

**Survey and Research Report
on the
Charlotte Union Bus Terminal**

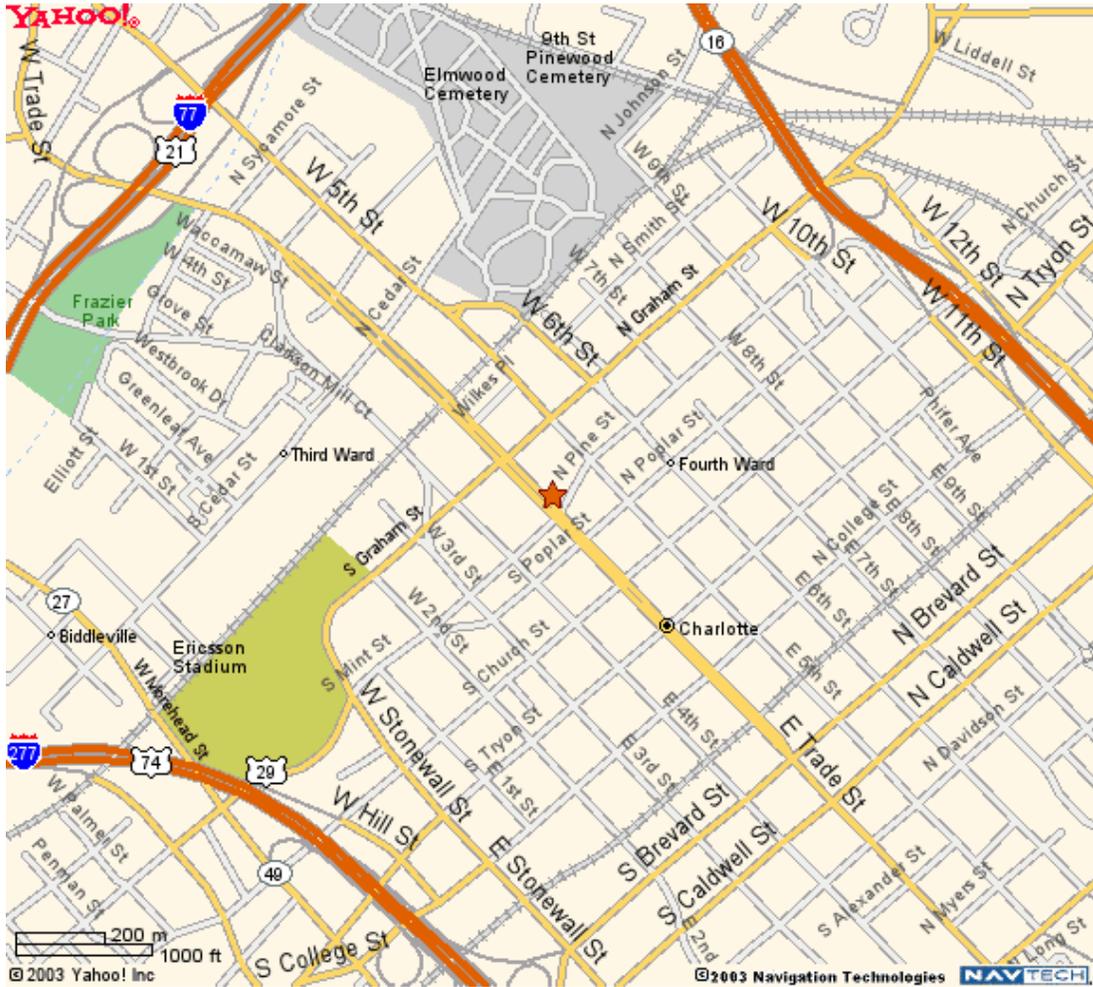


1. **Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Charlotte Union Bus Terminal is located at 418 W. Trade Street in Charlotte, North Carolina.
2. **Name and address of the current owner(s) of the property:**

The current owner of the Union Bus Terminal is:

Central Business District, L.L.C.
Post Office Box 32247
Charlotte, NC 28231

3. Representative photographs of the property: This report contains representative photographs of the property.
4. A map depicting the location of the property:



5. Current deed book reference to the property: The most recent deed to the Charlotte Union Bus Terminal can be found in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 8888, page 695. The PID number for the parcel is 078-05-404.

