

## BELK FACADE



*This report was written on April 3, 1985*

**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Belk Facade is located in the 100 block of East Trade Street, Charlotte, North Carolina.

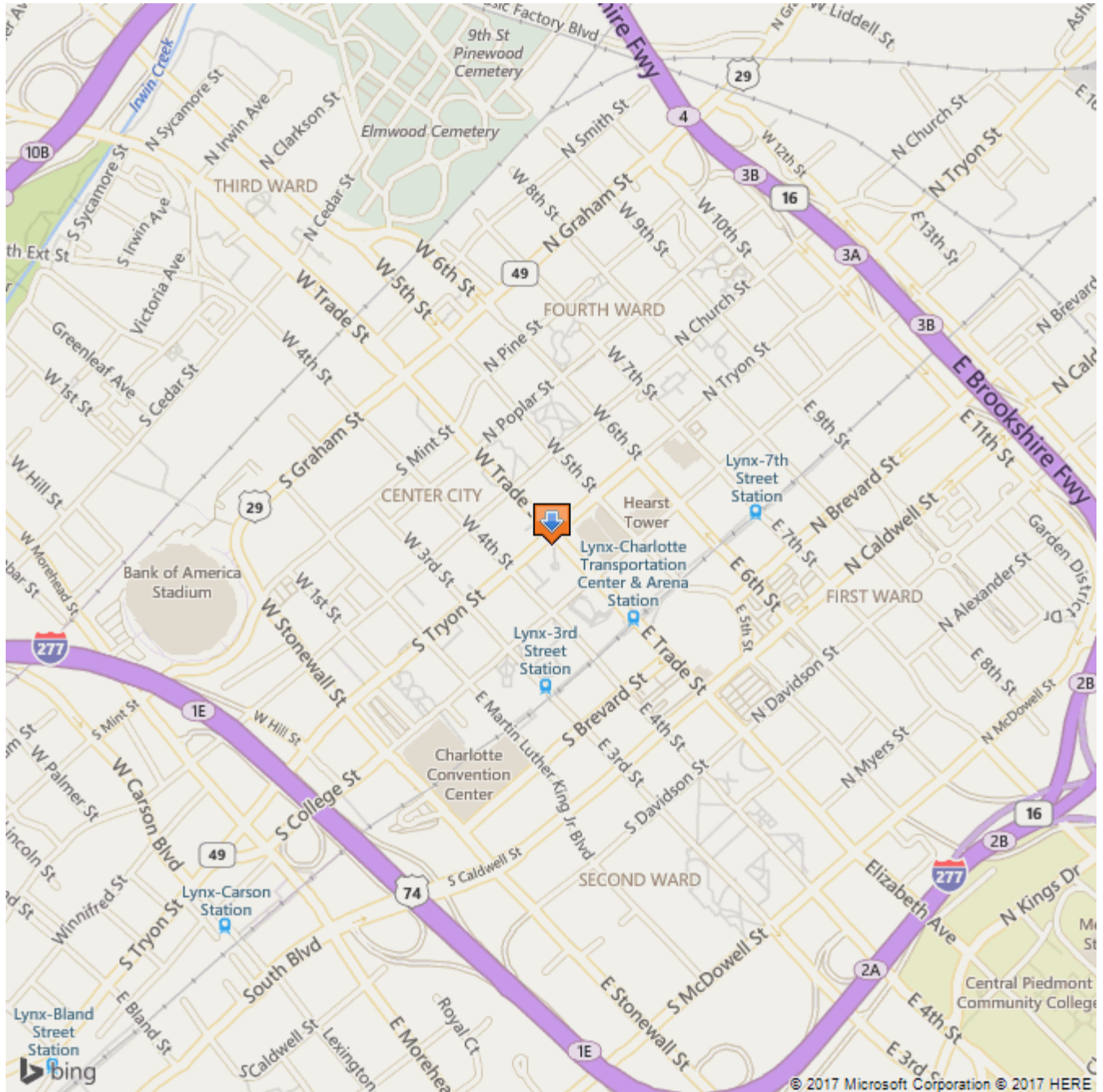
**2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property:**

Belk Bros. Company  
Box 31788  
Charlotte, N.C. 28231

Telephone: 704/372-8900

**3. Representative photographs of the property:** This report contains representative photographs of the property.

**4. A map depicting the location of the property:** This report contains a map which depicts the location of the property.



