



# THE CHARLOTTE NATIONAL BANK BUILDING



*The Charlotte National Bank Building*



*The Charlotte National Bank Building, as it appeared in 1924*

*This report was written on November 2, 1983*

**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Old Charlotte National Bank Building is located at 128 S. Tryon Street, in Charlotte, North Carolina.

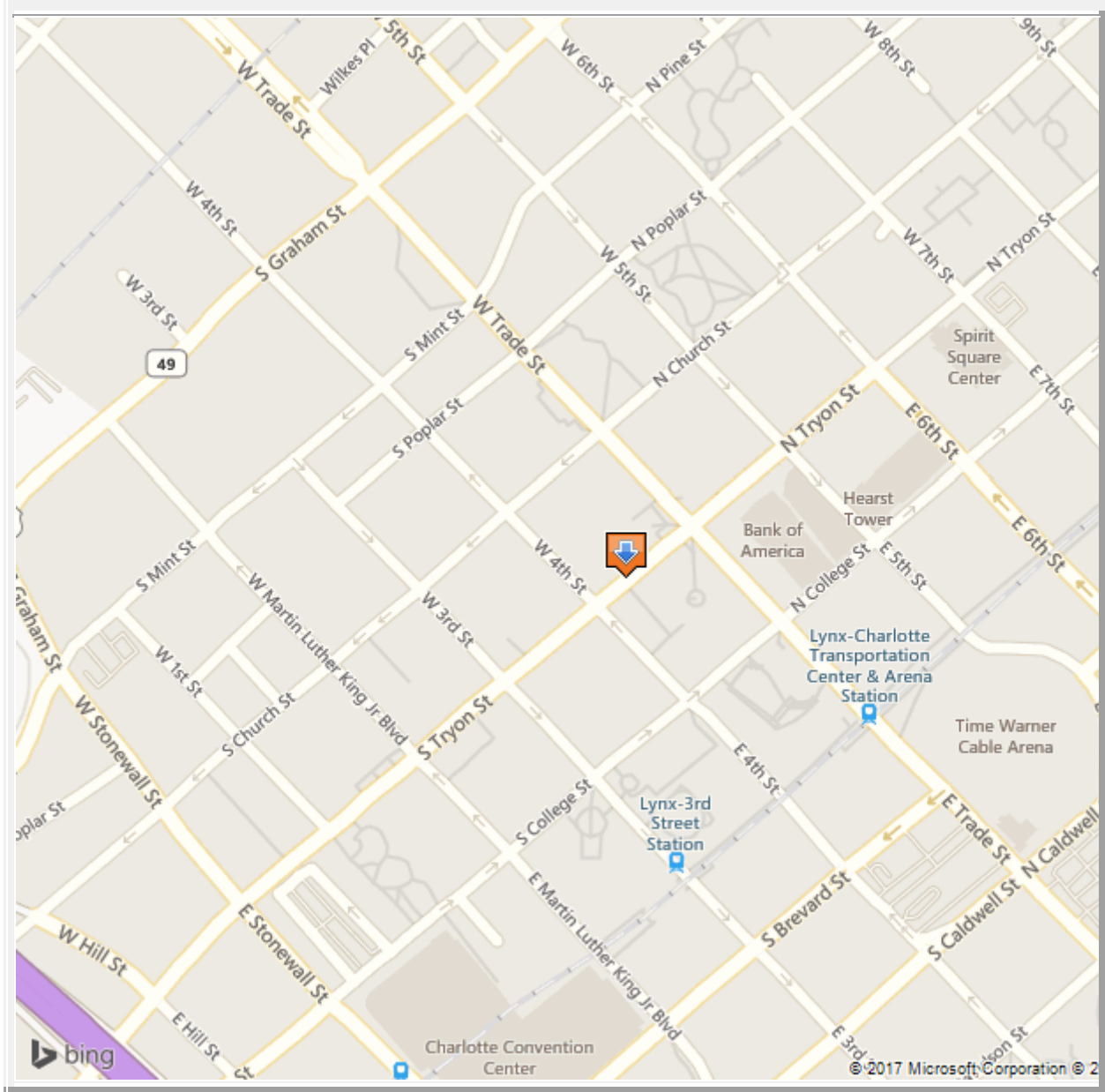
**2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner of the property:**

The present owner of the property is:  
Neuse, Inc.  
First Citizens Bank and Trust Company  
P. O. Box 10396  
Charlotte, N. C. 28237

Telephone: (704) 372-9220

**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 listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 2104 at page 395. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 073-011-03.

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

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Miss Lisa A. Stamper.