6. **A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Lara Ramsey.
7. **A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Lara Ramsey.
8. **Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-400.5.**
 - a. **Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance.** The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the Charlotte Union Bus Terminal possesses special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:
 1. The Charlotte Union Bus Terminal, located at 418 W. Trade Street in Charlotte, is a property that possesses local historic significance as a physical reminder of the proliferation of inter-city bus service—not just in Mecklenburg County but also across the state and the country— in the mid-twentieth century.
 2. Completed in 1941, the Union Bus Terminal was a modern monument to the heyday of bus travel, before interstate highways, large commercial airliners, and the glut of automobiles caused ridership to fall continually throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In the years after it opened, the terminal housed over half a dozen bus companies (including Queen City, Atlantic Greyhound, and Carolina Coach Company) that ran inter-city routes through Charlotte. By 1950, the five carriers, four interstate lines, and one local line used the terminal, and thousands of passengers came through the building every day.
 3. Architecturally, the Charlotte Union Bus Terminal is significant as one of the best examples of Art Moderne architecture in Mecklenburg County. Designed by local architect James A. Malcolm, the terminal displays the rounded forms, clean lines, and subtle, almost starkly minimal ornamentation that are the hallmark of this design.
 - b. **Integrity of design, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association.**

The Commission contends that the architectural description prepared by Lara Ramsey demonstrates that the Charlotte Union Bus Terminal 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 that becomes a designated “historic landmark.” The current appraised value of the Charlotte Union Bus Terminal is \$238,100.00 for the buildings, and \$3,088,400 for the land.

Date of preparation of this report:
January 12, 2004

Prepared by:
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Chicago, IL 60647

Statement of Significance:

Charlotte Union Bus Terminal



Summary

The Charlotte Union Bus Terminal, located at 418 W. Trade Street in Charlotte, is a property that possesses local historic significance as a physical reminder of the proliferation of inter-city bus service—not just in Mecklenburg County but also across the state and the country—in the mid-twentieth century. The development of bus routes between Charlotte and other cities in North Carolina was first facilitated by the push for the improvement and expansion of the state’s roads in the 1920s. As the system of highways connecting cities and towns grew, many enterprising entrepreneurs began providing bus service along these routes. Early “buses” were usually just automobiles that had been lengthened to seat more customers. As this mode of transportation became more and more popular, independent operators and larger bus companies expanded their routes into neighboring states, and buses were developed that could accommodate more passengers.

One of the most successful of these companies in Charlotte was the Queen City Coach Company. Founded in 1928 by L. A. Love, Queen City Coach first provided routes from Charlotte to towns in western North Carolina. Gradually, the company expanded to include routes to Wilmington, Atlanta, and towns in western Tennessee. In 1938, the company joined National Trailways, a nation-wide association of independent operators and companies.^[1] Riding this wave of success, Love spearheaded a campaign for the construction of a new inter-city bus terminal in Charlotte. Completed in 1941, the Union Bus Terminal was a modern monument to the heyday of bus travel, before interstate highways, large commercial airliners, and the glut of automobiles caused ridership to fall continually throughout the 1970s and 80s. In the years after it opened, the terminal housed over half a dozen bus companies (including Queen City, Atlantic Greyhound, and Carolina Coach Company) that ran inter-city routes through Charlotte. By 1950, the five carriers, four interstate lines, and one local line used the terminal, and thousands of passengers came through the building every day.^[2]

Architecturally, the Charlotte Union Bus Terminal is significant as one of the best examples of Art Moderne architecture in Mecklenburg County. Designed by local architect James A. Malcolm, the terminal displays the rounded forms, clean lines, and subtle, almost starkly minimal ornamentation that are the hallmark of this design. The Art Moderne style was especially appropriate for buildings such as the Union Terminal—no other style of the time could have better expressed the sense of modernity and technology, of movement and speed, which was inherent in automobile travel. Although the interior of the building has undergone several renovations over the past 60 years, the exterior has remained essentially unchanged, and today stands as a tangible reminder of the development of transportation in mid-twentieth century Charlotte.