**5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property:** The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Deed Book 1179, Page 556. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 080-012-16.

**6. A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. William H. Huffman, Ph.D.

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural description prepared by Ms. Caroline Mesrobian.

**8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria set forth in N. C G.S. 160A-399.4:**

**a. Special significance in terms of its history architecture and/or cultural importance:** The Commission judges that the property known as the Belk Facade does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Belk Facade, erected in 1908 and enlarged in 1926-27, is a compelling manifestation of the growth and development of the Belk Department Store in Charlotte, N.C.; 2) the original owner of the facade, William Henry Belk (1862-1952), was a businessman and civic leader of enormous importance in Charlotte and its environs; 3) the architects of the facade, Wheeler and Stern in 1908, and, more especially, C.C. Hook in 1926-27, were architects of local and regional prominence; and 4) the Belk Facade is one of the finest turn-of-the-century commercial facades which survives in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

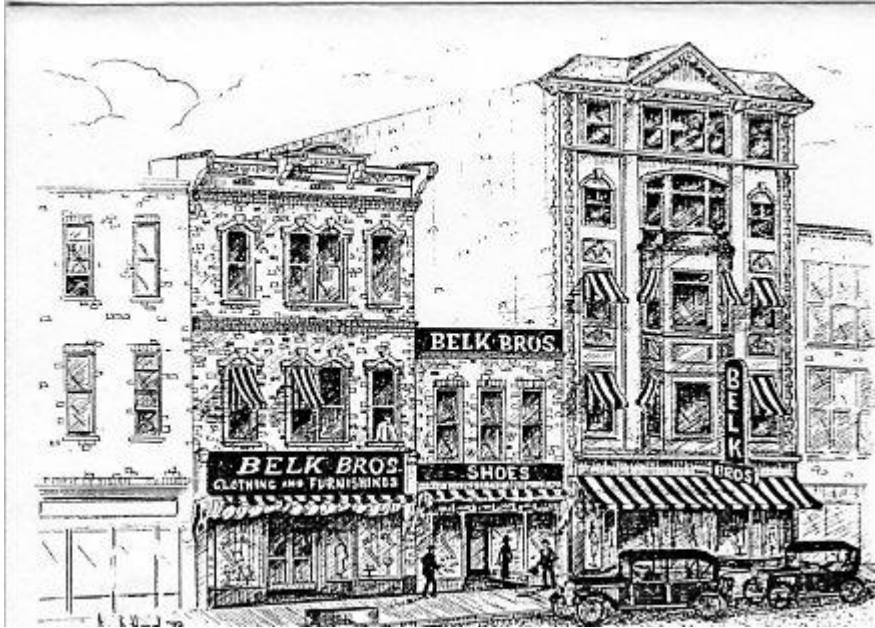
**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association:** The Commission contends that the attached architectural description by Ms. Caroline Mesrobian demonstrates that the Belk Facade meets this criterion. It should be noted that a major renovation to the first floor of the facade has occurred since the preparation of Ms. Mesrobian's architectural description. However, the Commission contends that these alterations have not affected the early and original features of the facade. Photographs taken before and after the renovation are attached to this report.

**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 property which becomes "historic property." It should be noted that the Belk Facade comprises a small portion of the overall parcel. The current appraised value of the 1.882 acres of land is \$1,954,520. The current appraised value of the improvements is \$1,683,520. The total current appraised value is \$3,638,040. The property is zoned B3.