**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 Old Charlotte National Bank Building does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Old Charlotte National Bank Building, constructed in 1918-19, was designed by Alfred Charles Bossom, an architect of regional importance who operated out of New York City; 2) the Old Charlotte National Bank Building is an especially fine local example of the Neoclassical style of architecture; 3) the Old Charlotte National Bank Building has served as a banking facility from its inception and is, therefore, the oldest building in Charlotte-Mecklenburg which has been used continuously as a bank; 4) the first president of Charlotte National Bank was B. D. Heath, a leading New South industrialist and entrepreneur in this region.

**b. Integrity of design setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:** The Commission contends that the attached architectural description by Miss Lisa A. Stamper demonstrates that the Old Charlotte National Bank Building 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 property which becomes "historic property." The current appraised value of the .199 acres of land is \$347,400. The current appraised value of the improvements is \$1,218,770. The total current appraised value is \$1,566,170. The property is zoned B3.

**Date of Preparation of this Report:** November 2, 1983

**Prepared by:** Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission  
1225 S. Caldwell Street  
Charlotte, North Carolina 28203

Telephone: 704/376-9115

***Historical Overview***

*Dr. William H. Huffmann*

It used to be that the exterior and interior of a bank were designed to convey the impression of solidity, of stability and strength, of a place where the customer felt secure in trusting hard-earned money or valuables for safe-keeping. Such a place is certainly the old Charlotte National Bank building on the northwest corner of Tryon and Fourth Streets. Built in 1918-19 it combines the impression of the strength of a fortress with the symmetry and scale of a Greek temple. The Charlotte National Bank was originally organized in 1897, when, on January 2nd of that year, the Comptroller of the Currency granted the founders federal charter number 5055, which entitled it to the status of a national bank.<sup>1</sup> An outgrowth of the private banking firm of Heath

Brothers, Charlotte National was the city's fourth national bank, following the First National Bank of Charlotte (1885), the Commercial National Bank (1874), and the [Merchants and Farmer's National Bank](#) (c. 1875).<sup>2</sup> The president of the new financial institution was Benjamin Dawson Heath (1849-1919), whose entrepreneurial interests also included cotton mills, railroads (the Edgemoor and Marietta, and Cliffside), life insurance, real estate, and land development. A native of Lancaster County, SC who grew up on a farm as part of a family of fifteen, Heath was an entirely self-made man whose fortune at his death in 1919 was estimated to be between two and three million dollars.<sup>3</sup>

His widespread successful enterprises were coincident with the rapid economic growth of the region as part of the New South expansion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Starting out in leased quarters at No. 9 E. Trade Street (between Belk Bros. and the corner drug store),<sup>4</sup> the small bank grew, and in 1909, on May 18th, Charlotte National moved to proud new quarters on the ground floor of the newly-completed [Independence Building](#) (at the time known as the Realty or Office Building) on the Square, which was the state's first steel-frame skyscraper.<sup>5</sup> The move was accomplished just two days before a visit to Charlotte by President William Howard Taft, and was made under an agreement for a ten-year tenancy from the Charlotte Trust and Realty Company, which developed the building,<sup>6</sup>



*The first Charlotte National Bank building*

After B. D. Heath resigned as president in 1911 to devote his time to cotton, rail and other interests, he was succeeded by Julian H. Little (1865-1955), a native of Richmond County who went to work for the Heath Brothers in Charlotte after graduation from the University of North Carolina in 1886. Little, who became vice-president of Charlotte National Bank when it was organized in 1897, also organized the Charlotte Trust and Realty Company, which he headed when the Independence Building was constructed.<sup>7</sup> As a result of what appeared to be a disagreement with the vice-president of the bank, John M. Scott (1866-1945), J. H. Little resigned on January of 1912, after only a few months as head of Charlotte National.<sup>8</sup> The next day he held a stockholders meeting of Charlotte Trust, which then ordered the bank to execute a formal lease to replace the more informal rental agreement and recorded it soon afterward.<sup>9</sup> On January 10th, the *Charlotte Observer* carried a story that Little intended to organize his own bank, and on the following May 12th the Independence Trust Company opened in the basement of what was renamed the Independence Building. By two years later, the Trust Company and its

competitor, Charlotte National, both operated from the first floor of the skyscraper.<sup>10</sup> Under these somewhat strained circumstances, and knowing that its lease, which expired in 1919, would probably not be renewed, the man who succeeded Little at Charlotte National, John M. Scott, searched for a new location. As a result, William H. Twitty (1861-1943), the longtime cashier of Charlotte National, acquired on behalf of the Bank the corner lot on Tryon and Fourth in late 1917,<sup>11</sup> and in the following year a New York architect, Alfred Charles Bossom (1881-1967) was engaged to design the new facility.<sup>12</sup>