Historical Background Statement



The development of the inter-city bus system in Charlotte was part of a larger move within the city, as well as throughout the county, state and country, toward the automobile as the major mode of transportation. While increasing availability and affordability of automobiles played a crucial role in the transition from wagon and rail to car, bus and truck, the development of a dependable system of roads was equally as important. The road building had been a priority in Mecklenburg County since 1879, when the Pioneer Good Roads Act was passed. The Act applied only to Mecklenburg County, giving control of road building to the county instead of the town and levying a special tax for construction and maintenance. By 1900, one-third of North Carolina's counties had adopted Mecklenburg's plan. In 1921, the movement culminated under the leadership of Governor Cameron Morrison with the passing of the Basic Highway Act, which planned to connect every county seat in the state with paved highways.^[3] In 1926, Wilkinson Boulevard opened as a connecting highway between Charlotte and Gastonia. The first four-lane road in North Carolina, Wilkinson Boulevard remained as one of the major thoroughfares in the county and in the state, even after the opening of Independence Boulevard in 1949.^[4]



With the system of roads connecting cities and towns expanding steadily through the early decades of the twentieth century, it naturally followed that a system of transportation for hire developed to take people from one city to another. The inter-city operations started as small taxi and bus services run by enterprising individuals. Because of the lack of any regulation on inter-city bus travel:

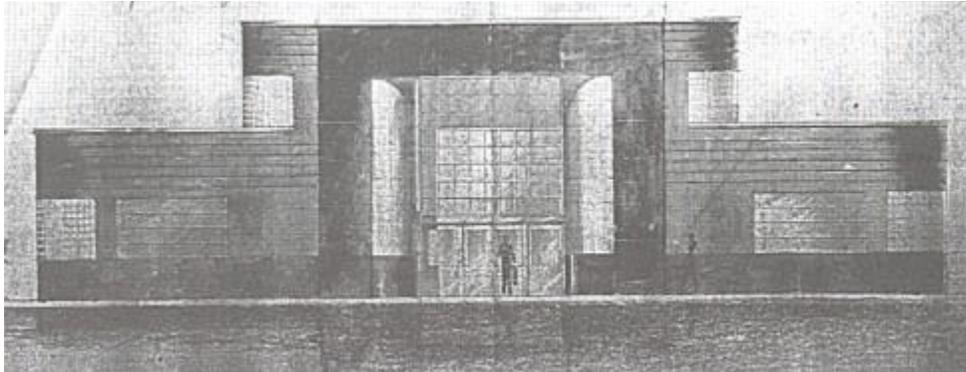
According to the law, anyone with even two vehicles running from one town to another could call his venture 'an intercity line.' On that basis, to quote federal figures, 'more than 6,500 intercity bus companies existed in the United States [in the mid-1920s].' Most of them, of course, were independent wildcatters. [\[5\]](#)

Early bus services tended to be haphazard at best, with no standard method of operation. “Buses might run from a hotel in one town to another, or from a livery stable in one town to another. Some operators printed tickets; others just took the fares in cash. At first there was no agreement between operators serving adjacent territories for connecting schedules in order to provide through services.”^[6] The vehicles used to transport passengers were also rather slapdash affairs—operators often drove seven-passenger sedans, taxicabs, or autos that had been converted (usually by lengthening the chassis) to hold more customers.^[7]

Even with these limitations, bus operators had several distinct advantages over their primary competitors, the interurban rail lines. While “private owners of interurbans had to buy, maintain and pay taxes on the roadbed their trains used . . .the federal and state governments supplied the right of way for the buses, which paid minimum vehicle registration fees and . . .only one or two cents per gallon in [gasoline] taxes.”^[8] With the advent of pneumatic tires, better paving for roads, and seating extensions, buses became as comfortable as interurbans and almost as fast, in addition to being less expensive.^[9] Even with the enactment of North Carolina’s first Bus Act in 1925, any lines already operating were protected by a grandfather clause.^[10]