**Date of Preparation of this Report:** April 3, 1985

**Prepared by:** Dr. Dan L. Morrill  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission  
1225 S. Caldwell St.  
Charlotte, N.C. 28203

Telephone: 704/376-9115



### *Historical Overview*

*Dr. William H. Huffman  
November, 1983*

The wonderfully ornate facade on the Belk Department Store on East Trade Street, just off the square in central Charlotte, was constructed in its present form in 1926-7, but it was an enlargement of an original facade built in 1908. Not only is the facade one of the finest in the city from an aesthetic point of view, it is also a representation of one of the region's most successful business enterprises.

The long and prosperous growth of the Belk Stores began when [William Henry Belk](#) (1862-1952), with \$750 saved from twelve years with the B. D. Heath store in Monroe, opened his own dry goods business in that city in 1888. Three years later he convinced his brothers Dr. John M. Belk, (1864-1928) to give up his medical practice and join him in the enterprise. Both were born on the family farm in Lancaster Co., S. C., had lost their father from pillaging troops of Sherman's Army, and had moved to Monroe in 1873 with the family. The Belk Brothers' successful formula of selling clearly marked, quality merchandise at reasonable prices, for cash only, treating all customers with respect irrespective of their financial status, and a no-questions-asked return policy, prompted them to move to Charlotte, where they opened up a store in rented premises just to the west of the present site on September 25, 1895. <sup>1</sup>

By 1900, Belk Brothers occupied four one-story storefronts along the first block of East Trade Street. Descending from Tryon Street, a shopper of the time would pass alongside the corner drug store to the [Charlotte National Bank](#); then, in order, Belk's Millinery Department, Clothes Department, Dry Goods Department and Shoe Department; followed by a building housing a cobbler, meat market and barbershop. Next came the three-story Weddington Hardware Co. (later Smith-Wadsworth), with four other stores completing the block to College Street. <sup>2</sup> Five



years later, in 1905, the growth of the business made possible the purchase of the building on the west side of the hardware store, which was to be used for further expansion.<sup>3</sup> To make the desired changes and add an appropriate facade to the new store, the architectural firm of Wheeler and Stern, of Charlotte and New York, was retained.<sup>4</sup>

Oliver Duke Wheeler, who was in partnership with various others in Charlotte and other cities in the first two decades of this century, counted among his designs the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Salisbury, the Sanatorium at Tranquil Park in Charlotte, a six-story bank in Monroe, the Dilworth school addition and a number of residences in the city. At present, nothing else is known of Eugene J. Stern, the other partner.<sup>5</sup> Their plans for the new store were completed about 1908, twenty years after W. H. Belk first started the concern.

On October 6, 1910, the new three-story store, with its impressive front, first opened its doors to customers at an informal reception combined with the annual fall opening of the latest millinery fashions. Live music was provided by Richardson's Orchestra for the gala occasion, which was held from eight to eleven in the evening. While retaining the other store fronts on East Trade with such merchandise as shoes and men's clothing, Belk's new addition contained dry goods, notions, and the like on the first floor, millinery on the second floor, and the rug department on the third.<sup>6</sup> The opening of the building with its handsome facade not only marked the fifteenth anniversary of the brothers' mercantile business in Charlotte, but was also a decorative reminder of how well the concern had done since its move from Monroe.

Indeed, the judgment that Charlotte was an up-and-coming city which would well support their business was a sound one, for the city's progressive growth as the center of the region's textile manufacturing since the 1800s continued unabated until the early 1930s. In fact, the steady rise in business experienced by the Belks in their first fifteen years was quickly overtaken by the even more rapid pace of the local economy in the Teens and Twenties. Thus in 1925, they bought the property adjoining their 1910 store, the location of the former three-story Smith-Wadsworth Hardware Co., which had been destroyed by fire, and laid plans for a major expansion of their facilities.<sup>7</sup>

To make the preliminary sketches for their new facility, local architect Willard G. Rogers (1863-1947) was first engaged, but his former partner, [C. C. Hook](#) was given the commission for the final work.<sup>8</sup> Charles Christian Hook (1869-1938) was for many years; one of Charlotte's leading architects. Born in Wheeling, W. Va., Hook came to Charlotte in 1890 after graduation from Washington University at the invitation of Dr. Alexander Graham, the head of the city's schools, to teach in the system.

