

Survey and Research Report

McCausland Building-Thacker's Restaurant

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission
2007



1. **Name and Location of the Property:** The property known as the McCausland Building-Thacker's Restaurant is located at 221 South Tryon Street, Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.
2. **Name, Address, Telephone Number of the Present Owner:**
TGB Condominium Association
221 South Tryon Street
Charlotte, NC
704-804-0647
3. **Representative Photographs of the Property:** This report contains representative photographs of the property. [McCausland Building Photos](#)
4. **Maps Depicting Location of the Property:** This report contains maps that depict the location of the property.

5. **Current Deed Book References to the Property:** The most recent reference to Tax Parcel Numbers 12501313-12501316 is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 19595, page 634, and Book 19674, page 1.

6. **Brief Architectural Description of the Property:** This report contains a brief architectural description prepared by Mattson, Alexander, and Associates, Inc.

7. **Brief Historical Description of the Property:** This report contains a brief historical description prepared by Mattson, Alexander, and Associates, Inc.

8. **Documentation of Why and in What Ways the Property Meets Criteria for Designation Set Forth in NCGS 160A-400.5.**

a. special significance in terms of history, architecture, and cultural importance. The Commission judges that the property known as the McCausland Building-Thacker's Restaurant does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) erected in 1899 and remodeled in 1936, this three-story building is one of the rare surviving, small-scale commercial buildings in downtown Charlotte; 2) the building retains key architectural elements from the original, 1899 construction and the major, historic 1936 renovation; the present stuccoed, classical façade neatly illustrates the architectural tastes of the 1930s.

b. integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association. The Commission contends that the architectural description by Richard L. Mattson and Frances P. Alexander included in this report demonstrates that the McCausland Building-Thacker's Restaurant property meets this criterion.

9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal. The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the properties which become designated historic landmarks. The current appraised value of the improvements to Tax Parcel Numbers 12501313-12501316 is -----. The current appraised value of the land associated with Tax Parcel Numbers 12501313-12501316 is -----. The total appraised value is -----.



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Date of Preparation of this Report.

28 November 2007

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Statement of Significance

The three-story McCausland Building-Thacker's Restaurant at 221 South Tryon Street has local historical significance as an unusually rare, small-scale, late-nineteenth-century commercial building in downtown Charlotte. Erected in 1899 for stove merchants and tinsmiths, J. N. and A. E. McCausland, and remodeled as Thacker's Restaurant in 1936, the three-story building typifies the scale of the city's commercial construction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Charlotte grew as a textile and distribution center in this period, two-and three-story commercial structures with narrow facades were squeezed together in the center city. High-rise buildings were the exception. By the 1920s, however, skyscrapers began to transform the skyline, especially along South Tryon Street, the city's financial corridor. Tall office towers and adjacent space-consuming parking lots steadily replaced the low-rise storefronts. Today, only a handful of these small buildings remain, all threatened by skyrocketing property values and zoning policies that encourage high-rise construction. The McCausland Building thus stands out as an extremely rare, tangible reminder of the center city as it appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Although the building has undergone a series of remodelings, significant elements still exist from the original 1899 facade and the major 1936 renovation. The arched windows with classical motifs on the third story date to 1899, and the rectangular windows on the second story retain their original shape. The stucco facade with classical trim dates to the 1936 remodeling when Thacker's Restaurant bought the building.

With exception of the McCausland Building-Thacker's Restaurant and the adjacent facade at 217 South Tryon, few intact examples of early, small-scale commercial construction remain in downtown Charlotte. Among the other rare survivors are several locally designated historic landmarks: the 1924-1926 Gateway and Century Building (402-412 West Trade, Local Landmark 1990); the 1921-1922 Mecklenburg Investment Company Building (233 South Brevard, Local Landmark 1981); and the 1921 Oscar J. Theis Automobile Sales and Service Building (500 North Tryon, Local Landmark 1992).

However, other low-rise, downtown local landmarks have been destroyed in recent decades, including the 1909 Garibaldi and Bruns Building (104-105 South Tryon, Local Landmark 1985), which had incorporated elements of the three-story, antebellum commercial block, "Granite Row" (also now gone); and the 1871-1872 Merchants and Farmers National Bank (123 East Trade, Local Landmark 1983). In 2004, the north side of the 400 block of East Trade was razed during the construction of the Charlotte Bobcats Basketball Arena. This historic collection of adjoining two- and three-story retail buildings had neatly illustrated Charlotte's downtown streets of the early twentieth century.