As the demand for inter-city bus services continued to rise, many independent operators joined forces (and bus routes) to form larger bus companies with more extended lines. One of the first of these companies in Charlotte—Queen City Coach Company—would also become the most successful. Queen City Coach was founded by L. A. Love, a Stanley county native running a taxi business out of Concord. Love began to join up with several other operators to run bus routes from Charlotte to Monroe, Statesville, and Gastonia. Out of these first lines emerged Love’s Queen City Coach in 1928. Initially, Love concentrated on acquiring franchises between Charlotte and towns in western North Carolina—an area that had been overlooked by some of the larger inter-city lines like Atlantic Greyhound. However, Love soon began to expand the Queen City lines east to Wilmington and Lumberton, south to Atlanta, and west to Tennessee. In 1938, Queen City Coach joined National Trailways, “a nation-wide association of independent operators, formed in 1936 by the Sante Fe, Missouri Pacific, and Burlington railroads and independents to arrange

connecting schedules, interchange tickets freely, and provide a through system.”^[11] From then on, the company was called Queen City Trailways.



Original Architectural Renderings

Flush with his recent successes, L. A. Love then set his sites on acquiring a new terminal for inter-city bus travel in Charlotte. He enlisted the support of the city’s bus operators; and, in 1940, the group unveiled plans for a \$225,000.00 bus terminal, a two-story Art Moderne structure designed by local architect James A. Malcolm. The building, which was to be located on West Trade beside the old station, was to contain a waiting room and restaurant for white passengers, with a separate waiting room and concession stand for African American riders. Ticket windows and baggage checking facilities were to be “arranged in a manner considered most convenient for both Negro and white customers.”^[12] The second floor would contain offices and ladies’ rest rooms, complete with “a large lounge room with mirrors and dressing tables, showers, and toilet facilities.”^[13]

The Charlotte Union Bus Terminal was completed in 1941 and stood as a modern monument to the success of inter-city bus travel.^[14] In its first year of operation, the terminal housed a half dozen separate bus operators, including Queen City Trailways, Atlantic Greyhound Company, Carolina Coach, and Smoky Mountain Stages.^[15] By 1950, five carriers, four interstate lines, and one local line operated out of the Union Terminal. According to an article on bus travel in the *Charlotte Observer* from that year, 12,000 passengers passed through the building every single day. *Charlotte Observer* reporter H. G. Trotter marveled at the number—“Twelve thousand passengers, all going somewhere or coming from somewhere. The total population of a fair-sized city. The

population of Charlotte moving through the Union Bus Terminal every fortnight.”^[16] Another *Observer* article from 1959 quoted a more modest but still impressive figure of approximately 6,000.^[17]

After reaching its zenith in the 1950s, inter-city bus travel began a slow decline that would accelerate through the 1970s and 1980s. While inter-city buses had easily overtaken interurbans, “they proved largely a transition to automobiles. . . . By the 1960s, the drivers of 70 percent of their successor vehicles—the automobile—would enter the city alone.”^[18] The city’s smaller inter-city bus companies slowly went out of business due to declining ridership, until only Trailways, Carolina Trailways, and Greyhound were left by the mid-1980s. Between 1977 and 1987, Trailways alone lost 18% to 20% of its ridership each year.^[19]

As inter-city bus service declined, so did the condition of the Charlotte Union Bus Terminal. In 1980, in an attempt to attract passengers back to the bus, Trailways renovated the terminal, installing new restrooms, a fast-food restaurant, and a “secure” waiting room for ticketed passengers only. This last feature was meant to discourage “unwanted visits from winos and prostitutes” at the terminal.^[20] The renovation did little to increase the number of Trailways passengers, and in 1987 the Union Bus Terminal closed. Trailways moved their much-diminished operations to the Greyhound Terminal at 601 W. Trade Street. Greyhound had built this terminal in 1973, and had moved out of the Union Terminal.^[21] Just before closing, Trailways had sold the Union Terminal to Charlotte businessman Jerry Blackmon, who had then leased the building to Trailways.^[22] In 1997, Blackmon sold the property to current owner Central Business District, L.L.C.^[23]