In 1893 he began the private practice of architecture. For five years, from 1902 to 1907, Hook was in partnership with Frank Sawyer, and from 1912 to 1916 practiced with Willard G. Rogers. Hook's son, W. W. Hook, joined in his father's practice in 1924 and remained with him until the elder's death from an accidental fall from a twelfth floor restroom window of the Commercial National Bank Building to the roof of the American Trust Company in 1938. Many important designs throughout the city and state came from Hook's office. He began his career by executing a number of commissions in the new [streetcar](#) suburb of [Dilworth](#) for the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company, or the 4C's, and later designed the old [Charlotte City Hall](#), the [Charlotte](#)

[Women's Club](#), and the [James B. Duke mansion](#) on Hermitage Road in the city. Book was also responsible for the west wing of the state capital in Raleigh, the Richmond County Courthouse, Phillips Hall in Chapel Hill and the State Hospital in Morganton, among many others.<sup>9</sup>

Belk's "Grand New Building", as their advertising termed it, combined the old hardware property with their three-story building to double its width, and made the entire structure five stories high, thus enabling the store to house all of its departments under one roof. By doing so, the largest department store in the Carolinas was created.<sup>10</sup> In March, 1926, J. A. Jones Construction Company took out a building permit to begin the job, which was estimated to cost \$250,000, and nearly fourteen months later, it was completed.<sup>11</sup> On Tuesday evening, May 3, 1927, from 7:30 to 10:30, an informal opening of the new store, complete with music and souvenirs, was announced:

We want you to participate in and enjoy the pleasure we have in "OPENING TO THE CAROLINAS" the very last word in Department Store Erection and Equipment - standing as A CROWNING MONUMENT to 35 years of FAITHFUL SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, the building and its grand facade were a testimonial to the success achieved by the Belk brothers in their business venture. Not only was the structure the largest department store building in the Carolinas, it was also the flagship for 42 other stores in the two states which the Belks' had opened in the intervening years.<sup>13</sup>

Since the grand opening of the new store building in 1927, Belk's has continued to expand in that location by acquiring the Efir's department store on Tryon Street and extending the building out to both Fifth and College Streets. In the 1950's and 60's the Trade Street facade underwent some remodeling but in 1976 it was restored to nearly original condition according to the plane drawn by Surratt, Smith and Abernathy Associates, who are the architects for Belk Stores, and F. N. Thompson Construction performed the work. It was then that the overpass linking Belk's with the Overstreet Mall was also constructed.<sup>14</sup>

The Trade Street facade of Belk's central city store is a distinctive and important part of Charlotte's architectural heritage, while at the same time it serves as a visible testament to the success that the Belk brothers achieved after thirty-two years in the city. No matter how large the still-growing organization may become, the pride of its original success will be there to see as part of the city which grew with it.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> LeGette Blythe, *William Henry Belk: Merchant of the South* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1950, enlarged ed., 1958), p. 63 et passim.

<sup>2</sup> Sanborn Insurance Map, 1900, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Deed Book 195, p. 688, 5 April 1905.

<sup>4</sup> Architectural plans on file with Surratt, Smith and Abernathy Associates, Charlotte.

<sup>5</sup> Information on file with Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission.

<sup>6</sup> *Charlotte News*, October 3, 1910, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Deed Book 573, p. 167, 7 Jan. 1925.

<sup>8</sup> *Charlotte News*. March 5, 1925, p. 2; original drawings on file with Pratt, Smith and Abernathy Associates.

<sup>9</sup> *Charlotte News*, Sept. 17, 1938, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, May 1, 1927, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Building Permit No. 675. 20 March 1926.

<sup>12</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, May 1, 1927, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Ronald L. Smith, Surratt, Smith and Abernathy Associates, 8 November, 1983.

Letters

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## Why Must We Sacrifice History For New Office Buildings Uptown?

I am a 16-year-old sophomore at East Mecklenburg High School who has a concern for the future of downtown Charlotte.