Historical Background

The McCausland Building-Thacker's Restaurant was constructed in 1899 and remodeled several times on the occasion of new ownership. The one principal exterior renovation occurred in 1936. Three stories tall and thirty feet wide, the building first appears in the 1900 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Charlotte. The original owners were J. N. and A. E. McCausland, tinsmiths and stove merchants. The McCauslands manufactured and sold stoves as well as mantels, grates, and other "kitchen furnishings." The office of physician, Dr. E. R. Russell, was located upstairs. The rear of the building contained a two-story tin shop. A ca. 1905 photograph of the 200 block of South Tryon shows the building's original façade in the foreground. Surrounded by buildings of similar scale and Victorian-era designs, it displayed a flamboyant, brick and stone façade with a shaped and corbelled parapet and a broad archway framing a balcony with a balustrade on the second story. The shopfront had rusticated stone pilasters and large, recessed multiple-paned windows. The windows across the third story displayed arched, corbelled lintels with classical swags and decorative fanlights that remain today. Some of this ornamentation, notably the decorative parapet, may have been pressed metalwork manufactured by the McCauslands to promote their tinsmithing business (Sanborn Insurance Map, Charlotte, 1900; Charlotte City Directory 1900; Schick 2006: 38).

McCausland and Company operated here until 1936, when the building was purchased by the officers of Thacker's Restaurant, a popular Charlotte eatery. A building permit issued in September 1936 records that Thacker's remodeled the building for use as a restaurant. R. C. Hill of Charlotte was the contractor. Hill's office was in the Piedmont Fire Insurance Company Building, located across the street from 221 South Tryon. The architect is unknown. The 1936 remodeling of the exterior created the cleaner, classical design that largely remains today. The owners affixed a large vertical, neon sign to the façade that announced, "Thacker's, A Good Place to Eat" (City of Charlotte Building Permit, 16 September 1936; Special Collections, University of North Carolina, Charlotte).

Thacker's Restaurant closed in 1963. Home Federal Savings and Loan occupied 221 South Tryon for a short time before moving into a new building one block north. Interstate Securities then acquired the property and remained there for fifteen years. In 1981, the law firm of Cannon, Kline, and Blair purchased 221 South Tryon for its offices. The architectural firm of Clark, Tribble, Harris and Li was commissioned to direct an extensive renovation that focused on the inside. On the outside, the principal changes took place on the ground floor. Expansive ground floor windows were installed to replace the earlier windows and transom, and a central classical doorway with a broken pediment was probably also added. The basic 1982 ground-floor fenestration and doorway survives to the present, though the pediment has been removed. Today, the first floor of the building serves as a men's grooming business, while the two upper floors are being converted to upscale condominiums (Van Hecke 1982; Smith 1982; Tribble 2007).

Sited two blocks south of the intersection of Trade and Tryon street--downtown's epicenter known as the Square--the McCausland Building arose amidst years of expansion within the central business district. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Charlotte and Mecklenburg County became the hub of the southern textile industry. By the 1920s, the Piedmont of North and South Carolina had surpassed New England as the leading textile producer in the world. With the proliferation of cotton mills and scores of supporting industries, the population of Charlotte soared from just 7,000 in 1880, to over 82,000 in 1929, becoming the largest city in the two Carolinas. The robust industrial economy and urban prosperity engendered a strong commercial and financial base that served large areas of the Piedmont as well as local consumers. As the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce boasted in a 1928 advertisement, Charlotte had emerged as a regional commercial center with a 150-mile trading radius and more than 4,500,000 consumers (Lefler and Newsome 1954: 474-489; Morrill 1979; Hanchett 1998: 184-188, 190-200).

The Sanborn Insurance Company maps and documentary images of Charlotte reveal the transformation of the center city. Charlotte around 1900 boasted a growing downtown, with contiguous rows of low-scale masonry structures dominating the principal streets near the Square. Within three blocks of the Square stood three- and four-story commercial buildings that included the standard urban assortment of banks, drygoods stores, furniture, and clothing establishments, jewelers, tailors, druggists, and hotels. Offices and apartments occupied upper stories. The city's three leading department stores, Belk's, Ivey's, and Efird's, opened in the years before and after 1900, and major banks—institutions that would later make Charlotte a national financial center—were in place near the Square by 1910. In 1909, the ten-story Independence Building (originally Realty Building) was completed as the Carolinas' first steel-frame skyscraper on the northwest corner of the Square (Sanborn Insurance Map, Charlotte, 1900, 1911; Morrill 1977; Hanchett 1998: 186-187, 196; Sumner 2006: x, 4, 16, 24-25; Kratt and Barringer 2000: 14, 15, 18; Schick 2006: 11, 13).

The more utilitarian 200 block of South Tryon contained a variety of retailing and industrial land uses in the early twentieth century. It included not only the McCausland Building but also the Piedmont Clothing Company (a pants factory), a steam laundry, a manufacturer of cotton looms, and furniture and plumbing supply warehouses. Commercial real estate near the Square was climbing in value, and the block's storefronts were narrow (typically twenty and thirty feet wide) and often reserved for retail uses. Several space-consuming warehouses and factories were relegated to the less pricey rear alleys, reflecting a downtown trend. "Back Lots Becoming Warehouse and Factory Sites," reported the *Charlotte Observer* in 1899. "The ground in the rear of business blocks is beginning to be utilized. . . Charlotte is learning to economize space as her larger and more populous sisters do." (*Charlotte Observer* 28 July 1899; Sanborn Insurance Map, Charlotte, 1900, 1911; Morrill 1977; Hanchett 1998: 186-187).