Architectural Context Statement



The Charlotte Union Bus Terminal is architecturally significant as one of the finest examples of Art Moderne architecture in Mecklenburg County. Influenced both by the spare, minimal designs of European architects like Peter Behrens, Walter Gropius, and J. J. P. Oud, and by the new materials and technologies associated with the machine age, Art Moderne emerged in the early 1930s as an expression of modernity and progress. Most often used in industrial or commercial contexts, Moderne designs feature bulky massing (so unlike the vertical emphasis of the earlier Art Deco skyscrapers), with rounded, gently curving forms. Minimally ornamented with horizontal banding or stringcourses placed closely together, Art Moderne buildings usually feature modern, man-made materials like steel, glass, or concrete. Most designs are devoid of color, using neutrals or whites to emphasize the clean, simple lines of the structure. Because Art Moderne buildings seem to express a feeling of movement and speed, especially in the aerodynamic suggestion of the rounded corners, it seems an especially fitting style to use in buildings like the Union Bus Terminal, which are associated with the automobile.



The terminal, with its simple façade of creamy brick with gently curving corners and subtle recessed lines running along the façade at the first and second levels, is a textbook example of the Art Moderne style and among the most impressive examples in the county. The rounded metal canopies extending across the east and west elevations of the building extend the curve of the façade (and originally served to protect waiting riders from the elements), and the massive entrance surround gives a sense of weight and monumentality that helps to anchor the rest of the structure. The curving walls just inside the tile surround seem to propel visitors into the building, and the large etched glass panels not only allow a great amount of light into the building, but also mimic the glass brick used in the windows that punctuate the elevations. These features work together to help make the Charlotte Union Bus Terminal one of the county's most impressive Art Moderne buildings.

James A. Malcolm, a local architect best known for his modernist designs, designed the terminal. Born in Atlanta in 1910 and raised in Fort Smith, Arkansas, Malcolm received a Bachelor of Science degree in Architectural Engineering from the University of Notre Dame in 1933. Malcolm moved to Raleigh after graduating, and subsequently moved to Charlotte in 1937. Two years later, he opened an architecture practice in the city, but had to close the firm during World War II. During the war, Malcolm worked at the Manhattan Project in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. In 1945, he returned to Charlotte to resume his architecture practice. A member of the American Institute of Architects and one-time

president of the Charlotte chapter, Malcolm is also known his designs of Barringer Elementary, Double Oaks Elementary, and Park Center (Grady Cole Center). James Malcolm died in 1996.^[24]

Physical Description



The Charlotte Union Bus Terminal is located at 418 W. Trade Street, on the north side of the street. The lot, which is paved, slopes down slightly toward the west and south sides of the property. To the east of the building is a three-story building clad in green terra cotta. To the west of the terminal is a two-story brick building that is currently vacant. The Former Charlotte Post Office faces the terminal from the south side of Trade Street.

The terminal's footprint is roughly T-shaped, extending north from the southern edge of the lot line. The short end of the 'T' consists of the wide south elevation (façade) of the building, which features a center, two-story bay flanked by single-story bays. Extending north from the façade and south end of the building is the long stem of the 'T,' which extends from the center bay of the south elevation. The northern end of the building, like the center bay of the south end, is also two stories tall. These two two-story sections are linked by a one-story connection that is slightly narrower than the north and south (center bay) sections of the terminal. All elevations of the building are covered with cream painted brick laid in Flemish bond. The roof of the terminal (on both the one- and two-story sections) is flat. The building is punctuated by windows in a variety of different shapes and sizes, and using a variety of different materials, including glass brick and metal frame. Some appear to be original windows, and some appear to be replacement.