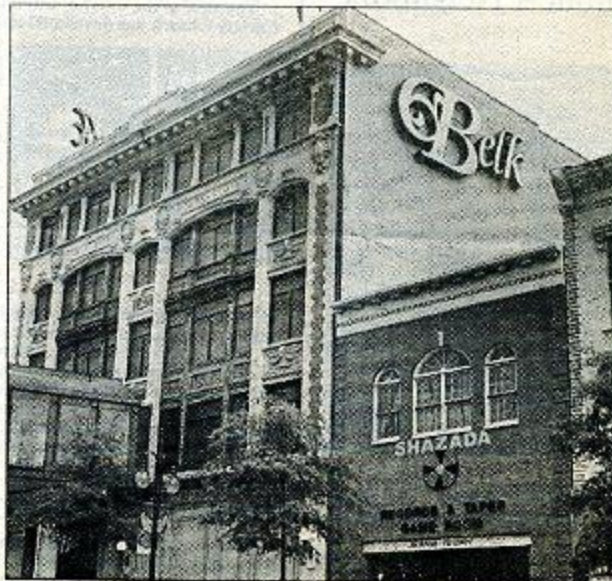
Charlotte has always been a city of beauty and grandeur with its ornate and unique structures of a bygone day. It saddens me to realize that these remembrances are rapidly fading.

Epitomizing this vanishing is the planned demolition of our beautiful Belk store uptown, an architectural gem of an era when beauty was first and foremost in buildings. The facade on Trade Street, with its elaborate scrollwork and engravings, is unequalled anywhere in the city.

Both the Trade Street and the Tryon Street facades provide uptown Charlotte with a staid and consolatory look that is pleasing to the eye, not to mention the many rare architectural wonders found inside the 1910 and 1927 structure.

If the Belk store were a dilapidated building, its razing might be fathomable.

It is interesting to note that NCNB's plans were released as First Union's new tower surpassed the NCNB tower by five stories. Is our heritage a reasonable price to pay so that NCNB may again be



Charlotte's historians boast of our preserved heritage. What heritage will be found of turn-of-the-century uptown Charlotte in the Hezekiah Alexander House or the Mint Museum?

Our history can be cleaned from

Belk building, not a few remnants of the 18th century.

I suppose that when Charlotteans want to see old buildings in the future, we will have to go to Matthews or Belmont.

### *Architectural Description*

The original East Trade Street facade of Belk Brothers Department Store, built in 1908, has witnessed numerous alterations. Major changes include an extension of the original facade in 1927, alterations in the floor on the street level, probably done in the early 1960s, and the restoration of the facade and the addition of an overstreet walkway to connect the store with the Radisson Hotel across Trade Street in 1976.

The half of the store's facade nearest Tryon Street (north-west) is the original building and was designed by the architectural firm Wheeler and Stern of Charlotte and New York. The 1908 plans show that the ground floor of the five-storied front elevation (subsequently altered) contained plate glass windows flanking two single glass entrance doors with transom, the area immediately above being articulated by prism glass which extended the length of the facade. The ends of the facade were sheathed in granite. Old photographs show that a large awning sheltered the span of the store front. The words "DRY GOODS", "BELK'S", and "NOTIONS" were



carved into the granite beltcourse between the first and second stories. Other decoration, designed to soften the commercial store front, included classical motifs such as dentil work, triglyphs and metopes, rosettes, and stone brackets.

A multi-sectioned bay window comprised the central portion of the second, third, and fourth stories, each floor containing three windows, either plate glass or casement. The panels and bands between the windows were sheathed in copper molded in the form of colonettes and fleur-de-lis and bound sheaves patterns. Other ornament included a balustrade under the central fenestration of the fourth floor. A bay containing casement windows and cartouche panels flanked the center bay on either side and extended up the three floors. Limestone was used to divide window sections, while the ends of these stories were articulated with terra cotta and brick quoining. Cartouches with the letter "B" flanked the inscription "BELK BROS" at the top of the fourth floor. The fifth floor contained five bays of casement windows. Brackets linked this floor with an elaborate galvanized iron roof which was in the form of a large pediment adorned with dentil work on the cornice and round finials at either end; a flag pole crowned the top of the roof.