In the 1910s, the city stripped downtown of its street trees and lined Tryon Street with electric lights to imitate Broadway in New York City. Zealous civic leaders declared Tryon the new "Great White Way." The center city witnessed the construction of several larger commercial blocks for new hotels, banks, and department stores. However, three- and four-story buildings still marked the key streets. The rise of hotels, including the six-story Selwyn Hotel on West Trade, reflected Charlotte's role as a regional industrial and distribution center that attracted growing numbers of salesmen in the early twentieth century. By 1911, a two-story tin shop was added to the rear of the McCausland Building, and the 200 block of South Tryon remained a mix of industrial and retail uses through the 1910s. However, other streets near the Square that had been residential in the early 1900s were transformed into commercial areas in this decade (Sanborn Insurance Map, Charlotte, 1911).

During the 1920s, the city continued to grow as an industrial and distribution hub, and downtown expanded dramatically. In 1927, a Charlotte Chamber of Commerce publication noted that the amount of money invested in new buildings more than tripled between 1920 and 1926. The city became a motion picture distributing point in this decade, and Film Row was built along Church Street. Ivey's, Efird's, and Belk's department stores all constructed large new stores or expanded existing ones. Most significantly, stylish Neoclassical skyscrapers arose as symbols of urbanity and progress, replacing smaller buildings near the Square, and especially along South Tryon Street. South Tryon emerged as the city's financial district, and the rows of modern office towers reflected Charlotte's role as a burgeoning banking center. Boosters nicknamed South Tryon the "Wall Street of Charlotte." Among the skyscrapers that transformed the avenue's skyline in the 1920s were the ten-story Hotel Charlotte, sixteen-story Johnston Building, twenty-story First National Bank, and ten-story Wilder Building (Sanborn Insurance Map, Charlotte, 1929; Morrill 2004: 6-12; Hanchett 1998: 196-200).

Along the 200 block of South Tryon, a canyon of office towers gradually replaced the small storefronts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A notable exception to this trend was the property at 217 South Tryon Street, immediately north of the McCausland Building. A two-story building housing

Charlotte Steam Laundry occupied the lot in 1900. By 1929, a new three-story structure stood on this parcel, separated from the McCausland Building by a one-story, ten-foot-wide office (219 South Tryon). The three-story building contained Maxwell Brothers Furniture Store, and the small office housed a real estate business. In 1940, shortly after Thacker's Restaurant renovated the McCausland Building, the property at 217 South Tryon was expanded and remodeled as a Maxwell Brothers and Morris Furniture. The adjacent office at 219 South Tryon was razed to make way for the expanded building, which shared the north wall of Thacker's. In fact, the upper floor of Thacker's was used by the furniture store for storage. In recent years, the philanthropic Foundation for the Carolinas has occupied 217 South Tryon. Although the building's entrance and windows have been updated, much of the ca. 1940 façade survives. It is a Modernistic design that echoes 221 South Tryon in its smooth, stuccoed exterior and clean lines (Sanborn Insurance Map, Charlotte, 1900, 1929.; Charlotte City Directories 1929-1941).

The post-world War II prosperity of the 1950s and early 1960s led to a period of vigorous high-rise construction in the center city. Such modernist towers as the Jefferson Standard Building (1953), Wachovia Bank and Trust Company (1957), North Carolina National Bank Building (1961), and the Cutter Building (1961) appeared along West Trade and South Tryon streets. In contrast to the 1920s, sprawling commercial suburban expansion also began to draw retail activities from the center city to new, auto-oriented shopping centers. In turn, the low-rise commercial buildings that once filled downtown were lost not only to skyscrapers but also to large-scale civic projects and parking lots (Morrill 2004: 12-20).

This pattern has persisted, spurred on by soaring property values and zoning policies that encourage large construction campaigns. With exception of the McCausland Building-Thacker's Restaurant and the adjacent facade at 217 South Tryon, few intact examples of early, small-scale commercial construction remain in downtown Charlotte. Among the other rare survivors are several locally designated historic landmarks: the 1924-1926 Gateway and Century Building (402-412 West Trade, Local Landmark 1990); the 1921-1922 Mecklenburg Investment Company Building (233 South Brevard, Local Landmark 1981); and the 1921 Oscar J. Theis Automobile Sales and Service Building (500 North Tryon, Local Landmark 1992).