Bossom, a native of England, practiced in the United States from 1903 to 1926, and through a connection with the Seaboard Railroad, he designed a number of buildings in the Southeast and elsewhere, mostly banks. Among others, Bossom designed the Magnolia Oil Company building in Dallas, Texas, which, in 1922, was the tallest building in the South; two banks in Durham, NC; many in small towns in Virginia, including a similar one to Charlotte National in Covington, VA, and the Wayne National Bank (now Goldsboro Tower) in Goldsboro, N.C., which is still the tallest building in Wayne County. When he returned to England, Bossom became a Member of Parliament and at his retirement in 1959 was elevated to the peerage, thus becoming Lord Bossom of Maidstone. Since World War I was still raging on, special permission had to be obtained to begin work on the building in June, 1918, and fourteen months later, on August 20, 1919, the bank formally opened for business in its new home. In an advertisement in the *Charlotte Observer*, they proudly noted:

When the Charlotte National Bank was established in 1897, Charlotte was a city of about 18,000. The city has grown steadily until today its population approximates 50,000, while 450,000 people live within a radius of fifty miles. The Charlotte National Bank has constantly kept pace with the growth and development of its community, at all times providing adequate facilities for the satisfactory handling of the varied and ever increasing banking requirements of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. The management of the Bank now takes pleasure in placing at the disposal of the public the facilities and conveniences which is in every way worthy of the institution and of this prosperous, progressive city.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, compliments and superlatives about the classic design were the order of the day. The *News* reported that there was an overflow crowd at the initial reception and that "the building is declared by competent architects and builders to be unique and one of the most handsome structures between Philadelphia and New Orleans."<sup>15</sup> The same story contains a detailed description of the building and its construction. Some good interior views as well as the operations of the bank were also provided in a brochure of about 1925. The president of the bank at the time of its construction, John McCorkle Scott (1866-1945), was a Charlotte native who was originally trained as a pharmacist in Baltimore. In 1891, at the age of 25, he organized a wholesale drug company, Jordan and Scott, which became the John M. Scott Company in 1900 and the Scott Drug Company in 1923, and is still in business. When Charlotte National was organized in 1897, Scott was one of the original members of the board and officers, and, as mentioned above, became president in 1912. He was still serving in that capacity in 1939, when Charlotte National merged with Wachovia Bank and Trust Company, whereupon Scott became chairman of the board of the Charlotte Wachovia bank. In addition to interests in textile mills in Mecklenburg and Gaston Counties, Scott was also a director of the Mutual Building and Loan Association.<sup>16</sup> Wachovia continued its banking operations from the classical-style building until

1958, when they moved to a new skyscraper on West Trade Street, which was built to accommodate their expanded business.<sup>17</sup> In 1961, First Citizens Bank and Trust Company acquired the site and continues to do business there as one of their locations.<sup>18</sup> As a Charlotte banking house, the old Charlotte National Bank Building is unquestionably distinctive and is one of the central business district's most important remaining structures from an era of unprecedented growth which lasted from the late nineteenth century to the Great Depression.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Brochure, Charlotte National Bank, c.1925, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.; LeGette Blythe and C. R. Brockmann, *Hornet's Nest: The Story of Charlotte and Mecklenburg Co.* (Charlotte: McNally of Charlotte, 1961), pp. 303-305.

<sup>3</sup> *Charlotte News*, July 18, 1919, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Charlotte City Directory, 1905/6, p. 155.

<sup>5</sup> Deed Book 283, p. 663, 19 February 1912.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, September 13, 1955, p. 1B.

<sup>8</sup> ["Survey and Research Report on the Independence Building,"](#) Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1977, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> See note 5.

<sup>10</sup> See note 8.

<sup>11</sup> Deed Book 391 p.27, 11 March 1918.

<sup>12</sup> *Charlotte News*, August 21, 1919, p. 13 (Appendix A). In this article, Bossom's name is misspelled as "Blossom."

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Martha B. Caldwell, James Madison University, 30 August 1983.

<sup>14</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, August 19, 1919, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> See note 12.

<sup>16</sup> *Charlotte News*, 27 October 1945, p. 1.



<sup>17</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, 15 February 1958, Section C.

<sup>18</sup> Deed Book 2217, p. 591, 1 February 1971.

### *Architectural Description*

*Lisa A. Stamper*

*"...the Charlotte National Bank ... is an adornment to the city and a distinction to the men and to the institution that has graced the community with such a handsome structure."*

*-The Charlotte News*  
August 21, 1919

Charlotte National Bank moved from the Independence building into its newly completed bank building at the corner of S. Tryon and Fourth Streets, in August 1919. In the heart of the city's business district, the handsome [Neoclassical](#) exterior of the Old National Bank Building still retains its historic ambiance and is only slightly altered. Secondary information suggests that the once elegant interior has been "modernized", but key historic elements, although hidden, still exist. The building is still an unique bank building with extraordinary ornamentation that makes it an impressive structure on S. Tryon Street.