In 1927 Charles C. Hook was asked to design an addition to the 1908 facade, on the end nearest College Street (south-east). Plans show a near duplication of the original front elevation. The floor on the street level, however, was altered to include two double plate glass doors with single, fixed transom. The prism glass section was replaced with sections of glass bounded by copper clad mullions and moldings. The words "SHOES", "BELK'S", and "CLOTHING" were included in the extension of the granite beltcourse between the first and second floors. The southeast bay end bay of the original building, extending from the second to the fourth floor, became the central bay of the new facade with the addition of a bay window section and an end bay with casement windows to duplicate those comprising the 1908 elevation on the northwest end. Hook, while maintaining the original bays' compositions, deleted the outward extension of the bay window areas, making them flush with the rest of the building. The copper clad facing was duplicated around the "bay" window sections, and the inscriptions "DEPT. STORE" and cartouches with the letter "B" delineated the upper portions of the fourth floor. The terra cotta and brick quoining end of the original building was dismantled and reused for the addition's southeast end. The fifth floor was extended by four bays containing casement windows. The cornice and roof were substantially altered, the pedimented structure being replaced by a more restrained flat roof with galvanized iron cornice adorned with dentil work and a central parapet.

At some point, probably during the early 1960s, the street level floor was altered. It now contains recessed display windows which angle in toward two entrances with double glass doors and fixed transoms.

In 1976, Surratt, Smith, and Abernathy Associates, architects for Belk Brothers Stores, restored the facade. Work included the cleaning of the copper sheeting and other surfaces and the replacement of the windows and frames with bronze tinted plate glass and bronze anodized aluminum bars. A bronze anodized aluminum and glass overstreet passageway on two concrete piers was constructed by J.N. Pease and Company, joining Belk's facade at the second story center bay with the Radisson Hotel.



DON STURKEY/8

A view from the first block of North Tryon Street shows the progress of demolition. The old Eckerd Drug store is at right.

# End Of An Era

## Last Of Buildings About To Fall At Historic Corner

By TED MELLNIK  
Staff Writer

Demolition workers may knock down the last of the old Eckerd at Trade and Tryon tonight, clearing a corner in the middle of Charlotte where homes and stores have stood watch for more than two centuries.

Charlotte's founder lived there.

An invading British general made the corner his headquarters.

President George Washington slept there, and the locals feted him with a gala picnic on the lawn.

Now the corner is on its way to becoming an open plaza, part of the \$300 million skyscraper-hotel-concert hall complex called NCNB Corporate Center that will fill the block.

Workers with D.H. Griffin Wrecking Co.

northeast corner of The Square for a couple of weeks. This morning, only half of the Eckerd drugstore and small parts of the fronts of the old Diana Shops and Pushpa III are standing. The old Revco and Roma's Pizza are rubble.

"We're hoping to get the rest of Eckerd down Thursday night," said Griffin's Buck Terry. "But a lot depends on weather."

Thomas Polk, the Mecklenburg legislator who got Charlotte incorporated in 1768, had built his house on the corner back when Trade and Tryon were two Indian paths.

British Gen. Cornwallis made himself at home there for 16 days in 1780, and Washington stayed over in 1791.

In 1830, members of the Springs family built a brick building that was half townhouse. The other half was a general store until the Civil War.

century-long tradition by opening a drug store. It was a landmark soda shop and in the 1890s got the city's first plate-glass windows.

"It was a great gathering place for young people," said Catherine Wooten Spritt, whose father studied pharmacy and jerk sodas behind Jordan's long marble bar. "The sodas and the ice cream were all they knew."

The building now about to topple opened on the corner in August 1949 as a Lliggett Drug, according to its advertisements, an "ultramodern store" and "one of the most modern in the South," with exterior, air-conditioning and fluorescent lights.

Eckerd moved in in 1963, painting the outside the gray it still wears.

Next in line for demolition at The Square is North Tryon's old Woolworth's, perhaps next week.