However, other low-rise, downtown local landmarks have been destroyed in recent decades, including the 1909 Garibaldi and Bruns Building (104-105 South Tryon, Local Landmark 1985), which had incorporated elements of the three-story, antebellum commercial block, "Granite Row" (also now gone); and the 1871-1872 Merchants and Farmers National Bank (123 East Trade, Local Landmark 1983). In 2004, the north side of the 400 block of East Trade was razed during the construction of the Charlotte Bobcats Basketball Arena. This historic collection of adjoining two- and three-story retail buildings had neatly illustrated Charlotte's downtown streets of the early twentieth century. The buildings originally contained a drugstore, grocery, creamery, photography studio, carpet cleaner, vulcanizer, and piano and organ dealership. Small hotels and offices filled the second and third floors. As with the façade at 221 South Tryon Street, their narrow brick exteriors were designed to attract passersby, and displayed an array of decorative pressed-metal cornices and fancy corbelled brickwork (Sanborn Insurance Map, Charlotte, 1911; Maschal 2001; Morrill 2003).



Physical Description

Three stories tall and thirty feet wide, the McCausland Building-Thacker's Restaurant at 221 South Tryon Street was constructed about 1899. It has been remodeled several times, including one major exterior renovation in 1936. A ca. 1905 photograph of the 200 block of South Tryon Street, as well as a documentary engraving, show the original façade. It was an ornate, Victorian-era façade of brick, stone, and pressed metal elements. The façade featured a shaped and corbelled parapet and a broad archway framing a balcony with a balustrade on the second story. The shopfront had rusticated stone pilasters and large multiple-paned windows. The four windows across the third story displayed arched, corbelled lintels with classical swags and decorative fanlights that remain today. Some of the façade ornamentation may have been pressed metalwork made by the McCauslands and displayed on the façade to promote their handiwork. The 1900 Sanborn Insurance Map records a two-story tin shop extending from the rear of the main building. This addition was enlarged or reconstructed by 1911, though it remained two stories (Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Charlotte, 1900, 1911; Van Hecke 1982; Schick 2006: 38).

Thacker's Restaurant, a local eatery, purchased the building in 1936. A permit issued in September of that year records that Thacker's remodeled the building for use as a restaurant. R. C. Hill of Charlotte was the contractor, but the architect is not known. The 1936 remodeling of the exterior created the cleaner, classical design that largely remains today. A simple, straight parapet replaced the flamboyant, shaped one, the brick facade was covered in smooth stucco, and the entry level renovated with larger single-pane windows capped by a transom. These shopfront windows were enframed by a delicately molded Neo-Classical surround with dentils, rope molding, and stylized urns at the upper corners. On the second and third levels, the window shapes remained unchanged, though eight-over-eight window sash topped by four-light transoms may have been installed at that time (City of Charlotte Building Permit, 16 September 1936).

Thacker's closed in 1963. Soon thereafter, Interstate Securities acquired the property and remained there for fifteen years. Perhaps about 1963, new eight-over-eight window sash were installed in the upper-story stories, modifying slightly the earlier eight-over-eight sash.

In 1981, the law firm of Cannon, Kline, and Blair purchased 221 South Tryon for its offices. The architectural firm of Clark, Tribble, Harris and Li was commissioned to direct an extensive renovation that focused on the interior. Rooms were rearranged and modernized, and three skylights were installed that brought light into the interior. On the outside, the principal changes took place on the ground floor. Expansive ground floor windows were installed to replace the earlier windows and transom, and a central classical doorway with a broken pediment was probably also added at this time. The present simple masonry parapet with recessed panels was subsequently installed above the original rooflines of both 221 and 217 S. Tryon, unifying these two buildings that remain otherwise distinct. The basic 1982 ground-floor fenestration and doorway survives to the present, though the pediment has been removed. Today, the first floor of the building serves as a personal grooming salon for men, while the two upper floors are being converted to upscale condominiums (Smith 1982; Van Hecke 1982).

Although the interior has been extensively modernized, it retains original brick side walls, wooden floors on the second and third levels, ceiling beams, and evidence of original window openings along the north wall in the upper stories. The rear elevation is a mix of original brick and modern masonry, and includes evidence of several original segmental-arched windows (now bricked in). Thus, much of the original building--not just the façade--remains.



Conclusion

In conclusion, the McCausland Building-Thacker's Restaurant survives as an unusually rare, small-scale, nineteenth-century commercial building in downtown Charlotte. Although it has undergone a series of remodelings, significant exterior elements still exist from the original 1899 building and the major 1936 renovation. The arched windows with classical motifs on third story date to 1899. The rectangular windows on second story have the original eight-over-eight sash configuration, though the wood sash themselves probably date to the early 1960s. The existing stucco façade, with classical trim around the

ground-floor windows (including urns and delicate rope molding), dates to the 1936 remodeling when Thacker's Restaurant bought the building.

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