plain, square columns dominates the front of the house, extending at one side to form a port-cochere, and at the other side to form an enclosed sun-porch. The residence appears to be in excellent original condition.

CHARLOTTE COUNTRY CLUB BUILDINGS

1931

2465 Mecklenburg Drive



The Charlotte Country Club is the city's oldest, having been founded in 1910 as the Mecklenburg Country Club. It remains the most prestigious, "oriented toward old Charlotte, especially old, more conservative Charlotte," according to one member. "It is the 500 club," said another member in a 1977 interview with the *Charlotte Observer*, "If you are anything at all, you belong. It was designed for that purpose: to be select and exclusive." Over the years its members have included the Piedmont's textile leaders, as well as the financiers and real estate speculators who have shaped the region.

In December of 1931, near the depths of the Great Depression, the Club celebrated the opening of this grand new building, which replaced the farmhouse that had served as a clubhouse for the first twenty years. The building was the work of Aymar Embury II, a nationally known architect of college buildings, clubs, and country houses for the wealthy. The country club's officers may have known Embury from his several books

on suburban mansion design, or from his work elsewhere in North Carolina. Trained at Princeton, Embury's major commissions ranged from college buildings at Princeton and Hofstra, to the Maidstone Country Club in posh East Hampton, Long Island, to the New York City Building at the 1939 Worlds Fair, to numerous New York public works projects, including the Triborough Bridge and Lincoln Tunnel. Embury early made important contacts with North Carolina's textile elite, and over the years designed the Mid-Pines Country Club, Southern Pines Country Club, and Hope Valley Country Club in the state.

Embury's design for Charlotte is a good example of the revivalist eclecticism that was popular in well-to-do conservative circles in the 1920s and early 30s. In massing, the structure is an oversized example of the time-tested three-part Palladian plan. It is composed of a 100 foot long central block with a gable roof and massive paired end chimneys, flanked by a pair of gabled pavillions. A two-story portico with gigantic fluted Doric columns and a modillion cornice extends across the entire front of the main block. The end pavillions feature circular gable windows, overscaled quoins, and bay windows. A low service wing extends off the side of the north pavillion. At the rear of the building the patterns of solids and voids is reversed, with Ionic-columned porches on the pavillions flanking the plain wall of the main block. French doors in the main block open onto a series of terraces that overlook some of the 240 acres of golf links. Inside, the main block contains the 100 foot long ballroom and the grand promenade known as Peacock Alley, while the south pavillion contains a massive lounge, and the north pavillion the dining room. The basement holds a cafe, billard room, and lockers and valets for the adjoining golf course, tennis courts, and swimming pool.

When it opened, local papers fairly gushed over the building's mix of opulent styles, next to articles discussing medical care for the region's unemployed.

The building could easily be taken for a fine old dwelling built in the Virginia hills back in Andrew Jackson's time.... From the east the building looks like a white temple set among Grecian hills. All exterior, both brick and stone, are done in whitewash and has the charm of aged paint Peacock Alley... has a Grecian motif in the mural decorations that tell the story of Psyche and Venus. The panels are of imported French wallpaper that closely resembles handpainted work.... The main ballroom... is decorated in French empire and Americanized Grecian furnishings.... On the south side is the Pine Room, the walls of which are panelled in natural pine done with a natural satin finish. English furnishings bring out the red and green color note of this room. The Dining Room on the opposite end of the building has a Wedgewood china motif of blue and white A "powder room" near the main entrance is delightfully done in modernistic furnishings. Downstairs the mens' lounge has handmade early Virginia furniture.

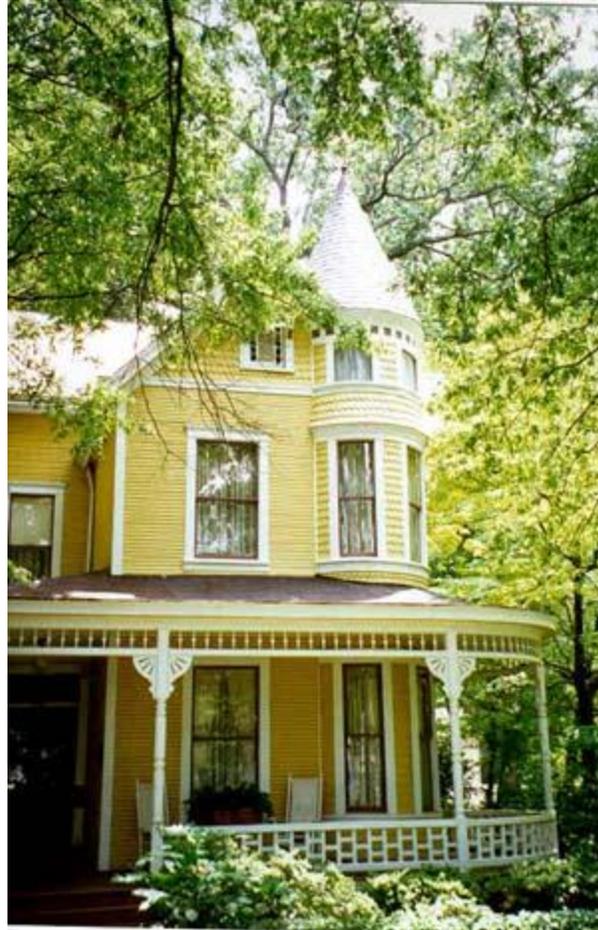
In addition to local attention, the building was featured in a long article in *Architecture* magazine, March 1935, and has appeared in numerous other publications from the *Princeton Alumni Review* to *National Geographic*. Early photos of the building taken for the Embury firm may be found in Embury's professional papers in the George Arents Research Library of Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, along with plans drawn by the same firm in 1950 for the golf shop which adjoins the original structure.