The Old Charlotte National Bank Building has always been used as a bank. Established in 1897, the Charlotte National Bank merged with the Charlotte Trust Company in 1908 and the Southern Loan Company in 1919. Wachovia Bank and Trust, which later became the largest bank in North Carolina, bought Charlotte National Bank in 1939 and used the building for nineteen years. The building was then sold to the present occupant, First Citizen's Bank Trust Company. Built in the form of a distyle in antae Greek temple with some Roman features, the Charlotte National Bank Building is two-stories high but contained only one and one-half levels originally. The roof is flat except for the central pyramidal dome which can not be seen from street level. This Neoclassical style building was designed by the New York architect Alfred C. Bossom and built by C. T. Wills, Inc., also of New York. Considered one of the best stone contractors in the early twentieth-century South, the Charlotte firm of John J. Morton Company was praised for its success in both procurement of scarce materials (World War I was still being fought), and Mr. Morton's personal supervision of masonry construction. Like most Greek temples, the Charlotte National Bank Building is rectangular in shape, tall, with monumental columns supporting a richly decorated entablature, all of which rests on a stylobate. The stylobate provides a level site on which to place the building. In the Charlotte National Building, the stylobate is highest at the rear and gradually lowers to street level at the front entrance.

Most Greek temples were made with local marble, and the Charlotte National Bank Building was also made with local stone: Carolina granite. Bossom faithfully used the Roman [Doric](#) Order for the bank building. Each massive granite fluted column weighs twenty-six tons and is constructed of six drums. There are two columns on the front facade and seven columns on the Fourth Street side. These columns differ from antiquity in that they do not have bases and that the seven columns on the side of the building are engaged. The frieze on the

Fourth Street side contains seven large metal replicas of famous coins as part of its decoration. The granite of the frieze is cut into a rigid geometric pattern which compliments the coins. On either end the year construction began is recorded in large raised bronze Roman numerals: MCMXVIII. The terracotta entablature is richly embellished with Greek motifs such as lion head spouts and stylized flowers. The entablature is very geometric in the rest of its ornamentation. To suggest the common double peristyle of Greek temples, pilasters were placed behind each column. Very large rectangular windows were probably placed between the columns on the side of the building, as well as between the columns and antae in the front. These windows were large to let in plenty of light and also to parallel the void between the columns in the temples of antiquity. Probably in the mid-twentieth century, these windows were sensitively bricked up.

The bricks were of the same color as the granite and corbelled into the space in a way which emphasizes and compliments the geometry of the building. The Romans often added attic stories to their structures, and Bossom added one to his. This "attic" is not defined as the modern type where one stores Grandma's antiques, but as the top section which is located above the principal entablature of a structure. The Old Charlotte National's attic story is embellished with molded stone, festoons, and corbelling. According to Harry J. Nicholas, the Senior Vice President of First Citizens Bank, during the 1960's attempts to modernize the interior resulted in insertion of a second floor, dropped ceilings, and removal of some classical features. It is probable that many of these original interior elements are simply hidden behind 1960 finishes rather than destroyed. Originally, Tavernelle Claire marble, Caen stone, and Tennessee marble were used to finish the interior. The interior plan is best described by an August 1919 article in *The Charlotte News* which states:

"There are at the rear and near the vault a series of neat booths for the accommodation of patrons of the bank and a ladies room with all conveniences. A mezzanine gallery across the west end of the building adds a novel feature (sic), with a gilded balustrade and with an easy flight of steps mounting to it from the first floor.. Down the left side of the lobby extend the cashiers' office.... The president's office is the first on the left and the cashiers' office adjoins this. On the right side of the lobby and separated from it by gilt cages are the computing machines. The directors' room is situated at the left side of the vault and has the latest devices for comfort and elegance. A table of Honduras marble reaches to the far end of the room, where there is a large old-fashioned fireplace, surmounted by mahogany with an inset clock."

The interior reflected the classical theme of the exterior, even to the extent that "draperies and awnings, selected with a view to harmonizing with the light admitted into the structure through the dome are a feature of the place." The 95,000 pound vault, the safest to be had in 1919, is still intact. The door is 32 inches in diameter, and weighs 33,000 pounds. The vault was also incorporated into the interior design as "... an integral part of the rear of the building...." The sides of the building facing Fourth and Tryon Streets were meant to be seen by the public and were extremely elaborate. The other sides of the building were not ever meant to be seen; therefore, not much effort was made to make them impressive. The plain sides have been altered over the years, but little historic integrity has been lost. The rear of the building now has a thin addition, the full height of the building. The other side of the building was shared with the Tate Brown Building, demolished a few years ago, and is now finished in stucco. Many different

businesses are located around the Old Charlotte National Bank Building. They all exhibit different architecture of different decades and styles, all of which are important to Charlotte's image as a thriving city which has a stable banking business. The Charlotte National Building was one of Charlotte's most eye-catching and impressive bank buildings in the early twentieth-century, and still is today.