The façade (south elevation) of the building consists of a center, two-story bay flanked by two one-story bays. The corners of the façade at the first and second floors are gently rounded, and the upper sections of both stories are accented with a series of recessed, horizontal bands that follow the curves of the elevation. The massive concrete bulkhead also curves around the east and west corners of the elevation. A monumental, two-story entrance surrounded by large, green terra cotta tiles dominates the central bay of the façade. Just inside these tiles, the walls flanking the entrance curve gently inward, mimicking the curve of the façade's corners. Above the set of two, metal, double doors (which are not original) are a series of etched glass panels. The fenestration on the façade is symmetrical, with a single glass brick window and corner window punctuating each of the one-story bays, and two curving windows punctuating the second floor corners of the center bay.



The east, west, and south elevations are completely unadorned except for the metal canopies running along the length of all three elevations. The canopies are supported by thin, round metal columns that are regularly spaced underneath the canopies. A parking lot lies along the east and north elevations of the building.

The interior of the terminal has been significantly altered. The first floor of the building features an open area that is currently being used as office space. The southwest end of the floor is separated from the rest of the space by a partition wall set with windows. A set of double doors near the entrance leads to this space, which contains a raised floor. Another partition has been placed around the east half of the area that is just inside the main entrance to the building. The doors are flanked with two curving walls, one of which has been fitted with a

single door. This door leads into the east one-story bay, which is a narrow space marked by the corner window and a glass brick window on its north wall.



A stairway just north of this bay leads up to the second floor of the south end of the terminal. The stair treads and landings in the stairwell are covered with salmon-colored terrazzo, and the walls are partially covered in a mosaic of small beige and white tiles. The second floor, which consists of three rooms off a single hallway at the north end of the floor, has been altered. At the west end of the hall are two bathrooms.



Along the east wall toward north end of the first floor is the staircase that leads to the second floor of the building's north section. The stairway is identical to the one at the southern end of the building. This staircase leads up to a large open room, covered with the same tile that is seen on the staircases. A double door leads into a large bathroom that takes up the west end of the floor. This double door is flanked with two smaller bathrooms, both of which are equipped with single showers. This area was originally the ladies' bathroom.



The terminal does have a full basement, which originally housed the men's restroom and a kitchen. However, because of inadequate lighting, the author was unable to examine the basement level.

[1] H. G. Trotter, "Bus Line Network is Huge," *Charlotte Observer*, 28 February 1950, G-2.

[2] *Ibid.*, G-1

[3] R.C. Lawrence, "Development of Good Roads," *The State*, 24 May 1947, 11. "62 Million Moved by Bus Last Year," *Charlotte News*, 21 June 1959.

[4] Mary Norton Kratt, *Charlotte: Spirit of the New South* (Winston-Salem: John F. Blair, 1992), 217

[5] Oscar Schisgall, *The Greyhound Story: From Hibbing to Everywhere* (Chicago: J.G. Ferguson, 1985), 19.

[6] Trotter, G-2.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Stephen B. Goddard, *Getting There: The Epic Struggle Between Road and Rail in the American Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 124.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] Trotter, G-2.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] "Plans Completed for \$225,000 Bus Terminal," *Charlotte Observer*, 4 August 1940, Section 2, Page 1.

[13] *Ibid.*

- [14] Charlotte Building Permit, dated 10 January 1941.
- [15] 1942 Charlotte City Directory, 984 (Buyer's Guide).
- [16] Trotter, G-1.
- [17] John York, "Charlotte Natural for Bus Center," *Charlotte Observer*, 4 February 1959 (article taken from Charlotte: Bus Travel, etc. vertical file located in the Carolina Room, PLCMC).
- [18] Goddard, 135.
- [19] "Trailways to Seek OK for End of Bus Service from Charlotte to Hickory," *Charlotte Observer*, 17 January 1987, C-1.
- [20] "Bus Station Being Redone Inside Out," *Charlotte News*, 7 October 1980, 1-A.
- [21] "Greyhound Opens New Terminal," *Charlotte Observer*, 16 November 1973, 4-A.
- [22] Mecklenburg County Deed Book 5368, Page 293
- [23] Mecklenburg County Deed Book 8888 Page 695
- [24] [Charlotte Observer](#), 6 April 1996, 7-C.