At the same time that Aymar Embury II did the Charlotte Country Club, he also drew plans for the residence of at least one of its members. Embury is said to have designed the William States Lee, Jr., house at 2001 Eastway Drive on the corner of Kilborne Lane. Lee was a top official at Duke Power, son of William States Lee, Sr., the renowned engineer who helped create the company.

"VICTORIA," THE R.M. MILLER, JR., HOUSE

1891

1600 The Plaza



The R. M. Miller, Jr., house which now stands at 1600 The Plaza, is Charlotte's best-preserved example of Queen Anne Victorian architecture. It was originally built in 1891 on posh North Tryon Street near the corner of Seventh Street, one of a pair of identical houses constructed for the sons of R.M. Miller. Miller was an important textile man, and associate of New South leader Daniel A. Tompkins, and his son R.M. Miller, Jr., became a successful trader in groceries, grains, tobacco, and cotton. He became so prosperous, in fact, that in 1915 he paid to have the old house moved to this site so that he could build an up-to-date Colonial Revival mansion for himself on the downtown lot (demolished).

Since 1970 the house has undergone a museum - quality restoration at the hands of new owners Francis and William Gay. It is a good example of the Queen Anne style popular in the late nineteenth century, with a complex slate-covered roof, a wood-shingled corner turret, ornate gable and cornice "gingerbread," and a wrap-around porch with turned columns, carved brackets, and a spindle-frieze. The interior is, if anything, more elaborate than the exterior. The wood-paneled entrance hall opens

onto front and back parlors, which flow together through the use of large sliding doors. Exuberant columned mantels are to be found not only in the main downstairs rooms, but even in the master bedroom on the second floor. Original spindle-work screens remain in place. Of special note are the picture-tiles found around the fireplaces and in the balusters of the grand stair. "Victoria" is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

THE VANLANDINGHAM ESTATE

1914

2010 The Plaza



The [Ralph VanLandingham residence](#) is an excellently preserved example of an early twentieth century suburban estate. The two-story house is a noteworthy local specimen of the Bungalow style expanded to massive proportions. Walls are sheathed in rustic wood shingles, chimneys and porch columns are built up of rounded granite boulders, and rafter ends are left exposed in the wide eaves to produce a rustic effect. The dwelling is set in approximately three-and-one-half acres of carefully landscaped

grounds originally designed by Leigh Colyer, one of the region's earliest landscape architects.

Ralph VanLandingham was a cotton broker, one of the most prestigious and lucrative occupations in Charlotte during the textile boom of the first years of the twentieth century. He also served as treasurer of the elite Charlotte Country Club for many years, and was among the first men to make his home in nearby Chatham Estates. His wife Susie Harwood VanLandingham was an important figure in her own right. She headed an Atlanta, Georgia, hotel firm and chaired the boards of such institutions as [St. Peter's Hospital](#) in Charlotte, and the North Carolina Board of Approved Schools. One of the couple's children, Susie Deane VanLandingham, achieved national prominence as a pioneer sportswoman in golf. The family is of special value to social historians because all household records and business papers are now in the collection of the Atkins Library at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The VanLandingham Estate is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

BISHOP J. C. KILGO HOUSE

2100 The Plaza



This house was built in the fall and winter of 1914-1915 for Bishop J.C. Kilgo. It was designed by Charlotte architect Louis Asbury, Jr., an M.I.T. trained designer responsible for Mecklenburg's County Court House among many other major Charlotte buildings. The builder was J.A. Jones, the city's leading construction company, and the estimated cost was \$10,090, quite a large sum in the days when a comfortable middle class house could be built for \$2,000- \$3,000. The J.C. Kilgo House was among the first on The Plaza.

John Carlisle Kilgo, a native of South Carolinas was a Methodist minister who served as president of Trinity College, later Duke University, from 1894 to 1910. He was president emeritus of the institution from 1910 to 1917. Kilgo had a wide reputation as a progressive college leader. During his tenure as president, the size of the student body doubled and the faculty tripled in number. Kilgo initiated the building of the first women's dormitory on campus, which forged the way for a coordinate college for women. He encouraged his students to overcome sectionalism, which plagued the South in the late nineteenth century. In addition, the first speech ever made by Booker T. Washington in a white institution in the South was made at Trinity College upon Kilgo's invitation.

Kilgo left Durham in 1915 and moved to his new home in Charlotte. According to his daughter-in-law, Mrs. J.C. Kilgo. Jr., he moved for two main reasons. First, Charlotte was centrally located in the Methodist conference, and he could better execute his bishop's duties from the city. Secondly, Kilgo served on the board of the Southern Railway and needed to travel to New York regularly on business, which he could do more easily from Charlotte.

Bishop Kilgo died at his home on August 11, 1922, at the age of sixty-one. His widow, Fannie Turner Kilgo, lived in the home until her death on February 22, 1946. The residence remained in the Kilgo family until 1951 when heirs of the estate sold it to Frank and Genevieve Causley. The Causleys sold it in turn to Erleen B. Sanders in 1956. In 1959 she sold the house to Lucille Bedsol who used it as a boarding house into the 1980s. Kilgo United Methodist Church, a few blocks away, was organized in 1943 and named in honor of Bishop J.C. Kilgo.

Louis Asbury's design for Bishop Kilgo was an imposing two-story frame residence. Its rectangular, hip-roofed form and elegantly plain trim mark it as an example of what some architectural historians now call the Rectilinear style. The Rectilinear mode was developed at the turn of the century as a rebellion against the over-elaborate ornamentation of the earlier Victorian Queen Anne style. Kilgo's choice of this modern, no-nonsense style for his house fits well with what we know of his personality from his path-breaking work as Trinity College president.

